

## First Lesson

### Mark 16:15-20

*Ascension is the Exclamation Point!*

<sup>15</sup> He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. <sup>16</sup> Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. <sup>17</sup> And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; <sup>18</sup> they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well.” <sup>19</sup> After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God. <sup>20</sup> Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.

Well track season for our schools is winding down. There is nothing like winning an event in track, or any sport for that matter. In track there are ribbons and medals for those who place. The funny thing is, they don't award those ribbons and medals on the field. They are sent to the school and handed out to the athletes later. Ascension acts in the same way. We know who won the race. Ascension means the awards will be mailed to us later, when Christ returns.

Now, to fully understand Ascension, we need to understand the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The resurrection of Jesus is key. Without it we would still be in our sins and our faith would be futile. His resurrection proves he is God. It proves our sins are truly paid for. It proves we will rise from the grave. Resurrection means the race is over and we win with Christ.

But if the resurrection of Jesus is the true victory, his ascension into heaven is the exclamation point or the awards soon to come. As we read, <sup>19</sup> **After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God.** Jesus' leaving may seem like a step backwards. I mean, here was the risen Lord walking and talking with his disciples. For him to physically leave would make it appear that a void has happened. But it really is a step forwards. He left to sit at God's right hand. This is proof that Jesus is God and always had been. This is proof that his work is complete; nothing more needs to be done to save us. It is proof that the devil has been conquered, the sting of death removed, and the guilt of sin eradicated.

But he offers us even more proof. <sup>17</sup> **And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; <sup>18</sup> they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well.** Read through the book of Acts. You can do that in one or two evenings if you devote yourself to it. In it you see these words fulfilled. You see believers speaking in tongues. You see Peter and Paul raise folks from the dead. Paul was bitten by a poisonous snake, but did not die. It happened exactly as Jesus said it would. You see miracle after miracle. We are not chasing after fairy tale. We are following the truth.

Does God still need to perform such signs today? We may think so, but the answer is no. We may wish that I or someone else can periodically raise someone from the dead as proof. But such thinking calls God a liar. We will then say that the proofs he gives us in the Bible and Acts are not enough. The only proof we need is Ascension.

Ascension is a very important day to remember. It is like track. We know who won. We did with Christ. We will get the award a little later when he returns for us. But that doesn't mean we keep it a secret. When our kids did well at a track meet, we plastered it in texts and emails and pictures. Newspapers will spread the news. Let's do the same with Christ. Let's share the good news with all.

Let's respond with our next hymn and proclaim the victory Jesus won for us with hymn 169, **Alleluia! Sing to Jesus.**

## Second Lesson

### John 14:1-7

#### *Our Heavenly Adoption.*

<sup>1</sup> “Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. <sup>2</sup> My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? <sup>3</sup> And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. <sup>4</sup> You know the way to the place where I am going.”

<sup>5</sup> Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?”

<sup>6</sup> Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. <sup>7</sup> If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”

Adoption is a wonderful thing. Though not officially adopted, my mother was taken into by a family of total strangers who raised her as if she was their own daughter. Some couples adopt because that is God’s way of giving them children. Others adopt because they want to give a family-less child a home. There is always an awkward time when the adopted child comes into the home. He meets total strangers. It is a strange house with strange customs, maybe even a strange language. And the parents feel awkward, too. How do you make that child feel as a part of the family? The best way is to show your love and time. This awkward feeling gives way to familiarity. Strangeness gives way to a sense of belonging. A child will one day call the parents, “Mom and dad,” and mean it.

I love this text from John 14. It reminds me that we belong with God, that we belong in his heaven. This is a great feeling because we know heaven is not for sinners. We were strangers, aliens, even enemies to God. We didn’t speak the same language. He spoke of holiness and righteousness and love, we spoke of selfishness and greed. We were the outsiders who deserve to be outsiders. We had no right to even think of heaven let alone believe we will live there one day.

But love, God’s love, changes all of that. His love moved him to give up his son for us. That is not normal practice. You don’t trade one of your children in order to get a different one. No. But that is how God adopted us. He traded Jesus for us. But here is the clincher. He died for us, rose again, and is and will be living with us in his home. So he gets us and he gets Jesus back.

