

Easter 6
May 26, 2019

John 14:23-29
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Jesus Gets Us Ready for His Ascension

- I. "If anyone loves Me..."
- II. "My peace I give to you."
- III. "I am going away and I am coming back."

Dear Christian friends,

This **coming Thursday** marks 40 days after Easter. That makes it Ascension Day. That also makes it a **pretty much forgotten** and IGNORED day. Yes, we regularly confess that Jesus has "**ascended into heaven** and (now) sits at the right hand of God the Father almighty" – but that's about AS MUCH ATTENTION as **many Christians give** to Jesus' ascension.

The **apostles** here were having a hard time grasping the GLORY and COMFORT of Jesus' ascension. Jesus bluntly tells them, "**If you loved Me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father.**" "If you guys really loved Me and understood what My **ascension means**" you would BE GLAD **for Me** and be CELEBRATING **for yourselves**.

Jesus spoke these words to get His disciples ready for His ascension. **With them** Jesus also GETS US READY. Jesus gets us ready for His ascension BY TELLING us, 1) "**If anyone loves Me...**," 2) "**My peace I give to you**" and 3) "**I am going away and I am coming back.**"

I. "If anyone loves Me..."

"**If anyone loves Me, he will hold on to My Word.**" That word "if" – "**IF anyone loves Me**" – raises a question. Do I – do YOU – "**love**" Jesus? You almost feel foolish asking that question. **How** can we NOT love Jesus?!

We are moving farther and farther away from Holy Week and Easter. Yet don't ever lose sight of what we ALL SAW – of what JESUS all went through for us! "FOR US and **for our salvation**" the very Son of God took on our human flesh and blood – our Creator was born our Brother. "FOR US and **for our salvation**" Jesus lived the life of **perfect love** and **obedience** that we owed God. "FOR US and **for our salvation**" Jesus let Himself "be crucified under Pontius Pilate." "FOR US and for our salvation" **on the cross** Jesus endured the punishment of our sins – Jesus sacrificed His innocent life to "**take away the sin of the world.**" Then also "**for us** and for our salvation" came that glorious Easter morning. We have a risen, living Lord Jesus who has paid for all our sins – who has conquered death and the devil – who has promised us eternal life in heaven when we die. **How** can we NOT love Jesus?!

"**If anyone loves Me, he will hold on to My Word.**" There's no separating Jesus from His Word. It's ONLY THROUGH the Word that we come to know WHO Jesus is and WHAT Jesus has all done for us and promised to us. It's ONLY THROUGH **the gospel** that God brings us to faith in Jesus and keeps us growing in our faith.

That's why God's Word is SO ESSENTIAL **to our faith** and our personal relationship with Jesus. The word Jesus used for "**hold on to**" His Word also means keeping a CAREFUL WATCH over His Word – guarding His Word as a **precious treasure**. Jesus isn't simply telling us to HAVE a Bible but to actually USE our Bibles. We show how much we "**love**" Jesus by WHAT WE DO with His Word.

To encourage us Jesus has a SPECIAL PROMISE for us. "**If anyone loves Me, he will hold on to My word. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.**" With His ascension Jesus would **no longer** BE VISIBLY PRESENT with the apostles. HOW SPECIAL the **past three years** had been for them – walking and talking with Jesus – listening to Jesus – asking Jesus questions, etc. But Jesus has something JUST AS SPECIAL for them. They would watch Jesus

ascend on high but they should not think of Jesus as FAR OFF and **gone** from them. ***“My Father and I will come and make our home with him.”***

The church fathers call this the MYSTICAL UNION – the triune God dwelling in a MIRACULOUS yet **very REAL – SPECIAL – PERSONAL way with each believer**. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit have ***“made their home”*** – they dwelt in our hearts. My Savior God is NOT FAR away but right here – RIGHT NOW – with me in my heart. Perhaps we should ask, “Does God FEEL AT HOME in our hearts?”

These comforting promises and blessings are TRUE ONLY for those who ***“love”*** Jesus and ***“hold on to His Word.”*** ***“The one who does not love Me does not hold on to My words.”*** In the second reading Jesus warned the Christians in **Laodicea** about their HO-HUM attitude toward God’s Word. ***“Take this seriously and repent,”*** Jesus warned them.

