

Good Friday Service – 6:00 pm April 19, 2019

God shares a great truth with mankind in **Isaiah 55:8-9**. He says,

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. ⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

I am reminded of this reality whenever I come to this time of the year. Decades ago, my first thought about Good Friday, was why in the world do people call the crucifixion of Christ **a good day**? That sounded twisted to me. But when I learned all that Christ accomplished by His sacrifice at the cross, I had to admit it was **a very good day for sinners like me**.

What I want to grapple with this evening, is another issue that initially did not make sense to me. Here was my confusion. At the cross, Jesus took the guilt of all our sin upon Himself – and then said “it is finished” – breathed His last – and died in our place. That is the greatest act of love the world has ever known. On Sunday, Jesus rose from the dead, proving He has the authority to be our perfect sacrifice for sin. He then spent forty days with His disciples speaking about the Kingdom of God – which Christ came to extend all over the world. The last command Jesus gave to His disciples focused on how to make faithful citizens for His Kingdom.

And so let’s ask ourselves, what characterizes the Kingdom of God? What does it look like? Jesus told His followers that when we pray, we should ask God that His Kingdom would come, and His will be done **on earth** as it is in heaven. God’s WILL is embraced and delighted in by all

the saints in heaven. Jesus says we should pray for that to happen here on earth as well. Decades ago, my question to God was – “Why did the resurrected Christ only remain on earth for forty days and then leave?” Would it not have greatly helped the cause of Christ’s Kingdom on earth if the King had stayed on earth to personally manage and extend His Kingdom?

It eventually dawned on me that if the resurrected, glorified Christ had stayed on earth for all to see, it would take no faith to believe in what everyone could see. Hebrews 11:6 says, “Without faith it is impossible to please God.” But there are some additional reasons why Jesus needed to ascend back into heaven. Listen to what Jesus told His disciples in **John 16:5-7**,

“But now I am going to him who sent me [He was returning to God the Father in heaven] . . . ⁶ But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart [it seems that the disciples also thought Jesus should stay on earth]. ⁷ Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away”

In order to see why it is to our advantage, we need to discover what happened when Jesus ascended back into heaven. Let me share an Old Testament passage which addresses this issue. The earliest references to Christ’s ascension are found in Psalm 2 and Psalm 110, which King David wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, about a thousand years before Christ came to earth. This is undoubtedly why those two psalms are the most quoted psalms in the New Testament. But I want to focus on what David said in **Psalm 110:1-2**,

“The LORD [God the Father] says to my Lord [God the Son]: ‘Sit at my right hand [the seat of power], until I make your enemies your footstool.’² The LORD sends forth from Zion your mighty scepter. Rule in the midst of your enemies!”

These two verses are an example of Hebrew poetry, which doesn't rhyme words, but repeats a truth in a slightly different way. We learn from verse 1, that after Christ's ascension, the Father told Him to remain at His right hand until His enemies were made into His footstool. The word footstool is the key word. Verse 2, repeats this same thought a little differently. In this verse – God the Father commanded the ascended Lord Jesus to rule in the midst of His enemies – beginning at Zion [Jerusalem] and then extending out to peoples in all the nations.

Let's unpack that a bit. The Bible teaches that all have sinned and fall short of God's holy standards. Because we are all sinners, we all start out at enmity with God. But when people repent of their sins and place their trust in Christ – they become a part of God's family [the Church], which is now the temple of God on earth. If you get a Bible concordance, and look up the word “footstool” – you will discover that in the Old Testament, God's footstool referred to God's temple. For two thousand years now, God the Father has been making Christ's enemies into temples.

Where did Christ's Church [God's new temple on earth] begin? At Jerusalem and from there it spread into all the nations. In 2019, there are about 70,000 people a day – from all over the world – who are being transformed from enemies of God, into temples of God. This was all set into motion when Christ ascended back into heaven, sat down on His

glorious throne and was officially declared to be the King of kings.

But there is a key issue **we haven't yet** looked at. How is God the Father doing this transforming work of making Christ's enemies into His footstools [temples]? To discover the answer, we need to go back to **John 16** and listen to what the Lord Jesus promised His disciples in verses **7-11**,

“ . . . I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper [God the Holy Spirit] will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you [Jesus did this ten days after His ascension].⁸ And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment:⁹ concerning sin, because they do not believe in me [rejecting Christ is THE sin that sends people to hell];¹⁰ concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father [Christ's resurrection and ascension verify that He is the sinless Son of God, who can make the worst of sinners – righteous in God's sight] . . .¹¹ concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.”

It was at the cross that Satan's head was crushed. At that time, Satan lost his foothold of power that he had gained because of mankind's fall in Adam. Listen to what **Colossians 1:13-14** declares is happening to Satan's domain of darkness,

“He [God the Father] has delivered us [believers] from the domain of darkness [Satan's domain] and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son,¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

Every person who is delivered from Satan's domain of darkness – is transferred to Christ's kingdom of light, and thereby becomes a citizen of Christ's Kingdom. The more people who are transferred into Christ's Kingdom of light, and become bearers of light – the more darkness can be dispelled [light always overcomes darkness]. Someone has said that our culture in America has gotten dark, not because of the prevalence of

darkness, but because of the scarcity of light. Jesus said we are not to hide our light, but to let it shine. I think there are enough Christians in America, to light this place up, if we don't hide our light. O God, please help us to let our light shine.

There is one more truth I want to share about the Lord Jesus ascending to the Father's right hand. Jesus promised in **John 14:23**, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him." How can God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit dwell within all of us? Because the Triune God is omnipresent. When Jesus was on earth, as fully man, in a physical body, He was not making His home within each of His followers. But when He ascended back to the Father's right hand, He began doing that.

This great truth caused the Apostle Paul to declare in Colossians 1:27, ". . . [It] is Christ in you, the hope of glory." And here is the mystery I close with – because Christ is in all true believers, **He is still present on earth** – working through us to extend His Kingdom.

And so Good Friday is good, because of what Christ accomplished at the cross for repentant sinners. It is good because on Sunday, He rose from the dead – never to die again. It is good because when Christ ascended back to the Father's right hand – He became a King with the authority to make His enemies into temples. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are God's ways higher than our ways.