

Ephesians 1:15-23

Luke 24:44-53 His Glory, Our Gain

May 4, 2008

Jesus' final appearance took place on a mountain - the Mount of Ascension. You recall that earlier he had been upon another mountain with his disciples: the Mount of Transfiguration (Luke 9:28-36). Up to the time of his Transfiguration Jesus taught about the kingdom of God. After that event his life *was* the kingdom of God; a life poured out for others, for you and for me. After the Transfiguration he went to the cross, where he paid for your sin and mine. All who come to the foot of the cross, releasing their sin to him, will receive eternal life in His resurrection. And by His ascension the Lord enters heaven and sends the Holy Spirit, giving us the power to resist sin, and be transformed for his kingdom.

Just before his ascension Jesus met his disciples and "opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures." Bible study does not stop at adulthood. In fact that's when it really begins. Robert Fulgham wrote a popular book a few years back, *Everything I Needed to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*. I lived in Montana way back when. We did not have a kindergarten, so, needless to say I didn't learn anything there. But my educational process, though deprived early on, continues to this day. It also is true to say that the more I learn, the more I realize how much there is to learn and how little I know. This is true in all fields, including the one that bears on your eternal destiny. The more I learn about Jesus - and it is the Scriptures that teach me - and the closer I come to him, the more I realize how much there is of Christ still to know, and how much I need him.

He taught them that Scripture announces that the Christ must suffer at the hands of a godless world.

But God vindicated Jesus and his suffering proves to be an expiation of our sins. This theme is found over and over again throughout the Scriptures - both Old and New Testaments. [In our reading from Acts, Peter's sermon describes Jesus in terms similar to that used in describing Moses in the O.T.] Jesus is God's righteous servant who leads people into a new life, just as Moses led God's people into a new land. Humanity's no to Jesus is countered by his resurrection, which is God's yes. By his cross, vindicated in his resurrection, our sins are expunged from the record. Becoming a Christian does not mean we become faultless and our problems vanish. But it does mean we repent of those sins, be redeemed by his atoning sacrifice on the cross, and transformed by his continuing grace, so that he can work through us. The Bible contains a lot of good directions on how to handle our daily lives as genuine Christians.

Today we have Holy Communion. And why is that so important? Look at that word "communion." It has the same root as communicate and communication. We commune with our Risen Lord when we share the bread and cup and we commune with one another. We are like spokes on a wheel, radiating out from Christ; each an individual, yet all connected. The Risen Christ does not simply provide an escape from distress and fear, from sin and death, then the promise of a better place beyond the grave. Instead we are met by the Risen One today, in our history, in concrete situations, in this church, in this community, with its flesh and blood needs. Christians and the church do not exist primarily for themselves but for others - those who do not know him and his atoning grace. Those who surrender to Him will find comfort, strength, and power in Christ in this life, and the life to come. This is the good news we have to share with broken people in a broken world. During the last ten days, I attended the General Conference of the United Methodist Church, held in Ft. Worth, Texas. Every four years delegates from the worldwide body of the U.M.C. gather. This year 1/3 of the delegates came from Africa, where the U.M.C. is growing rapidly, as it is in the Philippines. In North America the U.M.C. is in decline everywhere except in the South East U.S. There are more Methodists in Georgia than west of the Rockies. But as the church declines in California, it will grow at First Church, Bakersfield. We will buck the trends and share the transforming power of Jesus Christ, as do our African brothers and sisters. One African delegate at the General Conference said thank

for the food, the schools, the help; but the Muslims can bring food and build schools in our villages. What we need from you [American church] is Jesus Christ, and the life-transforming power found in Him!

A holy life results from surrender to our risen king. We sing of Christ Jesus as Lord of Life, king of kings. But is he Lord of your life? Many of us in church are lukewarm about that because we have "... the sneaking suspicion that Christ will sabotage our gain on this side. That somehow Christ equates to loss on this earth, even though He has guaranteed the reality of heaven on the other side. We fear that if we take Him seriously and submit to His lordship, He may ask us for our money or maybe call our children away into service in the church - or worse yet, overseas to missions. Christ becomes a potential liability when we think that we may have to give up what we have gained in earth-side comfort to be fully devoted to Him. This nagging suspicion that Christ means loss often keeps us from an unflinching commitment to serve Him.

Deep down, we are simply swallowing Satan's lie which whispers to us that "True gain is to be achieved here." True gain, however, is being restored to our created purpose, an unhindered, satisfying experience of a relationship with the God of the universe. As the lover of my soul, he intends heaven as the place where we know final gain and eternal fulfillment."¹.

Sometimes those sidewalk preachers can speak the truth, right to the heart. In L.A. a man wore one of those sandwich boards that said in big letters, "I'm a fool for Christ. Who's fool are you?" That's the real question in life: Who or what do you live for? Is it of eternal value?

Scripture speaks to us just here: if only "... the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe" (Eph. 1:18-19a). May it be so.

¹ Joseph M. Stowell *Eternity: Reclaiming a Passion for What Endures*, (Moody Press, Chicago, 1995), 92-93.

