

The Post-Ascension Mindset

Colossians 3:1-4 (Ascension - May 21, 2020)

Therefore, because you were raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Jesus gathered with his disciples on the Mount of Olives. His hands, feet, and side still bore the marks of salvation won for all. Forty days before this the women and the disciples had rejoiced that he was alive, victorious, raised from the dead just as he said he would. During that time the disciples once again sat at his feet listening to him teach about the kingdom of God. Now that time was coming to an end. As Jesus stood there with the disciples on that mountain, their Savior and teacher had work for them to do. "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." The students were given their assignment: To proclaim his saving work. Since that work was done, it was at that point it was time for him to visibly leave this world. Before their very eyes as he was blessing them, he was lifted up into the heavens and a cloud covered him from their sight.

These witnesses of Jesus stood there staring up into the heavens, maybe straining to get one last look, perhaps in bewilderment at what had just happened. But in their upward stare, two angels came and asked that question. "Why do you stand here looking into the sky?" They had a job to do. The Church must always be about its appointed work in this post-ascension world. We can't merely stare up into the sky. While our eyes turn back to this world, we have his promise that he will return.

Jesus will come again just as the angels told the disciples in their upward stare. Yet while we wait, there is always the temptation of becoming so focused on life here and have our heart set on the things of this world. If that happens, our mindset for life here changes so that our hearts are no longer looking upward - only inward and right in front of us. My friends, yes we are in the world, but we are not of the world. Hearing Paul's words on this Ascension Day, he directs our hearts into a proper post-ascension mindset while we carry out together the work Jesus would have us do until he returns and as we live our lives in this world. It begins by understanding and rejoicing in this simple fact: You are raised with Christ!

At one time we were dead in our trespasses and sins, but now we are alive in Jesus. We have been raised to a new spiritual life. It is an accomplished fact. His victory over the grave proved it. You are raised with Christ. If that is our greatest treasure, then our hearts are pointed in the right direction. As Jesus himself said, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will also be." So our post-ascension mindset rises above earthly things and instead seeks those "above things" which we have been raised to a new life in Christ to receive.

We seek the things that are above the vision of this world where Christ himself sits at the right hand of God. We set our minds and hearts on those above things, not on earthly things. We lift up our hearts and keep thinking about things which are above the sins and sorrows of our world remaining confident in our "hidden life". **(read vs. 3-4)**

That sounds like an odd thing to say that we died and our life is hidden with Christ. Yet in many ways we have died. When death happens, there is a separation involved from the way things were before. You and I were raised with Christ to new life. We have died to the things of the world. We are corpses as far as the devil's power or ability to reach us is concerned. We are dead to any threats or claims made upon us because our sins are paid for. Christ's work of raising us from death to life is completed. His ascension is the final proof that nothing more needs to be to save. Now our life is hidden where he has gone.

When you have hidden something away, you tucked it away so that it is kept safe and no one can touch it. Perhaps in your home you have a hope chest. In that hope chest you keep things that have some importance to you. They bring back memories of the past. Maybe you have that little cloth with a cross on it, used at your baptism or the baptism of your children to dry the head. Maybe you have some items from your wedding that hold significance to you like the garter, special jewelry worn that day, or even just an invitation. Whatever you put in that hope chest, those items have significance and value hidden away, tucked away so that they are kept safe. Things in a hope chest are just things of the past, but what we have hidden with Christ in God deals with the future. It is the most valuable thing we can possess. At the present time it is tucked away for safe keeping with our Ascended Lord.

The life in heaven we have is hidden. We know we have it. We know that where Jesus has gone, we will one day be. The glory of heaven is already ours. We possess it only through faith in his saving grace. That life is hidden with Christ. It is tucked away in safe keeping for you until you are called out of this world to be with your Ascended Lord. Peter, who had stood there with the other disciples looking up into the sky, wrote years later, **“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he gave us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, into an inheritance that is undying, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.” (1 Peter 1:3-4)** Living our life with that post-ascension mindset not only has hearts that seek what is above, but also remains confident in our “hidden life” that is kept safe where Christ has gone. When he appears in glory and returns, then that hidden life becomes a reality.

Jesus spoke of that return. On Maundy Thursday night Jesus told his disciples that he was going to prepare a place for them in his Father’s house and that he would return to take them to be where he was. The angels on the Mount of Olives reinforced that promise. “This same Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.” When Christ who is our life visibly appears once again it will not be to pay for sins again. Instead it will be to make what was tucked away and hidden seen. We will see him with our own eyes in his glory and we will dwell with him in his glorious heaven. What was hidden away in Christ will be fully revealed when Christ returns.

After Jesus left their visible sight, the disciples' gaze turned from upward to outward. They didn’t weep at his departure as they had done at his death. Instead they worshipped their risen and ascended Lord and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. They were continually in the temple courts praising God while they waited for the promised gift of the Holy Spirit to carry out the important work Jesus had sent them out to do - to serve as his witnesses to the world around them. With proper post-ascension mindset, their eyes may not have been looking up into the clouds, but their hearts were indeed looking upward as they began the work given to them knowing they would see him again in glory.

While our eyes are not constantly looking upward giving ourselves sore necks watching for Jesus to return, our post-ascension mindset is a heart mindset. Where is your heart looking? Yes our eyes, hands, and mouths are busy with the work that our Lord Jesus has given to us to serve him as his witnesses to the world around us. Yes we live our lives in this world to serve him, but we are raised with Christ. As a result our hearts and minds are always focused on what he has won for us and where he has gone. Sometimes Christians are accused of having their heads in the clouds. They might be right, but in the way they mean it. We go about our life seeking the things that are above this world where our Risen and Ascended Savior sits at the right of God. We live every day with our hearts looking only outward and set on earthly things, but looking upward with confidence in the hidden life that will one day be fully revealed and we will be with him who sits in glory ruling over all things. My friends, on this Ascension Day and beyond, may we possess that post-ascension mindset until he returns just as he promised! Amen