

## **Praise The Ascended Lord – Luke 24:44-53**

- 1) He has fulfilled the Old Testament
- 2) He has blessed us to be his witnesses

When you look at American history, few things get as much attention as World War II. You're lucky if you study much after it in grade school. When we look at foreign policy and big historic trends, World War II is usually connected somehow. Those 4 years unified the country with a singular focus – to defeat the Axis powers. When the war was finally over in 1945, it was a big deal. The fear of defeat was replaced with the joy of victory. Ticker tape parades and Navy sailors kissing unknown nurses were common sights. Everyone was celebrating the hard-fought victory.

We still like to have big victory celebrations when we overcome a difficult challenge. For young families who are finishing the school year, summer gets real busy real quick with graduations parties and family vacations that you've been planning for months. Maybe your victory celebration will happen when you beat the Arizona heat by going up into the mountains or getting out of Dodge. Maybe you'll join in others' celebrations with wedding receptions and the like. It's just something we like to do. Because whether it's a huge world war or a small personal challenge, we like to celebrate our victories.

How strange is it then when we read how Jesus showed his victory over sin when he ascended into heaven. It was the biggest victory in the history of the world! And how flashy was it? As Luke tells us **“When he [Jesus] had led them [the believers] out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven”** (Luke 24:50-51). You probably wouldn't have known about Jesus' ascension if you weren't already there. But what Jesus' ascension lacked in flash, it made up in importance. It is the reason why we can praise the ascended Lord. Because Jesus' ascension wasn't a retreat from battle. It was a sign of victory since our Lord has fulfilled the Old Testament Scriptures and he has blessed us by choosing us to be his witnesses.

Before and after Easter, Jesus made it a point to show his believers how he was fulfilling what was written about him in the Old Testament Scriptures. As Jesus said before he ascended – **“Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms....This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day”** (Luke

24:44,46). Here we see the Old Testament referred to the three-fold division used by the ancient Jews – the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms. All 39 books of the Old Testament point ahead to Jesus' death and resurrection which is the key to understanding it all. You have Genesis, the first book of the Law of Moses, which talks about Eve's offspring crushing Satan's head once and for all (Genesis 3:15). You have the prophet Isaiah who talks about Jesus as the Suffering Servant who will bear all our punishment so that we may live in peace with God's forgiveness (Isaiah 52:13-53:12). You have Psalm 22 which records what will happen at the cross and Psalm 16 which points ahead to the resurrection (Psalm 16:9-11; 22:1, 8, 18). As impossible as the odds were, Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament Scriptures. Jesus is God. So that when he ascended into heaven, he did it victorious over sin and the devil himself.

But when you read the Ascension story, does it seem that way to you? After 33 years of living on earth to complete God's plan for salvation, there wasn't much to show for it in human terms. The number of believers was so few that they could all be in one area at one time. Outside of a house church here and there, there wasn't much to show that Christians were around. The cross where Jesus endured God's punishment for our sins was probably already stained with another's blood. The empty tomb where Jesus showed that he had indeed defeated sin would eventually house another body for good. Looking at it without the eyes of faith, Jesus' ascension doesn't seem much like victory. If anything, it looks like a retreat. That Jesus had tried his best, got killed for it, and then went back home to call it quits.

But if you remember, the Old Testament doesn't promise that the Christ was going to have an easy life. It doesn't promise he'll create a new kingdom where truth and justice reigns supreme. No, they prophesied that the Christ was going to suffer and rise from the dead on the third day. That's what Jesus did 40 days before he ascended into heaven. When he completed God's plan for salvation on Easter Sunday. He is Eve's offspring who crushed Satan's head once and for all when he breathed his last on the cross. He is Isaiah's Suffering Servant who bore all of God's punishment for our sins. He lived up to the tunes of Psalm 22 and 16. He has fought the fight for our souls and won hands down. Now he can ascend into heaven – because our salvation is secure. Now repentance and forgiveness of sins could be preached in Jesus' name to all nations.

You see, it's because Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament Scriptures that repentance and forgiveness of sins can be ours. When we go to our ascended Lord

and repent of our sins, we do a 180 degree away from them. First we recognize what wrongs we have done. Then we go to our Lord and genuinely say we're sorry for sinning against him. This is where our ascended Lord comes in and renews the forgiveness we already have in his name. Not because of what we've done. But because of what Jesus has done – that suffering and rising from the dead. Because if Jesus had not done this and fulfilled the Old Testament, there would be no one to give us forgiveness. If Christ had not died his perfect and innocent death on that cross, we would have to die for our sins. But thanks be to God that Jesus has fulfilled those Old Testament prophecies for us. So that we may praise the ascended Lord and have God's forgiveness for every sin we repent of.

This is what Jesus' ascension guarantees you and me. He has fulfilled the Old Testament Scriptures. There is forgiveness of sins where there is repentance. But as you read through the Scriptures after Jesus' ascension, you'll notice that he doesn't visibly appear on earth as he once did. That's because Jesus is now sitting at the right hand of God ruling over all things for the good of his believers. We won't see him again on earth until the Last Day. That's why he spoke these words to the believers before he ascended – **“This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. 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”** (Luke 24:46-49). 10 days after Jesus ascended into heaven was the day of Pentecost. The day when God poured out the Holy Spirit on his believers in full measure and empowered them to his bold witnesses. But they didn't do this with heavy hearts or against their will. It was with joyful hearts they praised the ascended Lord by being his witnesses. To give thanks for what Jesus was doing as he ascended into heaven.

Listen again to Luke's account of Jesus' ascension. Pay attention to what Jesus was doing as he ascended into heaven and how the believers responded. **“When he [Jesus] had led them [the believers] out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God”** (Luke 24:50-53). What was Jesus doing while he ascended into heaven? He was blessing them. And how did the believers respond? You might expect them to be sad or

frustrated. But in fact they were the opposite. They praised the ascended Lord with great joy! And why? Because he had blessed them to be his witnesses.

These believers knew firsthand how Jesus had fulfilled the Old Testament Scriptures. They had seen him suffer, die, rise, and ascend. As they went to all nations, they told others the good news of the ascended Lord. But Jesus' blessing wasn't limited to those first believers. He has blessed Christians today to be his bold witnesses of what he has done for us. But how can we be witnesses of things that happened thousands of years ago? By going to God's Word and reading what these first believers wrote down. We have their trustworthy words. God has given us the Holy Spirit who has clothed us with his power from on high. We have the message that is for all nations to hear and believe.

Jesus has done it all. He has fulfilled the Old Testament Scriptures as only the Christ can do. He has renewed God's forgiveness to all those who repent of their sins. He has given us plenty of reasons to praise the ascended Lord. And one possible way we can praise the ascended Lord today is by being his witnesses. Seek the lost and tell your friends. Invite your family members and encourage the young ones who look up to you. Tell them that their Lord has ascended on high so that they may have life everlasting. Tell them so that they may praise the ascended Lord for the victory he has given to us all. Amen.