

Lesson 1 • Conception and Birth of Jesus

Text • Matthew 1:18-25; Parallel • Luke 1: 25-56; 2:1-20

Aim

I believe that Jesus came down from heaven and was born as a human because He loves me.

Background

Jesus once said, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends." (John 15:13). Yet that is all a man may show or accomplish by the giving up of his life—love for another. This should clearly demonstrate to us the necessity of our Savior from our sins to be more than a mere man. Jesus not only showed His great love for all mankind by surrendering His life, but because He is true God, He was able to pay the full price of our redemption. After the sacrifice had been made, Christ took up His life again in victory—forever sealing Satan's fate and our salvation. Give thanks to Jesus Christ our Savior—True God!

The Apostle Paul by the Holy Spirit has recorded for us in Galatians 4:4-5 the following, "But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons." The laws that bind us certainly do not bind God, but Jesus chose to bind Himself as a human under God's law. Therefore, once again, the Scriptures clearly demonstrate the necessity of our Savior's dual nature. Not only did the debt have to be paid with blood, but the perfect life under the law had to be lived. Jesus, as true man and true God, was held accountable to the law, was able to keep the law perfectly for us and shed His innocent blood as the only perfect sacrifice for our sins. Give thanks to Jesus Christ our Savior—True Man!

Introduction

You may recall many events from the Old Testament in the Bible. Stories such as: Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah and the ark, Abraham, etc. What we should also remember is that in many of these records, God was continually promising His people that He would send a Savior to take away everyone's sins (see scripture references). God did not send this Savior right away. He waited for just the right time in history for His Son and "the Seed of the woman," the God-Man, Jesus, to be born.

Text study

Verse 18: Betrothal was a much stronger union than some of our modern day engagements. It was the public declaration of intent to marry and could not be broken except by a regular divorce.

Mary was "with child by the Holy Spirit." As Mary had been told by the angel Gabriel, "the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God." (Luke 1:35) "The conception and birth of this Child would be brought about by a divine and miraculous power; it would be something unique in the annals of man." (Rupprecht: *Bible History References, Volume II*, page 15)

Verse 19: When Joseph discovered his bride-to-be was expecting a child, he came to the only humanly possible conclusion; she had been unfaithful to him. According to the Law (Deuteronomy 22:22-24), Joseph had the right to not only dissolve the betrothal, but to see to Mary's public punishment as well. However, Joseph showed a

“just” and godly spirit by not wishing to heap any public shame or punishment on Mary. He would rather see that the whole matter be taken care of in a private fashion. A fine Christian example (Proverbs 10:12, “...love covers all sins.”)

Verse 20: God intervened on behalf of Mary and Jesus by means of a divine dream sent to Joseph. The angel in the dream called Joseph “Son of David.” Joseph and Mary were both descendants of King David's line. The importance of this lies in the fact that it had been prophesied that the Savior would also be a member of David's family tree. (David's son—true man, yet David's Lord—true God.)

Verse 21: Joseph should call the Son Jesus (Savior) “...for He will save His people from their sins.” We can only imagine the wonderment Joseph must have felt at this message!

Verse 22-23: The Gospel writer, Matthew, was inspired by the Holy Spirit to add commentary to the story. He explains that all of these things were done so that God's promise would be fulfilled. As recorded in Isaiah 7:14, “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.” Immanuel = God-with-us, or God as flesh and blood, God in human form.

Verse 24-25: What a wonderful example of obedience Mary and Joseph are to us! God commanded and Joseph and Mary obeyed. When the angel appeared to Mary she responded, “Behold, the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.” (Luke 1:38) God's choice for Jesus' earthly parents provides good examples of humble obedience and willingness to bow to His will.

With amazing simplicity, Matthew states: Jesus was born. In a lowly manger, tucked away in a humble stable, in the tiny town of Bethlehem, in an unimpressive province of the Roman Empire, the greatest event in history took place. God Himself stooped to become one of us. Jesus came not to be served, but to serve. Who was on hand to witness this miracle of the ages? Only His mother, step-father, and a few humble shepherds. Even today, the people crowd into the inns of this world, ignoring the blessed event that has taken place. It is for us to lead our fellow man back to that humble stable, that he may, through the working of the Holy Spirit, find his God there as well.

Statement of Beliefs

- Apostles' Creed—“...who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary ...”
- Nicene Creed —“..the only-begotten Son of God...incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man,”
- Athanasian Creed — “...we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and man.”

Application

Remember, nothing is impossible with God—we may not understand how or why, we must simply believe. God's promises never go unfulfilled! He is faithful to all that He has proclaimed in His Word.

Every Christmas a special joy and excitement fills the air. This joy and excitement we feel in our hearts as the day rapidly approaches. But why? Why is there such joy and excitement? How many base their joy and excitement on the giving and getting of gifts? We received the greatest gift at Christmas. God the Father gave us the gift of His Son, Jesus, the Christ-child.

How do we express our joy over the birth of Jesus at Christmas time? Special services: Mid-week Advent, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day. Perhaps the use of an advent calendar. We decorate our homes and churches and

send religious Christmas cards. Mention the meaning behind the decorations that we put up. The evergreen tree signifies everlasting life, never dying. The lights on the tree signify the Light of the world (Jesus) and our being lights to the world. Giving and receiving gifts is a custom which should remind us of the greatest gift God has given to us in His Son Jesus.

There is a danger that we let these many outward customs “steal the show” of Christmas. They so very often take up so much of our time, energies, thoughts and finances, that the real joy of Christmas gets pushed into the background. We will want to make sure our children realize that Christmas is not Santa Claus and presents or even a winter holiday, but a special time when we were given by God the Father the greatest gift ever: His Son in human flesh and blood as our Substitute Savior.

Scripture References

- Genesis 3:15 — The first promise of a Savior.
- Micah 5:2 — Birth place of our Savior foretold.
- Isaiah 7:14-16 — The Immanuel passage.
- Isaiah 9:6-7 — “For unto us a Child is born...”
- John 1:1-18 — The Divine and Human nature of Christ.

Hymns

78 • 80:1 • 93 • 94 • 95 • 99 • 102:4

Lesson 2 • Baptism and Temptation of Jesus

Text • Matthew 3:13-4:11; Parallel • Mark 1:9-13; Luke 3:21-4:13

Aim

I believe that Jesus was baptized and then battled Satan because He loves me.

Background

John the Baptist had told the people: "There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose." This Mightier One was Jesus. Jesus was almost 30 years old and John had been preaching for about six months when Jesus began His ministry. The first thing He did then was to go out into the wilderness and be tempted by the devil. As our High Priest and True Man, He "was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin." He is our Substitute in keeping the Law perfectly for us.

Introduction

This lesson reveals Jesus as TRUE GOD and TRUE MAN; and how He alone is strong enough to win salvation for us. In the first part of the lesson, God the Father shows how He specially chose Jesus to be the Savior. In the second part of the lesson we see Jesus in action, fighting to win salvation for us.

Start the lesson by asking the class: "Who's your hero?" Talk about war heroes of the past and the bravery it takes to fight in a war. Say something like: "Today we're going to talk about a brave warrior!" Someone who already is your hero — Jesus. We want to learn to think of Jesus as the best hero of all!

Text Study

Matthew 3

Verse 13: Jesus was about ready to begin His public ministry. He left His home in Galilee in order to be baptized by John.