Jesus GETS US READY for His ascension by focusing us on **His Word**. Our relationship with our **ascended Lord is built on** His Word. Jesus continues getting us ready for His ascension **by saying**,

II. ***“My peace I give to you.”***

“All this I have spoken while still with you.” After Easter Jesus was no longer with the disciples **24 hours** a day. Instead Jesus would POP IN on the disciples **1)to convince them** that He really was **alive again** and **2)to do** some LAST-MINUTE teaching. But that all ended when Jesus ascended. Jesus promises them, ***“But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, ...will teach you all things and remind you of everything I told you.”***

I like that ***“teach and remind you.”*** Just like you and me the apostles were often slow to CATCH ON and quick to forget. EVEN AFTER three years with Jesus they still had plenty to **learn** AND ***“be reminded”*** of.

How much more is that TRUE ABOUT US! This promise is also for us. The Holy Spirit inspired and guided the apostles in writing the books of the NT. Through the books of the OT and NT the Holy Spirit ***“teaches”*** and ***“reminds”*** us. There’s ALWAYS MORE for us to learn – **always more** for us to remember. Jesus GETS US READY for His ascension by promising us the help of the Holy Spirit.

“Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you.” Jesus’ peace is much more than A FEELING. Jesus’ peace is real – a fact – NO MATTER WHAT we might **be feeling** at the moment. **In fact** the more we’re focused on the REALITY of Jesus’ peace the more at peace we will FEEL and BE.

“MY peace,” Jesus calls it. “The peace I worked for you.” This is ***“the peace of God that goes beyond all understanding.”*** The peace that NO MATTER WHAT’S **all happening** God really does love me. The **peace** that no matter how horrible or **great my sin** God really has forgiven me. The **peace** that NO MATTER HOW DARK the day God really is with me – God **really is in control** and working all things for my eternal good. The **peace** that WHENEVER and HOWEVER I may die I really am going straight to heaven. ***“My peace.”*** This peace can only be found in Jesus. Jesus gives us ***“(His) peace”*** THROUGH THE GOSPEL in Word and sacraments. Jesus GETS US READY for His ascension by giving us ***“(His) peace.”***

The rest of the **apostles’ lives** were going to be a real ROLLER COASTER ride. So it will be till the end of the world! Ups and downs – twists and turns – thrills and scary times. THROUGH IT ALL we have Jesus’ peace AND His ascension promise...

III. ***“I am going away and I am coming back.”***

This is FIRST OF ALL a promise of Easter. Jesus would be taken from them **in death** and come back to them **risen and alive** on Easter. There was no avoiding the cross for Jesus. That was the ONLY WAY Jesus could be our Savior – could pay for all our sins – could set us free from the **devil’s power** and **hell’s punishment**. There was no avoiding the cross but Jesus LOOKED BEYOND the cross. We

read in Hebrews 12, ***“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, ...who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”***

“I am going away and coming back” is also Jesus looking ahead to Ascension Day – a glorious day of TRIUMPH for Him – but one the disciples saw as a LOSS for them. But Jesus’ ascension into heaven is NOT Jesus abandoning us! That’s totally missing the JOY and COMFORT – the TRIUMPH and PROMISE – of His ascension.

“If you loved Me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I.” Jesus had come here sent by His Father ON A MISSION – to be the Savior of a world of guilty sinners. To carry out that mission Jesus ***“humbled Himself – took the very nature of a servant – was obedient even to death on a cross.”*** With His ascension Jesus returns home MISSION ACCOMPLISHED. Our sins are paid in full – we are forgiven. Jesus now lays aside the humility and servant’s role. He now sits at the Father’s right hand IN CHARGE and IN CONTROL of all things ***“in heaven and on earth.”***

“And I am coming back.” At the start of this chapter we have Jesus’ BEAUTIFUL WORDS, ***“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions. I am going to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to be with Me, so that you may also be where I am.”***

“I have told you now before it happens so that, when it does happen, you may believe.” Holy Week – Easter – Ascension Day – Pentecost – teach us a BIG, COMFORTING lesson – God always keeps His promises. AT TIMES it may not look like it. We may wonder what God is up to or how He will work things out. Take Elisha’s servant in the OT reading. ***“Oh no, my Lord! What shall we do?”***

“Do not let your hearts be troubled,” Jesus tells us. We have His promises, ***“Lo, I am with you always – I am coming back.”*** We need have NO DOUBTS about any of Jesus’ promises.

Ascension Day may be ignored by most people – but NOT BY US. Ascension Day is a day of triumph for Jesus. It’s a day of comfort and blessing for us. Jesus’ ascension into heaven is not only to BE CONFESSED but celebrated with joy and thanksgiving. Amen.

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