

Ascension Day
May 21, 2009
(Also marked 8th grade graduation)

Exodus 14:21-31
175-173-411/171-169

Our Ascended Savior Sits at the Father's Right Hand

- I. That's not His promise of an easy life.
- II. That's the comfort of Jesus in control of everything.
- III. So confidently follow His leading.

Dear Christian friends – and especially you the members of this year's graduating class,

As you listened to these verses were you perhaps WONDERING, "**What** does Israel crossing the Red Sea HAVE TO DO with **Jesus' ascension** into heaven – with your **graduation**? It's going to take a REAL STRETCH of the imagination to tie all this together.

No it won't. This **incident** is a good illustration of **what we confess** every week – that Jesus has "ascended into heaven and (now) sits at the right hand of God the Father almighty." On this Ascension Day and **your graduation** we focus on these verses with this thought – OUR ASCENDED SAVIOR SITS at the Father's right hand. 1)That's not God's promise of an **easy life**, but 2)that is the comfort of **Jesus in control** of everything. 3)So confidently follow His leading.

I. Not God's promise of an easy life.

Today was another day of TRIUMPH for our Savior. 40 days after He **rose triumphant** from the dead Jesus ascended triumphant into heaven. As we heard before it was a SIMPLE MIRACLE. Jesus led His disciples "**out to the vicinity of Bethany, He lifted up His hands and blessed them. While He was blessing them, He was taken up before their very eyes and a cloud hid Him from their sight.**" Jesus returned home to His heavenly Father MISSION ACCOMPLISHED. Born our Savior Jesus had taken care of everything for us. All the commandments have been perfectly obeyed. All sins of all people have been fully paid for. Death and the devil have been defeated.

Jesus' triumph is also OUR triumph. Trusting in Jesus we enjoy God's forgiveness of all our sins – we **have** a whole new relationship with God – AND we have Jesus' precious promises. Promises like, "**Lo, I am with you always.**" "**I go and prepare a place for you. I will come again and take you to be with Me.**" But NOTE WELL that Jesus never promised us an EASY life here on earth.

These **Israelites** are a good illustration of that. They had just been SAVED from slavery in Egypt – and it was ALL GOD'S DOING. These Israelites were FREE to head home to that **Promised Land** of Canaan. They were FREE – but life would not be easy for them. Here they were in DESPARATE straits. They were convinced this was the END for them.

We have our ASCENDED **Savior sitting** at God's right hand. SAVED from our sins we are now heading home to our Promised Land of heaven. But let's be clear – it won't be an EASY TRIP! Just ask your **parents** or grandparents. Life can be ROUGH – **real** rough at times. Life can be so UNFAIR and disappointing. A job or **promotion** we wanted goes to somebody else. Health problems can make our lives **miserable**. People take advantage of you. Let's not forget too that the DEVIL – the world – our sinful natures won't make it EASY FOR US to live as Christians. They will throw ALL KINDS of temptations at us – temptations to PUSH God off to the side in our lives – **temptations** to be greedy and **selfish** – to screw up our **priorities** in life. Just as for these Israelites life at times can be VERY SCARY.

That's why Ascension Day is so FANTASTIC! We have our **ascended Savior sitting** at God's right hand.

II. The comfort of Jesus in control of everything.

So just what does that MEAN? We know that God is a "**spirit**" – He doesn't have a body or a right hand.

God's right hand is a Bible picture of God's **almighty** POWER AND CONTROL over all things. After God delivered the Israelites Moses taught them to sing, "***I will sing to the LORD, for He is highly exalted. The horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea. The LORD is my strength and my song; He has become my salvation. Pharaoh's chariots and his army He has hurled into the sea. The deep waters have covered them; they sank to the depths like a stone. Your right hand, O LORD, was majestic in power. Your right hand, O LORD, shattered the enemy.***"

Sitting at God's right hand Jesus is not sitting around TWIDDLING His thumbs **waiting** for Judgment Day. SITTING at God's right hand our ascended Savior is in control of **all things** – ruling all things with His almighty power. Recall Jesus saying, "***ALL authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me.***" Paul tells us in Ephesians 1 that Jesus is "***seated at (God's) right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under His feet and appointed Him to be head over everything for the church, which is His body.***"

WHAT COMFORT! **Life** is not always EASY or FAIR. **Going through** life we quickly learn that we're not the ones IN CONTROL – we don't have all the ANSWERS – we can't make everything WORK OUT. **Life** doesn't always go the WAY WE want it to. You go out for sports and get cut – or you lose the championship. You study hard but **somebody else** gets the SCHOLARSHIP. Again ask your parents or grandparents and they can give you many **more examples**.