Verse 14-15: John recognized something important: his own sinfulness in contrast to Jesus' holiness and sinlessness. John's baptism was a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins... "In Him is no sin" (1 John 3:5). Yet Jesus insisted that John baptize Him. Jesus' reason? — "to fulfill all righteousness." What did He mean? Usually when we speak of Jesus' righteousness we are referring to His perfect keeping of the Ten Commandments. Baptism, however, has nothing to do with the Law. It's all Gospel! Yet this was something Jesus had to do to complete His work as our Savior. In view of the context we can think of Jesus' baptism as an inauguration into His ministry.

Verse 16-17: In these verses the truth that Jesus is TRUE GOD is clearly brought out. God the Father says: "This is My beloved Son!" Here also we have the Trinity present: The Father's voice from heaven; the Son walking up from the water; and the Holy Spirit descending upon the Son in the form of a dove.

Note how the Father says He is well-pleased with His Son. Jesus never sinned. Jesus only and always sought to do His Father's will. This is in sharp contrast to the rest of us. In the last lesson we learned that Jesus was conceived and born sinless. We, on the other hand, were sinful at the moment of our conception; "In sin did my

mother conceive me.” (Psalm 51:5). Everyday throughout our lives temptation gets the best of us, causing us to sin in thought, word, and deed. Jesus “was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). God the Father is most pleased with Jesus. Because of our sinfulness, the holy God cannot be pleased with us. We are worthy of nothing but eternal condemnation. But we have a hero — a warrior strong enough to save us from the consequences of sin. Praise the Father for sending Jesus to rescue us. On account of His beloved Son, God the Father is pleased with us too. In the next section we behold Jesus, the God-man on the field of battle, triumphing over Satan for us!

Matthew 4

Verse 1-2: After His baptism Jesus was led into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit to be tempted by the devil. The battle that follows was staged by God. God brought it about, not Satan. From the beginning God was in control of winning man's salvation. Nonetheless, the battle was very real; Jesus “was tempted as we are” (Hebrews 4:15).

Although the Bible only tells us of three specific temptations, Mark and Luke inform us that the temptation of Jesus was continuous. It lasted during the entire forty day period (ref. Luke 4:2 & Mark 1:13). Satan knew very well that Jesus had come to crush His power (cf. Genesis 3:15). If he could succeed just once in getting Jesus to sin in thought, word or deed, he would win the victory. So for forty days Satan relentlessly attacked Jesus. During these forty days Jesus fought Satan “like a man.” Never once did He use His divine power against the devil. On the field of battle Jesus represents and fights for all of mankind. He uses only the Word against Satan.

Verse 2 brings out the manhood of Jesus in this battle. “...afterward he was hungry.” As true man Jesus had the same needs as we do. His body needed nourishment and rest just like ours (Cf. Matthew 8:24).

Verse 3-4: In the first temptation Satan tried to tempt Jesus to use His divine power for selfish purposes — to provide bread for Himself. (Note how all of Jesus' miracles were done for the benefit of others: (1) for the benefit of showing people that He was the Son of God; (2) for the benefit of providing for people's physical needs; and (3) for the benefit of bringing glory and praise to His Father. Jesus responded to Satan's temptation by quoting Deuteronomy 8:3. Man's purpose in life is not to satisfy his own selfish desires. (A very popular sin in our day and age.) Man's purpose is to learn about and to serve the true God.

Verse 5-7: Now Satan, by quoting Jesus, challenged Jesus to test whether or not the Word of God is as powerful as Jesus seemed to think. Satan referred Jesus to Psalm 91:11-12. Here the Evil One misused the Bible. It is true that God will guard and protect His own. But that does not mean that we are to recklessly throw ourselves into danger. Jesus had perfect trust in His Father, but He reminded Satan: “You shall not tempt the LORD your God.” As God's children we rest safe and secure in the all-powerful hands of God. At the same time it would be wrong for us, for example, to throw ourselves in front of an on rushing train.

Verse 8-10: Finally Satan tempted Jesus by offering Him the authority and splendor of all the kingdoms of the world. All this would be His if He would only bow down to Satan. Here we see why Satan is called “the Father of lies.” The wealth and glory of the world did not even belong to Satan in the first place. They belong to God. How arrogant of Satan to offer the Son of God what already belonged to Him. Once again Jesus counter attacked with Scripture: “You shall worship the LORD your God and Him only you shall serve.”

Application

God told us at Jesus' baptism that Jesus is His Son. What does that mean for us? It means that He is the One of whom God spoke in all of the Old Testament prophecies. He is the One God sent into this world to take our place. He is our Savior! There is no one else!

We know the sad results of listening to Satan's lies. Instead of receiving the power and glory he promises, we become his slaves. Satan always rules with sadness and misery. A good illustration of this for children would be drug and alcohol abuse. Satan promises the youth excitement and adventure through the use of mind-altering drugs. The first experiences the child has with drugs may lead him to believe that the drug is fun and exciting, but that is only Satan's way of leading his victim deeper into the trap. So many young lives have been ruined because the devil has gotten them to "swallow" his lies. The fun and excitement soon turns to despair and heartbreak.

Jesus' overcoming all temptations shows us that Jesus has the power over our greatest, most powerful enemy, Satan. Yes, the devil is powerful, more powerful than we, but Jesus is more powerful than Satan. Through His Word He also strengthens us (our faith) so that the devil cannot lead us into sin and unbelief. "We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us." Romans 8:37 We "can do all things through Christ who strengthens us." Phil. 4:13

God chose Jesus, His only-begotten Son, to win salvation for mankind. Man's plight was so desperate that it took the very Son of God to save us. At Jesus' baptism God declared Jesus to be His Son. After this Jesus met and defeated the devil in fierce battle. Jesus, however, did not use His power as God to beat Satan, Jesus wielded "the sword of the Spirit, which is the WORD of God." (Ephesians 8:11) As a man, and in our place, Jesus has resisted Satan and never once gave into temptation. "He knew no sin." (II Corinthians 6:21) If man had any hope of escaping eternal damnation, someone had to live a sinless life in our place. Jesus has done this. It was on the cross, though, that Jesus dealt the death blow to Satan. On the cross, moments before He died, Jesus declared: "It is finished!" With these words Jesus proclaimed the final victory over sin, death and hell.

In this lesson lead the children to think of Jesus as their hero. He is a hero sent by God Himself. Jesus was the only one able to defeat our greatest enemy. Show how He fought long and hard for us! In Jesus, God made good on His daring rescue attempt to save mankind.

A secondary, but important application is found in Jesus' use of the Word against the devil. Jesus overcame Satan by using the very same weapon which is available to every Christian — the Word of God. Emphasize the importance of using the WORD of God as we fight against Satan's temptations. When Satan tries to get us to doubt God's love for us, we recall to mind a Bible passage which tells us of God's grace and abiding love for the sinner (John 3:18). When Satan tries to get us to sin, we remember how the LORD has told us "Thou shalt not." This aspect of the lesson gives the teacher an excellent opportunity to underscore the importance of memorizing Scripture. We never know when Satan will attack. We need to keep our arsenal full.

Scripture References

- Matthew 28:18
- Romans 5: 17-21; 6:3-11; 8:31
- Ephesians 6:10-17
- Philippians 4:13
- Hebrews 2:18; 4:14-16
- Psalm 124:8

Hymns

298-303 • 446 • 261:1-2 • 262

Lesson 3 • Preaching and Healing By Jesus

Text • Mark 2:1-13; Parallel • Matthew 9:1-8; Luke 5:11-26

Aim

I believe that Jesus does the miracle of forgiving sin because He loves me.

Background

On a map of Palestine, identify especially the Jordan River, the Sea of Galilee, Nazareth, the region of the Gerasenes, and Capernaum. Trace Jesus' route from the region of the Gerasenes (where He had cast out demons), across the Sea of Galilee to Capernaum.

