

Ascension; May 24, 2020

Luke 24:44-53

How do you like good-byes? Sometimes, good-byes aren't all that fun, are they? It can be hard to say goodbye to family members who live some distance away. Even though you had a great time together, saying good-bye can be sad. It was great to laugh with a group of really good and close friends when you finally got together, but you know that it might be some time till you see one another again after you each go your separate ways. You might feel a little sad. Even though there are things like Facetime, google meets, zoom and all the other kinds of services that allow you to see each other electronically, it isn't always the same as seeing each other face-to-face.

And then there are those other times when we want to sing the Hallelujah chorus when someone finally leaves. Perhaps, it was someone who just overstayed their welcome. Maybe it is someone who simply unintentionally made your life more difficult. Maybe it is someone who said all the wrong things that made you feel uncomfortable, or simply because you are tired of playing the part of host and just want your house to be YOUR home again. For whatever reason, you want to say good-bye, maybe you are even glad when someone leaves. Good-byes can be met with a whole range emotions. Today we finish our series on the theme: **What do we do when our plans fall through?** We look at Jesus saying goodbye to his disciples to answer the question: **When it feels like Jesus left us?**

40 days after Easter, Jesus ascended into heaven. The day finally came that it was time to say good-bye. Luke wrote, **"He left them and was taken up into heaven."** What kind of a reaction would you expect out of Jesus' disciples? If you were one of those disciples standing on the hillside with Jesus, and you saw him begin to ascend into heaven, how would you feel? This was their Jesus. You saw the miracles that he had performed. You walked with him. You shared meals with him. You heard him teach in ways that totally made sense. He always seemed to have the perfect words to say at the perfect time. He always forgave you even if you didn't always forgive others. You never had to worry about your next meal, well because he is Jesus. He provided for you. Now he is going away.

We would understand if the disciples asked the question: *Why did he have to go?* It would make more sense for Jesus to stay. What more could he have done to prove to the Israelites that he was who he said he was? Even after all they did to him, after all the opposition he faced; here he was, raised from the dead. He was standing right there in front of them. Wouldn't it have made more sense to stay around for a little while longer and jump-start the church? At that moment in time, the church wasn't even that big, only a 120. Why did he have to leave at this moment in time?

Do these kinds of emotions run through your head? Do you ever feel as if God has left you? Did something happen in your life that maybe you feel like you watched God walk right out of your life? Do you feel like God has abandoned you, left you like an orphan?

Although we would totally understand if this is what the disciples were feeling, that's not what happened. Luke does not record any tears being shed on that Ascension Day. Instead, we are told that after Jesus left them by ascending into heaven, they were filled with joy. Luke tells us: **"While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy."**

Great joy? What's up with that? Were they glad that Jesus was finally out of their hair, that they could now do their own thing again? Were they joyful because now they could be free to be themselves again? The disciples were not filled with joy because they finally got rid of Jesus. No. Their joy came from that fact that Jesus did what he came to do. Jesus had spent that last 40 days since Easter to make one thing clear to them: **"This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."**

The Ascension of Jesus answers that question about why he had to say goodbye. Jesus' ascension isn't like Buzz Lightyear flying through Judean airspace shouting, *"To infinity and beyond!"* In His ascension, Jesus isn't like Superman, leaping clouds with a single bound. Jesus doesn't tap His communicator and say, *"Beam me up, Scottie."* Jesus' Ascension is about the Father seating his Son at his right hand **"in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, 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."** (Eph. 1:19-22)

There we see Jesus sitting constantly exercising God's power for us. We see Jesus ruling heaven and earth. The Savior who bled and died to save you now sits at God's right hand, as your advocate, brother, and redeemer. The Lamb of God is slain and yet lives—for you.

Christ ascending into heaven in all his glory proclaims to the world that his work is done. It is finished! We need to do nothing. Everything has been accomplished. His work of saving mankind from its sin and hell has been completed. If you ever doubt that God loves you... If you doubt that all your sins are forgiven... If you believe that a sinner like you couldn't stand before a holy God and be anything but condemned, God the Father asks you to look to his right and see that his Son has done it all for you.

So, how do you feel about good-byes? Some are easier than others. This good-bye of Jesus is a good thing. This world may not have any Ascension Day parades; no Ascension Day parties; no Ascension Day sales at the mall. But we have every reason to celebrate our Savior's return to heaven to rule over all things for us – his believers. **What do we do when it feels like Jesus has left us?** We remember that this Jesus has not left you, but loves you with whole his heart. **Even when our plans seem to fall through,** God's plan never failed. His plan is for you. Amen.