We have those days and we GET DOWN. We get worked up – **fearful**. WAIT! **What is it we** confess every week? "He ascended into heaven and IS SEATED at the right hand of God the Father almighty!" We're not in control but we know WHO IS. **Life** may be out of our hands but we are SAFELY IN the hands of **Him who is** the Lord God almighty – the hands of our "***Good Shepherd***" who has promised that "***no one can snatch (us) out of His hands.***" Those hands were once nailed to the cross for us – they were lifted high in blessing **as He ascended** – those hands now hold you and me **so tightly**. We couldn't ask for a BETTER PLACE to be! WHAT COMFORT to know that our **ascended Savior** now sits at God's right hand in control of everything. What a reason to...

III. Confidently follow His leading.

As I worked on this sermon I ran across some **interesting comments**. Listen to them. "Our darkest hours are God's opportunities to reveal His love, power, faithfulness. When God seemed His weakest He proved to be His strongest." I really like them.

Take this situation. The Israelites were trapped. On one side was the Red Sea. In front of them and on another side were **desert mountains**. Coming full speed at them **from behind** were "***Pharaoh and all his army, his chariots and horsemen.***"

How did they get in this **pickle**? They had followed GOD'S leading! **At the time** they didn't see it and it didn't look like it – but God was IN CONTROL. God was going to bring one FINAL JUDGMENT on defiant Pharaoh. God was going to show the Israelites **once more** that they could CONFIDENTLY

follow His leading. We don't always understand WHERE God is leading us or HOW He'll work things out for us. But instead of complaining or doubting we can CONFIDENTLY follow God's leading. LATER ON – just like these Israelites we will be able to LOOK BACK and see God working things out.

There was no human solution to the Israelites **dilemma** EXCEPT surrender and death. They needed to learn to GIVE UP on **themselves** but NOT on their God! Moses told the people, ***“Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you. The LORD will fight for you; you need only be still.”***

This is quite the miracle when you think about it. There was ***“a wall of water on their right and on their left.”*** The dry ground had to cover a good half-mile or more. There were some two million people – **plus their animals** – who crossed over in less than 12 hours. You know what God then did to the Egyptians!

There are some lessons for us here. Our enemies and **problems** can be TOO BIG for us to handle but not for our God. God has already handled our BIGGEST problems of sin and death. WE could do nothing about them. We're guilty of ignoring and **defying** God OVER and over and over. We can't hide from God. We can't make it up to God. God really should be **totally DISGUSTED** and FED UP with us – He really should just send us to hell's eternal punishment once and for all.

Yet we know what God in AMAZING GRACE has done for us. We have God's own Son as our perfect Savior. We have Christmas – Good Friday – Easter – and now Ascension Day. **Our sins** have all been washed away in Jesus' blood shed on the cross. We've been clothed with Jesus' own holy life. Clinging to Jesus we've been promised that we're **going straight** to heaven when we die. THAT SAVIOR – in control of **all** things – is now leading us through this life to heaven. NO PROBLEM is **too big** for our Jesus. The problem is that we often try to handle our problems ON OUR OWN instead of letting Jesus handle them.

Another lesson here. God used Moses' help in delivering the Israelites. At God's command Moses ***“stretched out his hand”*** and God parted the water for the Israelites and later brought it back on the Egyptians. God COULD HAVE done it all without Moses' help. But that's not how God wanted to do it.

God today wants to use you and me to HELP Him carry out His plans. God wants our help in getting His WORD OUT to others – in telling others about Jesus. God wants our help in **bringing** His LOVE and HELP, etc., to others. As you think about WHAT TO DO with your life it's not simply about where can I make lots of money so I can have a GOOD LIFE with the least amount of problems. That's SELFISHNESS. That's wasting our lives. As you consider what to do with your life pray often, “Lord, where and how can I BEST HELP and **serve** You? Lord, use me HOWEVER You will. Lord, keep me focused ON YOU and not on me.”

I like how this miracle ends. ***“When the Israelites saw the great power the LORD displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared*** (were filled with awe - WOW!) ***the LORD and put their trust in Him.”*** Having gone through St. John's school – having reached another Ascension Day – we've seen ***“the great power”*** of our God fighting to save us. May it be true of US ALSO – ***“they feared*** (were filled with awe) ***the LORD and put their trust in Him.”*** Amen.