Introduction

The teacher might begin by asking a series of questions designed to test the students' knowledge, and to show that by His works and His words Jesus was Himself God. What name was Jesus given that means "God with us?" [A. Immanuel] Why was He named Jesus? [A. Because He would save His people from their sins.] What was Jesus doing after His baptism? [A. Preaching God's Word.] Why were so many people following Him around? [A. To hear His preaching.] What did Jesus use to combat and defeat the temptations of Satan—turn water into wine—fill the fishermen's net with fish—calm the storm—feed 5,000 men—cast out demons? [A. His Word: He just spoke words.] Can any man or woman do these kinds of things just by speaking? [A. No.] How was Jesus then able to do these things just by speaking or commanding? [A. He is true God.] What did Jesus do which showed He was true God? [A. Many miracles; can the students name others?] Who also testified that Jesus was true God? [A. God the Holy Spirit through Isaiah (Immanuel), and the Father Himself—This is my beloved Son.]

All of Jesus' words and works had this purpose: to give praise and glory to God, and to show He Himself was God, the Lord, and the Savior of the world.

Text Study

Verse 1: He entered into Capernaum — Jesus had been in the land of the Gergesenes (Gerasenes), east of the Sea of Galilee, but now crossed over to the western shore.

Capernaum — Probably situated some two miles SW of where the Jordan River empties into the Sea of Galilee. The city was on a great trade route between West (Rome) and East (Persia, etc), and therefore quite prosperous. Roman soldiers were stationed there; it also had a customs house, or tax place during the early months of Jesus' ministry. Jesus had preached there often and done powerful miracles, but the people for the most part rejected Him as Lord and Messiah. For that reason Jesus cursed the city which is now a mass of ruins.

Note: Bethlehem — city where Jesus was born.

Nazareth — city where He lived as a boy and young man with His parents.

Capernaum — city where He made His home in the early years of His ministry.

Jerusalem — city where He suffered, died, and rose again and near which He ascended into heaven.

Verse 3: bringing a paralytic (or palsy — or shorter word for paralysis) Palsy is a disease which deprives the part of the body affected of sensation, or power of motion, or both. This might have been paralysis on one side, below the neck or waist, either from brain dysfunction or spinal cord injury.

Verse 4: But what was to be done? Remember, the house was packed with people trying to hear Jesus. No one was willing to move aside lest they lose their place. Yet the four friends believed in Jesus' power to help and were absolutely determined to bring their sick companion to Jesus.

Uncovered the roof — they got to the roof by means of an outer staircase. There they removed enough of the supporting structure (rafters, branches, poles) and of the protective material (dirt, tile) so as to be able to lower the cot with the sick man through the opening. Ylvisaker seems to suggest these four men removed only the “covering which protected the opening in the flat roof during the rainy season,” which seems to imply some sort of skylight. However, Mark says they “broke through.” Edersheim also thinks it was not the main roof, but a covered gallery which would have been lighter in construction.

Rupprecht on houses — The common ancestors of Israel, the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob lived in tents, which were sometimes divided into apartments by means of curtains, and the ground was covered with mats or carpets. It was not until their descendants settled in the Promised Land, that they abandoned their simple habits. They entered the houses which the conquered and exterminated Canaanites had built. The houses of the common people had only one story and sometimes only one room. The interior was divided into two portions, one several feet higher than the other. The door from the outside led into the lower portion, which was occupied by the cattle. The higher floor, where the family dwelt, was reached by a short flight of steps. Sometimes there was a loft above the stable for guests. These several apartments were not walled off from each other. The outside walls of the houses were often of mud or sun-dried brick. The roofs were made of tree branches, canes, palm leaves, etc. laid upon rude rafters, covered with a thick stratum of earth or clay and frequently rolled with a stone roller. Materials this flimsy could not long resist the heavy rains which fell at certain seasons. There would be no difficulty in temporarily creating an opening in the roof and letting down a man on a bed.

Houses of the better classes were generally built in a quadrangle, around a central courtyard, which sometimes contained a fountain or even a well. The upper chamber was an important room in the second story, built above the general level of the roof. It was entered by an outer staircase leading to it as well as to the roof directly from the street, and therefore entirely unconnected with the interior of the house. The roofs were flat and surrounded by a wall at least three feet high, lest anyone should fall from it. They were used for drying linen, flax, produce and figs; for rest and sleep; for meditation and prayer; for conversation and conference and also for public wailing. The windows opened into the courtyard instead of facing the street. Chimneys were unknown; the smoke escaped through openings in the wall.

Verse 5: Jesus saw their faith — The determination of the five was now evident to all. Jesus saw their faith; He is Lord; He is omniscient; He knows what is in man.

What Jesus saw, at the very least, was faith on the part of the five in His healing power. What the Lord saw in the sick man, regardless of the degree of his knowledge and faith in Jesus as the Messiah, was a repentant sinner, who felt the need of forgiveness. Jesus knew the man was not deceived into believing that somehow his own sickness and suffering was payment enough for his sins, as some of the Jews believed.

Son — Luke calls the paralytic a “man,” so it is doubtful whether “son” here means simply a child, or young man. Paul considered it an honor and privilege to be the servant of Christ. It is said of Moses that he was the friend of

God. This paralytic is called “son” by Him who is God — not an enemy or sinner, not a servant or friend — but son.

Your sins are forgiven you — Matthew includes, “Be of good cheer!” People generally expect their doctors to have a friendly bedside manner. Jesus was all of that. As the kind physician, He inspired confidence and instilled comfort and balm for the aching heart right at the outset with a tender, gentle and cheering word.

Jesus is more than just one with a friendly smile and gentle manner. He is wise. He is the Physician with the truly X-ray vision. He knows there are common, non-fatal illnesses. He knows there are also fatal diseases which always kill unless treated. The ills of the soul are always of more importance than ills of the body — ills of the soul kill eternally. Men/women always need God's grace more than they need healthy bodies; they need forgiveness more than bread (the wages of sin is death). Diagnosing the thoughts of this man's heart, Jesus knew the paralytic's sins were troubling him and were his greatest ailment. “Your sins” — all of them. With God it is all or nothing. Forgiveness does not imply only some or certain sins, but all sins.

Sin — any thought, word or action not in compliance with God's Word and standard is a sin. If one were to shoot arrows, anything but a bulls-eye would be a miss — it would not be a perfect score. God demands perfection. His standard for us is love. He expects us to be perfect according to His standard of love. All our thoughts, words, and actions should be motivated and done in love to God and our neighbor. Anything which is not done in this way is a miss, not a bulls-eye — a sin or rebellion against God.

We receive forgiveness of our sins, not by suffering some illness, not by doing something for God (works, deeds), not even by trying hard not to sin. We dare not think we have no sin, or we deceive ourselves. Certainly the sick man had nothing of which to boast that merited forgiveness, or that he could trade for God's forgiveness. What he did have was faith that trusted that in Jesus as his Lord and Savior from sin, all of his sins were forgiven unconditionally.

Verse 6: Scribes — others were standing, but these had found seats. Scribes were of the tribe of Levi. It was their duty to teach the people, and especially to make copies of the books of the Old Testament. They generally were much respected by the people. And because they copied the Old Testament Bible, they soon became authorities in what it said; therefore they were regarded as experts and teachers. People put great stock in their words and advice. But, like the Pharisees, they were determined and eager foes of Jesus, always watching and waiting to pounce if Jesus should ever make a mistake. They heard Jesus utter the word of forgiveness.

