

## I'm So Glad He Left

Luke 24:44-53 (NIV)

<sup>44</sup> He said 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." <sup>45</sup> Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. <sup>46</sup> He told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, <sup>47</sup> and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup> You are witnesses of these things. <sup>49</sup> I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." <sup>50</sup> When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. <sup>51</sup> While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. <sup>52</sup> Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. <sup>53</sup> And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.

"Parting is such sweet sorrow." Another Shakespearian quote from *Romeo and Juliet* that is just as applicable today as it was 400 years ago. You experience this particular emotion after you see family and friends and then sadly have to say goodbye again. Even though you had a good time, the sorrow sets in as you have to part for a time.

And then there are those other times when we want to sing the Hallelujah chorus when someone finally hits the road again, whether they were someone who overstayed their welcome or who effortlessly made your life more difficult, someone who said all the wrong things, or simply because you are tired of playing the part of host and just want your house to be your sanctuary again when you can do what you want and say what you want without being judged, to sit and watch tv without feeling like you have to make conversation with this person that you don't get to see very often. On the reverse side of the coin, maybe you as the guest are happy to leave because you are exhausted of living out of your suitcase and eating out of your cooler, feeling guilty that you like to seclude yourself in the evening and have quiet, alone time instead of socializing.

40 days after Easter, after he rose from the dead, Jesus ascended into heaven. Luke wrote, "He left them and was taken up into heaven." (verse 51) What kind of a reaction would you expect out of Jesus' disciples? What emotions would be flooding over you if you had been one of those disciples out there in the vicinity of Bethany? This is the man who you believed to be your Savior, your God. You saw the miracles firsthand. He walked with you, talked with you, shared meals with you, taught you. He always knew the right thing to say. He always had patience for you even if you didn't have patience for others. He always forgave you even if you didn't forgive others. You never had to worry about your next meal because Jesus somehow always provided for you. You always felt protected with him around. And, of course, if you were there near Bethany on that day, you were probably still having a hard time wrapping your head around the fact that he suffered and died on the cross and then came back to life and showed himself to you. With Jesus around, everything else could crumble, but he was your peace, your tranquility, your sure foundation throughout the storms of life.

Then Jesus is taken away from you. He goes away, seemingly for good. This has already happened once. You were told about his death. For two days you thought you would never see him again. How can he leave me again? Doesn't he know what that does to me? He leaves me feeling so alone. If Jesus is not with me, will God still protect me? Will he still care for me? Will he still love me, forgive me? How will I be able to function without him? Where will my help and support come from?

Are these the emotions that 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 disciple were feeling, Luke does not record any tears being shed on that day. Instead, we are told that after Jesus left them by ascending into heaven, "They worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy." (verse 52) Jesus' disciples had great joy when Jesus left them. What's up with that? Were they glad that he was finally out of their hair, that they could now let it all hang out again, drop the holy act? Were they joyful because now they could be lazy about their faith and their beliefs again, finally 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." (verse 44) Jesus had told his disciples even before it all happened that he would suffer and die and then rise from the dead on the third day. By living perfectly and then offering himself up as an innocent sacrifice, he provided forgiveness of sins for the entire world, for all people, for

his disciples, for you and me. This is what he had always planned on doing. This is what he had taught them. This is what he said he would do.

Think about what this means for you and for the disciples. Think of the first sin you committed, if you can. Think of the last sin that you committed, probably one done even while I've been preaching to you. God promised that he would take away that sin and defeat the devil, save all humanity from damning itself to destruction, including you. The risen Lord was the proof that this was accomplished. We have eternal security before God because Jesus fulfilled everything written about him in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms.

Jesus had also promised that he was going to return to God the Father. Once he did, he was going to send his disciples the gift from the Father that he had already told them about. "I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." (verse 49) He was going to send them the Counselor, the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit would give them power to carry out this mission to be witnesses that Jesus had fulfilled everything written about him in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms. The Holy Spirit would work through the disciples' witnessing to preach that message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. This is what Jesus said would happen after he returned, ascended, to the Father, and we'll hear about it next Sunday as we celebrate that day of Pentecost. Jesus leaving the disciples in this way was him still fulfilling everything that had been written about him.

What's more is that Jesus' ascension into heaven means that he is now sitting at the right hand of God. Now, this is not an actual seat, but this is a title, a position of power and authority far above all rule and authority, power and dominion on earth. As his disciples would be going out and serving as his witnesses, preaching his suffering and death to lead people to turn away from their sins and preaching Jesus' resurrection to show them how God did actually take away their sins as promised, Jesus would be in control of all things. Although he wouldn't be by their side as he had over the last three years, he would be ruling all things for their benefit, to make sure that Jesus' message of repentance and forgiveness prevailed.

Now we begin to understand why the disciples were not crying when Jesus left them nor were they glad that Jesus was finally out of their hair. They worshiped Jesus on that hilltop where he was taken up into heaven, where he left them, because Jesus had fulfilled and was continuing to fulfill everything written about him in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms. Jesus leaving them meant that his work in accomplishing the forgiveness of sins for all people was truly, completely accomplished, that Jesus was indeed going to send them the Holy Spirit, that he would rule all things for their good, and that they could preach repentance for the forgiveness of sins to all nations without hesitation. They knew that this message was good and valid. They had great joy as Jesus blessed them and left them.

If you feel like Jesus has left you, remember what was written about him in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms. He lived, suffered, died, and rose from the dead to give you the forgiveness of sins. You are forgiven. And what's more is that he kept his promise to you. The report of all that Jesus did to forgive you has been preserved for you. Our God is a God of his Word. Jesus sent his Holy Spirit to his disciples as he said he would. He is at God's right hand, that position of power, to rule over all things in this world for our good. Jesus is still with you right now even if you don't see him. He said that he will be with you always to the very end of the age. He always does what he says he will do.

This message is for all nations. This is the message and the joy of ascension, which the disciples spread after Jesus left them by ascending into heaven. This is why we can proclaim that same message to others. This is why we come here to worship him today on Ascension. This is why we can say, "I'm so glad that Jesus left." Amen.

---

May 28, 2017

Pastor Jonathan Klein

[pastorklein@lightofthevalley-wels.org](mailto:pastorklein@lightofthevalley-wels.org)