But guess what? We can and should call him, “Father.” We do because he has adopted us through Jesus Christ. We actually belong in his heaven. That is what Jesus promises us in this text. His ascension means he has gone back to heaven to sit at God’s right hand, but it also means he is coming back. Why? To take us back to heaven. We will fit in heaven just as much as Christ fits in because we are just as holy as he is, again because he died and rose for us.

Imagine an adopted child during his first Christmas. He sees Christmas stockings hanging from the mantle, each with a name of a family member, and there is one there with his name. Imagine him having his own bed, his own closet, his own clothes. Yes, even when he is disciplined it reminds him that he belongs because the parents are treating him as their own children. He has his own place at the dinner table, his own seat in the car, everything. We have a place in heaven. We have a seat at the wedding banquet. Yes, God disciplines us only because he is treating us as his own dear children. Heaven is our home and Jesus is coming back to take us there.

Let’s acknowledge this with our next hymn, hymn 170. Jesus draws us to himself now as our Savior and brother, and he will certainly draw us all the way to heaven.

## Third Lesson

### Exodus 14:10-18

#### *Crossing Our Own Red Sea.*

<sup>10</sup> As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the LORD. <sup>11</sup> They said to Moses, “Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? <sup>12</sup> Didn’t we say to you in Egypt, ‘Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians’? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!”

<sup>13</sup> Moses answered the people, “Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. <sup>14</sup> The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still.”

<sup>15</sup> Then the LORD said to Moses, “Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on. <sup>16</sup> Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground. <sup>17</sup> I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them. And I will gain glory through Pharaoh and all his army, through his chariots and his horsemen. <sup>18</sup> The Egyptians will know that I am the LORD when I gain glory through Pharaoh, his chariots and his horsemen.”

God delivered his people from over 400 years of slavery in Egypt. He was leading them to the promised land. And the people did exactly what God told them to do. And what happened? They were going to be destroyed. Ahead of them was the Red Sea and behind them was Pharaoh’s army. They didn’t stand a chance and they couldn’t run.

They became frightened naturally. But in their fear, they blamed Moses. That’s what fear does: it makes us feel sorry for ourselves. It fills us with despair to the point we blame God and others for our problems. No wonder the devil wants to plague us with fear as an attempt to drive a wedge between God and the believer.

Panic was spreading, but it stopped at Moses. <sup>13</sup> **Moses answered the people, “Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. <sup>14</sup> The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still.”** The equivalent of over three modern armored divisions is about to tear into the people, and Moses is telling them they have nothing to fear. On what could Moses base his wild claims? Simple. God and his promises.

Friends, we are the redeemed children of God. But, it seems, we are trapped. The forces of the world are bearing down on us and it seems that heaven is so far away. I know for a fact that the devil will not let up. In fact, if Scripture is correct, he is intensifying his attempts because it is closer now than ever to the day Jesus will return. The pressure to become secularized is greater than before. And they may not attack the Church directly, but they are trying to dismantle it bit by bit, stone by stone. Marriage, the unborn, what to do with the elderly and the infirmed, the gift of sex, even love for one’s neighbor are all being compromised. If only they can get us to tolerate ungodly thinking or to think we can separate Sunday morning from the rest of the week, then they will be winning. Here we are, trying to do exactly what God tells us to do, and it seems we are trapped. So what does the Lord tell us? He tells us the same thing he told Moses.

**“Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. <sup>14</sup> The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still.” <sup>15</sup> Then the LORD said to Moses, “Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on.** Do not be afraid. Why? The enemies we see today, including death, especially the devil, we will see no more. The Lord has fought and will always fight our battles. Because of this promise, God gives us a big kick in the butt and tells us, **“Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on.”** Stop feeling sorry for yourselves. Go where God tells you to go. God told them to go to the impassable Red Sea and they did. What happened? God parted it so they could cross and then destroyed the pursuing Egyptians.

Friends, I know exactly how God will deliver you from this world. The same Christ who died for your sins will come back. Those of us who are still alive will join those he raises back to life and we will all be taken home to heaven.

So, move on along the path God places you on. Don’t be surprised if he backs up against what is impassable, like death itself. Don’t worry. He will part all ways. He will deliver you. The Ascended Savior will lead you all the way home.

Let’s follow our Savior through it all as we sing hymn 174, **See, the Conqueror Mounts in Triumph.**