Verse 7: They surely thought Jesus had committed a grave error by claiming He was forgiving sin. To blaspheme God is to speak evil of Him or to claim His powers. It is to insult God. The Scribes thought Jesus a blasphemer because He forgave sin. They reasoned: Who can forgive sins but God alone? They were right! Only God has power and authority to forgive. What they did not believe was that Jesus was God's Son and hence God Himself. In fact, they were the blasphemers of the Son of God and so of God the Father in whom they professed to believe.

Verse 8: Immediately Jesus gave them proof of His deity. The reasoning and questioning of their hearts was known to Him, and He made them aware that He knew what they were thinking. Nothing is hidden from Jesus, neither the sins in the thoughts of the sick man, the Scribes, nor ours.

He is omniscient (all-knowing): It is true — Jesus looked like only a man. The Scribes knew His father (so they thought) and His mother. They knew Him to be a carpenter's son. But Jesus, unlike any other man, was without sin. Mary was His mother; but who was His Father? [A. God] Why had the angel told Joseph to name Him Jesus? [A. “You shall call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins.”]

Jesus also wanted to save the Scribes and forgive their sins. So He asked them to reflect and give their opinion — which is easier: to forgive sin, or to heal the body. Humanly speaking, to say the words is easy; but to heal? In fact, both are equally difficult. Both require supernatural power. Humanly speaking, it is easier to speak a word of forgiveness — anyone can do that. To heal, actually heal, no tricks or mirrors, is not something man can do by himself. If Jesus by one word could heal this hopelessly paralyzed man, would they not have to admit He also had power to forgive sin? Would they not have to admit that Jesus is God?

Verse 10: Son of Man — Jesus referred to Himself by this name more than any other (78 times). Why did He call Himself “Son of Man” if He was Son of God? [A. Conceived of the Holy Ghost, but born of the virgin Mary: both God and man.]

Power on earth to forgive — The scribes especially, from copying and studying the words of the Old Testament prophets, ought to have known that Jesus was the Messiah — hence the Son of God — hence had power on earth to forgive. Moreover, He came to bear the sins of the world, as John the Baptist had testified. What did John say concerning Jesus? [A. Behold, the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world.] What happened also at His baptism to prove He was God? [A. A voice from heaven testified: “This is my beloved Son.”]

Verse 11: Jesus now proved, first with His words (preaching), then with great deeds before their very eyes, (miracles) that He had divine power. “Arise, take up your bed and go home.” No mere man can say that and cause it to immediately happen. No doctor you know can speak and cause the patient to be healed. By healing this man with words only, all had to admit Jesus also had power and authority to forgive sins. He must be God, for only God could do what He had done.

Verse 12: Immediately he arose — At once the muscles, nerves, tendons and bones were regenerated in the paralyzed limbs and peace was restored to his troubled soul. He was cured completely and immediately. The Son of Man proved He was Lord of all by preaching the word of forgiveness and by healing diseases. All were amazed and glorified God. The scribes probably remained unconvinced and therefore not healed of their sin.

The multitudes were thrilled and excited. This was a mighty miracle. It argued for a power greater than they had ever come into contact with. Never before had they seen anything like this. By the preaching and healing of Jesus, they were led to praise and glorify God.

Application

God was praised when Jesus preached God's Word and when He revealed His divine power.

Only God had the power to heal the paralytic, and only God could forgive sins. What did Jesus prove about Himself by healing the sick man? [A. He is true God.] What power therefore did He also have? [A. Power to forgive sins.] In this story, the Divine Healer took care of the most important problem first: healing the soul, then the body.

What did Jesus do to gain forgiveness for all? [A. suffered, died, and rose again] Through His saving work God has covered all sins. (Psalms 86:2; Romans 4:7) What does the Bible call a person whose sins are forgiven? [A. blessed] What is the hope of such a “blessed” one? [A. heaven]

What was the reaction of those who witnessed this great miracle? [A. They were amazed.] What did they do because of their amazement? [A. They praised God] This was the purpose of Jesus' words and His works — that all glory be given to God. This is what God still expects from people, especially His own sons and daughters. (Psalm 103:1-5 could be read.)

What Jesus did could only be done by God. By performing this miracle Jesus showed He is God, causing people to give all credit and praise to God. God was praised through the paralyzed man. God was praised when Jesus preached God's Word of forgiveness and when He revealed His divine power!

Everyone, at one time or another, gets sick. Maybe it's only a cold. Maybe it is something more serious. Mostly we recover and are healed, but sometimes not without a doctor or hospital stay.

Of what other sickness are we guilty each day? [A. Sinning] Why do we sin? [A. We are sinful by nature.] Where does all our sin begin? [A. In our hearts.] Matthew 15:19 speaks of this truth. Perhaps a short discussion on how the students have committed at least some of the sins listed in this passage would be worthwhile. Who sees these sins the very moment we have the thought in our hearts? [A. God] What kind of trouble do our sins bring us? [A. Discuss wars, sickness, crime, death — but our greatest trouble would be eternal death and suffering in hell if we are not forgiven.]

What alone can bring us relief and comfort in our sinful condition? [A. The assurance that our sins are forgiven.] Why can we be assured of the forgiveness of our sins? [A. Through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, God has told us that He has forgiven all our sins.] What power does Jesus have as He showed in today's story? [A. The power and authority to forgive sin.] How do we find out about this forgiveness today? [A. Through the preaching and teaching of the Gospel.] When was the last time someone told you that all your sins were forgiven? [A. Last Sunday, when your pastor assured you God had forgiven you your sins for the sake of what Jesus had done for you.] Why does the pastor do this forgiving? [A. The whole Christian Church, every believer, has the power to forgive sins. The congregation of believers calls pastors to act in their behalf publicly. Through the pastor, God tells us that our sins are forgiven, and that we can be of good cheer. Trust in Jesus as your Lord and Savior for forgiveness of sins, life and salvation.] What will this prompt you to do? [A. Praise and glorify God for the mighty things we have seen and experienced.]

Prayer

Lord God, heavenly Father, we confess that we daily sin against You in thought, word and deed, and that we deserve nothing but Your anger and punishment for not having lived as You want us to live. We ask You to forgive our sins for the sake of Your own Son, Jesus Christ. We ask You to give us the strength to lead a life that pleases You and gives all glory to Your holy name. In Jesus, who is our Lord and Savior, we ask this. Amen.

Scripture References

- Matt. 23
- Romans 3:19-28
- Isaiah 42:1-8
- John 20:22-23

Hymns

319 • 321 • 325 • 329 • 331

Lesson 4 • Death and Resurrection of Jesus

Text • Mark 15:22-28,33-39;16:1-8; Parallel • Matthew 27:33-38,45-54;28:1-8; Luke 23:33-38,44-54;24:1-8, John 19:16-22, 28-30

Aim

I believe that Jesus died and rose from the dead because He loves me.

Background

In five short days, Jesus had gone from being hailed as a king, in His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, to being betrayed and deserted by His own disciples, arrested and sentenced to die a cruel death at the hands of the Jews and the Roman government. How could this happen to the Son of God? The answer lies in the simple word LOVE. God, out of love, allowed all this to happen. John 3:16 — “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” Jesus possesses that genuine care and concern for our best interest, and it is that undeserved love for us that caused Him to put aside His Godly qualities and to take on human flesh.

Introduction

You may have heard it said that death is a natural part of life. That is not true. Death is not natural. Mankind was not created to die. The reason there is death in the world is because of mankind's one sin in the Garden of Eden. That's how serious even one sin really is: the single sin of Adam and Eve's eating the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil is why there is death in the world today. One of the qualities (attributes) of God is that He is just, He is fair. The result of that one sin (in all Divine fairness) was that all mankind plunged itself into sin and death and brought a curse on the whole world. Death in all its forms—spiritual, temporal and eternal—came into the world through the one sin of Adam. Romans 5:12, “Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.” The sins that we commit every day are each as deserving of the same condemnation as that first sin. A convicted serial murderer can only be put to death once for his crimes, even though he deserves to die for each murder of which he is convicted. The sins we commit every day deserve the same punishment and condemnation as the sin of Adam. That's how serious our sins are. We could never pay for even one single sin, let alone a whole day's worth, or a whole lifetime's worth, or a whole world's worth.

The price that was needed was an innocent life and innocent blood. Hebrews 9:22 — “And according to the law almost all things are purged with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission.” God knew that. He knew what kind of fix we were in after the fall of Adam and Eve. So, out of genuine care and concern for our best interest, He had already come up with a plan of saving us from our own sins. Only God could pay the price for sin. The first promise is written in Genesis 3:15 where God told the devil; “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.” He sent His own Son, His only begotten Son, the Seed of the woman, to die for us, in our place, as our substitute. This effectively destroyed the power of the “Old Serpent, that is the devil,” destroying the power of sin and death. The seal of God's approval—the fact that He accepted the atoning sacrifice of His Son Jesus Christ—is that He raised Jesus from the Dead.

The resurrection of Christ holds many comforting truths for us:

1. Jesus is proved to be true God with the Father.
2. The fact that Jesus rose as He said proves the truth of His words and validates the Bible.
3. By raising Jesus the Father showed that He had accepted Christ's atoning sacrifice as sufficient and complete.
4. Because Jesus rose, we too as believers shall rise as He promised. All believers will rise to eternal life with Christ.
5. Because Jesus lives never to die again, we are assured that He will always be with us.
6. All the enemies of our salvation have been overcome and vanquished and the debt of our sins has been paid.
7. We are freed from the curse of the law.
8. We are at peace with God.
9. We have access to the throne of grace.
10. We have a sure and certain hope that sustains us in the midst of trials and revives us on our earthly pilgrimage.
11. We have strength to carry on the Lord's work despite obstacles.
12. We have power to walk in the newness of life.
13. We have a compelling desire to share this Good News with others.

For you, Jesus Christ died and rose again.

Philippians 2:5-7, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery (spoils of war, booty) to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men." Christ humbled Himself so that mankind would have a perfect substitute and Redeemer from sin. In order to do that He also had to be true God. Christ had to be true man and true God for two reasons. (1) In order to be placed under the law and keep it in perfect obedient love for us. (This is sometimes called the active obedience.) (2) So that He could be killed as the perfect sacrifice for human sins. (This is sometimes called the passive obedience.) Hebrews 2:14 — "Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil." On Good Friday, the humiliation of the early morning hours of scorn, mocking, beatings and injustice all on His shoulders, Jesus was brought out to be crucified. This is where our study begins.

Text Study

Mark 15:22-28, 33-39 - The death of Jesus — His humiliation

Verse 22: The "they" in this verse are the Roman soldiers of verse 16, although they were only carrying out orders. The word translated "brought" in the NKJV is taken from the Greek word which means to bear or carry. Golgotha — "place of a skull" derived from the Latin — "calvaria," translated into Greek — "kranion," skull (c.f. our English word cranium). Calvary was a knoll or hill a short distance beyond the northern wall of the city. Many believe the hill was given its name because from a distance, its shape took on the appearance of a skull. In our day, there is disagreement over the exact site.

The "they" who brought Jesus to be crucified were really you and me, for our sins sent Jesus to the cross. We can't blame it on just the Roman soldiers or just the unbelieving Jews. None of this could have happened unless Jesus had been willing to lay down His life for us.

Verse 23: The Gospel of Matthew says they gave Him vinegar mixed with gall. Our text says they gave Him wine mixed with myrrh. This is not a contradiction, vinegar is sour wine, and gall is another name for myrrh, a bitter sedative. It was the custom of the Jews to give this pain deadening drink to the condemned person. Jesus did not take it. His was the task of suffering the full brunt of our sins without any painkillers. He emptied the cup of God's wrath over sin. This act was prophesied in Psalm 69:21: "They also gave me gall for my food, And for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink."

Verse 24: They crucified Him. There were three kinds of crosses used in crucifixion. The "X" shape, the "V" shape, and the one we are most familiar with, the "T" shape. The superscription above Jesus' head would indicate that His cross was the "T" shape. The Romans considered crucifixion to be the most degrading type of execution, reserved for slaves or traitors. It was also the most painful. The cross was laid upon the ground. The victim was first tied to the cross to prevent struggling, then with outstretched arms, his hands (wrists) were nailed to the wood with heavy spikes. The feet were either nailed separately or together, depending on the shape of the cross.

Then the cross was lifted up and dropped into a hole to stand upright. Somewhere in the middle of the cross was a small seat or saddle on which the sufferer could partially support himself. There was nothing merciful about this, for it only gave the victim the vain hope of putting off the inevitable. The final cause of death for the victim was usually asphyxiation, because as he becomes weaker and weaker, he lacks the strength to support himself upon the saddle, so he hangs suspended by the nails. This causes the collar bones to collapse which makes breathing most difficult, and finally the victim suffocates in a most horrible death. The thieves later had their legs broken so that they might die (suffocate) more quickly.

After the soldiers had performed the work of the crucifixion, they divided the garments of Christ — the outer robe, headdress, girdle, sandals, etc. They did so by casting lots (gambling), at least in the case of Jesus' vesture which was without seam, according to John 19:23-24. In so doing, these coarse soldiers who couldn't wait for the victim's death before pouncing on his last earthly possessions, were fulfilling a prophecy written a thousand years before by King David; Psalm 22:18, "They divide My garments among them, And for My clothing they cast lots."

The outward physical agonies that Jesus went through were only the tip of the iceberg in comparison with His inward sufferings. It was a tree from which Adam and Eve took the fruit and sinned, and it was a tree, the accursed tree, upon which the Second Adam hung to atone for Adam's and all his descendant's sins. Being made a curse for us by hanging on a tree, Jesus redeemed us from the curse of the Law. Galatians 3:13 — "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree')." 1 Corinthians 15:45 — "And so it is written, 'The first man Adam became a living being.' The last Adam became a life-giving spirit." 1 Corinthians 15:41 — "The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven." Isaiah 53:10 — "Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand."

Hymn 148:7 —

*Lord, in Thy nail-prints let me read
That Thou to save me hast decreed
And grant that in Thine opened side
My troubled soul may ever hide.*

Verse 25: The third hour in Jewish time is 9:00 A.M. our time.

Verse 26: Often the crime of the offender was written above the head of the man being crucified so that people could take example. Pilate himself had written the words of the accusation brought against Jesus by the Jews in three languages (Hebrew, Greek, and Latin). The four gospel writers all record this accusation. Matthew — “THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS”; Mark - “THE KING OF THE JEWS”; Luke - “THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS”; John - “JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS.” Although the translations differ in wording, they do not differ in content. The Holy Spirit inspired the four gospel writers to record the main point of the accusation, namely, this is the King of the Jews. He truly is our King. It was His Kingly office that put Him up there on the cross. The only way to conquer all our spiritual enemies was through His death on the cross. 1 John 3:8: “For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.”

Verse 27-28: The cross of Jesus was put up between two thieves, men who had been justly tried and deserved to be punished. It has been suggested that the center was the place of honor, that perhaps the soldiers were only continuing their mockery of Jesus by giving him the center of attention a “king” deserved. Whatever the case, they actually were only instruments of God who used them to fulfill the Scriptures; Isaiah 53:12: “He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.”

Verse 33: The sixth hour in Jewish time is 12:00 noon our time. When 12:00 noon came, darkness covered the land. Luke tells us in 23:44 that the whole earth was covered in darkness. The word used for darkness literally means “the darkness of the depths of the sea.” We know that there is no light at all that penetrates the deepest depths of the sea. This darkness from 12:00 to 3:00 p.m. was not like the normal night time, or the darkness of a full eclipse. This was absolute total darkness.

Verse 34: At 3:00 p.m. Jesus, under the burden of the full wrath of God over the sins of all time, cried out in a loud voice; “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” Many scholars compare the outer darkness of the world to be a symbol of the inner darkness and anguish of Jesus' soul. He was the target of God's wrath over sin. He was rejected as damnable, punished as one worthy of the curse. Luther said, “God forsaken by God — who can grasp it?” Jesus' words call our attention to Psalm 22, which speaks of the despair Jesus endured. But more importantly, by calling to mind Psalm 22, and so causing us to consider the rest of the Psalm, Jesus' words remind us of our gracious God, a God who hears and delivers His people. Jesus was forsaken so that we would never be.

Verse 35: Those who came out to mock Jesus — and there were many, including the Jewish leaders who now had Him where they wanted Him — incorrectly supposed that Jesus was imploring Elijah's assistance in His distress, and they mocked Him with satanic glee.

Verse 36: Again, as in verse 23, the words of Scripture in Psalm 69:21 are fulfilled. The fact that a reed of hyssop (John 19:29) about two or three feet long was used, gives us an idea of the height of the cross. The false act of pity in giving the wine is seen by the giver's mocking words: “let us see if...”

Verse 37: The shout of triumph of the dying Christ is a source of unspeakable joy to penitent sinners. Christ died as the Victor of death. Since He conquered death for us, we need no longer fear this enemy. 1 Corinthians 15:55-57, “O Death, where is your sting? O Grave, where is your victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

It is important to point out from this verse that God died. That was one reason why Jesus had to become true man in order to have a body to be able to be put to death. Here Jesus breathed His last. In addressing the Jews in Acts 3:15, Peter told them; “(You) killed the Prince of Life.” Of His own free will Christ entered into death,

even as He willingly allowed Himself to be made a prisoner and to be bound. He came to death, death did not come to Him. He cried out with a loud voice, because He would proclaim the truth to all. John says that "He bowed His head and gave up His Spirit." As the Father's beloved Son, He gave His life into the Father's hands as a priceless trust in order to receive it again from Him on the morning of the resurrection.

Verse 38: In the temple in Jerusalem there were two veils. These weren't the thin veils we think of today. These were thick curtains. The veil in our text was one of these veils. It is described as being made of blue, and purple and scarlet and fine twined linen. It was 60' x 30' (feet) in measurement, and of the thickness of the hand. The Jewish Talmud records that it took 300 priests to lift and move it. This veil divided the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies, God's most private place. In the Holy of Holies was the Ark of the Covenant with the Mercy Seat. Here God had His dwelling, symbolic of His heavenly home. It was off limits to everyone, except to the High Priest who once a year at the great festival of the atonement (after he was sanctified through a sacrificial offering) would go into the Holy of Holies to sprinkle the blood of the sacrifice upon the Mercy Seat of God. This of course was all a "shadow of things to come," for Christ Himself was at the same time the genuine sacrifice and the High Priest. Having the veil torn in two from top to bottom was a miracle with no natural explanation as to its cause.

Application

The tearing of the veil in two demonstrates the truth that access again is open to God for the sinner through the blood of Jesus' atoning death. The heavenly Holy of Holies is now opened wide. Sacrifice for sin was no longer needed. The most Holy place in the earthly temple is forsaken, because as the Holy writer to the Hebrews tells us; Hebrews 9:11-12: "But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption." It might be that this miracle, which must have shocked the priests and elders and caused them to ponder their actions, accounted for the early conversion of so many of them recorded in Acts 6:7, "And the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith."

Verse 39: Immediately after Christ's death His prophecy of John 12:32 was fulfilled "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself." Later Paul told the believers in 1 Corinthians 12:3: "Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit." The Spirit of God worked faith in the heart of this heathen man, Paul, which caused him to glorify God with his bold profession while the Jews around him had blasphemed God. John 5:23: "All should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him."

Application

Rupprecht —The work of redemption was completed in these ways:

1. God's Law was fulfilled in the sinners' stead and God's wrath against the sinners appeased.
2. Our sins were fully atoned for.
3. The eternal punishment we had deserved was carried by Christ.
4. Though Christ's heel had been bruised by the hellish Serpent, so that He had to die, He had crushed the head of the Serpent.
5. Hell's gates therefore were closed and the gates of Paradise opened.

The shout of triumph of the dying Christ is a source of unspeakable joy to penitent sinners. Christ died as the Victor of death. Since He conquered death for us, we need no longer fear this enemy.

Jesus did more than merely die to pay for the punishment of our sins. He had to suffer the eternal torments of hell for them. This paid the debt, the eternal punishment that every one of us owed.

When Jesus said, "It is finished" it was not only His life that was finished, but man's redemption. Everything that God graciously planned had been fulfilled. What a comfort in knowing that Christ has paid for the full and complete debt, guilt and punishment of our sins!

Impress upon our children again and again that this is why we are so sure we are going to heaven. Not because of what we have done or can do, but because of what Christ has done for us. This is the heart and core of our whole faith and confidence. Without the message of Christ crucified and risen again everything else is useless.

Mark 16 - The resurrection of Jesus — His exaltation

Verse 1: While our day runs from midnight to midnight, the Jewish day runs from sunset to sunset. So sometime Saturday evening, when the Sabbath was over and the shops were opened, these women, followers of Jesus, went out and bought spices in which to wrap Jesus' body, as was the custom. The three women were Mary Magdalene, out of whom Jesus' had cast seven devils and who with a thankful heart had served Him ever since; Mary the mother of James the Less (not the brother of John) and Salome, the wife of Zebedee and the mother of James and John - two of Jesus' twelve disciples. Luke mentions also Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, "and other women." These all went early in the morning to the tomb.

Verse 2: Very early — John tells us that when they left their houses in Jerusalem it was "still dark." The first day of the Jewish week, as is ours, is Sunday. By the time they arrived at the tomb the sun had risen.

Verse 3: They knew there was a large stone that would block their entrance into the tomb, and they naturally were concerned about who would move it for them. It took the strength of two or three men working with tools to move such a stone. These women probably had no idea of the guard and the seal which had been put on the tomb doorway by the Jewish leaders.

Verse 4: Much had happened already that morning before the women arrived. According to the other Gospel writers, there was a great earthquake and an angel of the Lord, whose countenance was like lightning, had descended from heaven and rolled the stone back from the door — not to enable Jesus to leave the tomb, but to show His beloved followers the empty grave. The guards who had been assigned to watch the tomb were so terrified by the sight of this angel that they fell down like dead men, reviving later to run immediately to the city and tell the Lord's enemies what had happened. John tells us that upon seeing this, Mary Magdalene hurried back to Jerusalem to tell the disciples.

Verse 5: The women — minus Mary Magdalene — went into the tomb. As they entered, they saw the angel who had rolled away the stone, here described as a young man, sitting on the right side. Luke says there were two men (angels) in shining garments. Matthew and Mark mention only one. The women were shocked, alarmed and frightened.

Verse 6: This was nothing to be frightened of, so the angel told them to stop being alarmed. He gave them an answer not to a verbal question, but to the question of their hearts, Where is Jesus? "He is risen!" The message of their Lord's rising was totally unexpected. The angel pointed to where Jesus had lain to help convince them that He was nowhere to be found in the tomb.

Application

Death could not keep Jesus. He rose victorious from the grave. Romans 4:25, "who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification."

Verse 7: The angel fast-forwarded to what's most important: spread the good news! Especially to the sad and sorrowing and to Peter, who had denied his Lord and was suffering from a guilty conscience. Their work — and ours — is to go and tell: Isaiah 61:1-3 — “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, because the LORD has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn, to console those who mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified.”

Verse 8: They fled away from the place with fear and trembling; they couldn't leave fast enough because they were still shocked by the sight of the angel and the message he told. They didn't stop to visit with anyone on their way to tell the disciples. In order to understand a seeming contradiction if the texts are read separately, we add the account in the Gospel of Matthew to our account in Mark. It reads something like this; “So they went out quickly and fled from the tomb with fear and great joy, for they trembled and were amazed; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid. And they ran to report it to His disciples.”

Scripture References

Old Testament passages that demonstrate what God had in mind long before Jesus died and rose again:

Job 19:25-26 — For I know that my Redeemer lives, And He shall stand at last on the earth; (26) And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, That in my flesh I shall see God,...

Psalms 17:15 — As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness.

Psalms 16:9-11 — Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices; My flesh also will rest in hope. (10) For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. (11) You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Psalms 49:15 — But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave, for He shall receive me. Selah

Psalms 71:20 — You, who have shown me great and severe troubles, shall revive me again, And bring me up again from the depths of the earth.

Psalms 73:24 — You will guide me with Your counsel, And afterward receive me to glory.

Daniel 12:2 — And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, Some to everlasting life, Some to shame and everlasting contempt.

Isaiah 26:19 — Your dead shall live; Together with my dead body they shall arise. Awake and sing, you who dwell in dust; For your dew is like the dew of herbs, And the earth shall cast out the dead.

Isaiah 53:10-12 — Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, And the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand. (11) He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, For He shall bear their iniquities. (12) Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, And He shall divide the spoil with the strong, Because He poured out His soul unto death, And He was numbered with the transgressors, And He bore the sin of many, And made intercession for the transgressors.

Hosea 13:14 — “I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. O Death, I will be your plagues! O Grave, I will be your destruction! Pity is hidden from My eyes.

New Testament passages that reaffirm the reality of the resurrection

Matthew 12:38-42 — Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You." (39) But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. (40) "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. (41) "The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here. (42) "The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon is here.

Matthew 16:21 — From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.

Mark 8:31 — And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

Mark 9:9 — Now as they came down from the mountain, He commanded them that they should tell no one the things they had seen, till the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

Mark 14:28 — "But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee."

Matthew 22:31-32 — "But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, (32) 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living."

John 5:28-29 — "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice (29) "and come forth; those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.

John 6:40 — "And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day."

John 11:25-26 — Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. (26) "And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

1 Peter 1:10-12 — Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, (11) searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. (12) To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven; things which angels desire to look into.

Hymns

142(1-4) • 151 • 153 • 154 • 158 • 165-186 • 187-211

Lesson 5 • Ascension and Return of Jesus

Text • Luke 24:46-50; Acts 1:9-11; Parallel • Mark 16:19-20; Matthew 25:31-34, 41, 46; Acts 1:3-8

Aim

I believe that Jesus ascended to heaven and plans to return because He loves me.

Background

Shortly before His death, Jesus prepared His disciples for the inevitable departure that would happen. Their first reaction was sorrow. Jesus was quick to remind them, "Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you." (John 16:7) The ascension of Christ was absolutely necessary. It was necessary for the salvation of man. It was necessary for the growth and development of the New Testament Church. To prepare His disciples for His final departure, Jesus gave them the promise of the Holy Spirit. He also assured them that He would return to take them to Himself. This discussion took place during the evening of Maundy Thursday, as the disciples were gathered with Jesus for the Passover meal. (See John 14-16)

After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to His disciples on a number of occasions, assuring them all that He was truly alive. He also spent time instructing them in the "things pertaining to the kingdom of God." (Acts 1:2-3) In Galilee He gave them the Great Commission to "make disciples of all nations" through the preaching of the Gospel and the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. They had important work to do to spread the Gospel. Before that work could be done, Jesus had to withdraw His visible presence from this earth. Jesus had to leave so that He could fulfill His promise to send the Holy Spirit. Forty days after His resurrection, this event took place.

Introduction

So many times, when friends part company and leave each other, it can be a sad and painful moment. Leaving friends and family is easier to do if we know that we will see those friends and family again some day. In this story of the ascension and future return of Jesus, we see the departure of Jesus from His disciples. This last good-bye was made much easier when the disciples were reassured that their Lord would return again.

We confess in the Second Article, "I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord; Who...ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead." Our Lord no longer has a visible presence on this earth, as He once did. The story of the ascension explains the reason why.

Text Study

Luke 24:46-47 The statement that Jesus made in these verses was not made on the evening of Easter Sunday, but sometime later. Jesus spent time teaching His disciples important truths before He left them. We have a sampling of that instruction in these verses. It was important for the disciples to understand that the entire work of salvation was predicted in the Old Testament. Isaiah 53 predicted the suffering and vicarious atonement of our Savior. Psalm 16 predicted the resurrection of Jesus. Even the ascension of Jesus was predicted in Psalm 47:5-8, Psalm 68:18, and Psalm 110.

Not only were these events predicted, but they were also “necessary.”

Jesus had to die as the full payment of our sins. Jesus had to rise as the guarantee from God that our sins have been removed and that we are not guilty in God's sight. Likewise the ascension of Jesus was a necessity. Jesus had to return to His home to show that His mission was accomplished. The Son of God had to return to His former state of glory which He had with His Father before He came to this earth. (Possible illustration: A carpenter goes to another city to do some construction work. When the work is finished, he comes home.)

It would be a sad thing if Jesus came, lived, died, rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven, but no one knew about it. The message of the Savior had to be preached. The “good news” of Jesus Christ had to go out into all the world, with Jerusalem as the starting point.

Forgiveness of sins is the most important message that a person can hear. That message is preached with the full understanding that it is based on the life and death of Jesus Christ. We can speak of the Gospel as a “finished product.” There is nothing left for man to do. There are no conditions for the individual to fulfill. Christ has done it all. The proof is in His ascension. Once Jesus had returned to His heavenly home, the message of free forgiveness could be proclaimed to all people.

Verses 48-49 — But first the preachers had to be prepared for their work. It was important that the apostles be eye-witnesses of the risen Savior. They had to be certain that they were preaching a Savior who was alive.

They also needed the “promise of the Father.” Jesus had promised to send the Holy Spirit once He had departed from them. The Holy Spirit would guide them into a full understanding of the salvation Jesus had accomplished. The Holy Spirit would give them boldness to preach Jesus in the face of opposition and persecution. They clearly needed the power of the Spirit before they could effectively preach the Gospel. Thus our Savior instructed them to wait in Jerusalem for the Spirit to come upon them.

Verse 50 — The previous verses are the substance of a conversation Christ had with His disciples sometime before He ascended. It is possible that verses 46-49 are equivalent to Acts 1:4-8. If that is the case, then the conversation recorded in Luke 24:46-49 would have taken place on the day of ascension. The ascension took place outside of Jerusalem. Starting out from the city, the Lord led His disciples across the Brook Kidron and up the western slope of the Mount of Olives. They descended the eastern slope and came as far as the village of Bethany, which was about two miles southeast of Jerusalem.

The blessing that our Savior spoke to His disciples before His departure must have been most comforting to them. Here the Son of God was bestowing the benefits of His grace and mercy upon them. We don't know the actual words that Jesus spoke, but we can be sure that He focused His blessing on the spiritual well-being of His disciples.

Acts 1:9 — After Jesus had spoken the blessing, His body began to ascend upward. The disciples were able to see the body of Jesus go higher and higher. Finally a cloud hid the Savior from their view, and they knew that He was gone.

It is important to notice that the ascension of Jesus was an event that took some time to happen. Jesus didn't simply vanish out of sight, never to be seen again. That would have been too much for the disciples to handle, perhaps leading them to despair and uncertainty. Jesus wanted them to be sure that He had truly ascended from this earth into heaven. For the sake of their faith and ours, Christ allowed them to see His ascension with their own eyes.

Acts 1:10-11 — Notice how angels were sent to announce the extraordinary actions of the Savior. Even as angels announced the birth of our Savior, even as angels announced His resurrection, so also they came at the time of His ascension. When the disciples realized that their Master had departed, the angels were there to remind them that He would return one day. That must have been good news to hear, under the circumstances.

After Jesus ascended into heaven, He was seated at the right hand of God. (Mark 16:19, Eph. 1:20) The “right hand” is used in the Bible as a symbol of power, authority, and honor. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was the “right hand man” of the heavenly Father. When Christ was seated at the right hand of God, that signified that He had finished the work of salvation that He was sent to do. Thus He returned to the original state of glory which He had as the preincarnate Son of God. Being seated at the right hand of the Father led to the last step in the exaltation of Christ. Even in the present time and into the future, Jesus reigns in all the glory of God, having all power in heaven and on earth. For the time being, His glory as Lord of heaven and earth remains unseen to the eyes of the world. One day that will all change, when Christ will reveal His glory to all on the Last Day.

Matthew 26:31 — The following verses are part of the Olivet Discourse that Jesus spoke sometime during the Holy Week. Christ refers to Himself as the “Son of Man,” thus alluding to the fact that the human Jesus would return on the Last Day. But He would not come in the state of humiliation, as He did the first time. He would come in His glory, with all His holy angels.

We have no way of preconceiving what the second coming of Christ will look like. Christ Himself uses a figure of speech to picture that glorious day — “He will sit on the throne of His glory.” He does not mean to say that He will physically occupy a physical throne. He is emphasizing the fact that His glory will be visible to all. People will no longer be able to deny that He is God. All people will have to acknowledge that Jesus has come to judge them and that He has the authority and power to do so.

Verses 32-33 — After Christ will have raised all those who are dead, He will gather the whole human race before Him. The process of judgment is described as a separation of the believers from the unbelievers, even as a shepherd would separate sheep from goats. Since Christ is true God, He has the divine ability to look into the heart to determine whether the individual person has saving faith. By an act of His omniscience, Christ will divide the human race into two camps. Those who believe in Him as their Lord and Savior He will set on His right. Those who do not believe in Him He will set on His left.

Verse 34 — Here Christ refers to Himself as the King, the heavenly Leader who rules in the hearts of His people. As part of the events of the Last Day, Christ Himself will escort His believers into the glories of heaven.

It is important to notice how Jesus describes those who will enter eternal life. They are the “blessed of the Father.” They will “inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world.” In a few words, so much is said. The only reason why the believers are saved to enjoy everlasting life is because of God's grace and mercy. From beginning to end, God does what is necessary to save His people. He made plans to send them a Savior who would redeem them from sin and death. He even chose them to believe, and thus sent the Holy Spirit to convert them during their lifetime. He continues to bless them, by preserving their faith until their last day on earth. When we inherit the gift of eternal life, it will be with hearts that are truly grateful. We will rightfully give God all the credit for bringing us into His heavenly kingdom.

Verses 41, 46 — For the unbeliever it will be a different story. To them Christ will pronounce the curse of God. Instead of joining Him for all eternity, they will depart from Him for all eternity. In these verses we have a vivid description of eternal death— to be separated from God forever in hell. Christ refers to hell as an “everlasting fire” and “everlasting punishment.” Scripture clearly teaches that hell is a place of suffering that never ends.

Notice that hell was prepared for the devil and his angels, not for humans. As the apostle Paul says to Timothy, "God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." (1 Tim. 2:4) Hell was not created to be a place in which to punish man. Those who are confined to eternal death can only blame themselves for their state of unbelief and consequent condemnation.

Application

The ascension of Jesus was necessary to bring our salvation to completion. Had He remained on this earth, that would have signified that His work was not complete. The ascension of Christ has been referred to as His "coronation" in heaven, because the Father received His Son and exalted Him to all glory as the victorious Savior. When Christ was seated at the right hand of God, that signified that the sacrifice He made was completely sufficient for all sins committed by all people of all times.

As the Son of God, it was impossible for Him to remain visibly on this earth for an indefinite period of time. He had to return to His former state of glory in heaven, the glory which He had with the Father before He came to this earth. The ascension of Jesus is another proof that He is true God, equal with the Father.

When Christ was exalted to the right hand of God, He was given dominion over all things in the universe. Jesus now rules everywhere with His almighty power. As Lord of the universe, Christ controls the events in this world for the interest of His Church. For example, He controls the events of history so that the Gospel can be spread to all nations. He intervenes for the benefit of His believers and protects them from harm. As the ascended Lord, Jesus sends pastors and teachers for the benefit of His Church. The ascended Christ is rightfully called the "Head of the Church," since He sends the Spirit to sanctify His believers, He guides their life with His Word, and He rules in their hearts by faith.

At the right hand of God, Christ pleads for us as our Intercessor. He serves as our Advocate (our attorney) before the Father. When we fall into sin, Christ intercedes for us and mediates the forgiveness of our sins on the basis of the fact that He atoned for our sins with His perfect life and innocent death. If we ever feel loaded down with guilt, let us remember that Christ stands before the Father as living proof that our sins have been fully atoned for and therefore removed from God's sight. Because Jesus is our Intercessor with the Father, we can be confident that our prayers are heard and answered.

The ascension of Jesus is the sign that He will come back to reclaim His people. His ascension is the forerunner, or prototype of our own ascension into heaven, As Jesus said to His disciples, "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also." (John 14:2-3)

We do not know when our Lord will return. Therefore our Lord urges us to be ready at all times. Being ready for the Lord's return depends on our using the Means of Grace (the Gospel in Word and Sacrament), so that the Holy Spirit can strengthen and preserve our faith. The Last Day could come at any time. Therefore our time of grace should be used wisely to cultivate our faith-relationship with Jesus Christ.

Nowhere does Scripture speak of Jesus returning to live and rule on this earth for any length of time. The teaching of the millennium is not from the Bible, but from literal misinterpretations of the Scriptures. Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead, to destroy the old creation and to create a new heaven and a new earth where we will live with Jesus Christ, the Father, the Holy Spirit and all the holy angels forever. What a blessed day to pray for and to eagerly look forward to!

Scripture References

- Psalm 47:5-9
- Ephesians 4:8-12
- Psalm 68:18
- Philippians 3:20,21
- Psalm 110
- Hebrews 4:14-16
- John 14:1-6
- Hebrews 10:11-13
- Romans 8:34
- I Thessalonians 4:13-18
- Ephesians 1:20-23

Hymns

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