

My Thoughts for Sunday, 17 May 2015

“Ascension Commands”

Ascension Day is traditionally celebrated on a Thursday, the fortieth day of Easter. However, many Christian churches, including our own Good Shepherd Lutheran Church have moved the observance to the following Sunday. Today, 17 May 2015, was that day set aside in celebration and commemoration of Jesus Ascension. That day He was received back into His original setting in heaven at the right hand of His Father. This totally validated for us as believers in Christ that His work on earth for our redemption was complete and acceptable to God. We can rest in the fact; we are redeemed children of God and have been fully reconciled to Him as joint heirs of His kingdom in Christ Jesus.

Luke began his account in the Acts of the Apostles with this statement. *“In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: ‘Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit... you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.’”* Acts 1:1-5, 8

His first command to His followers was; *“Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about.”* This gift they were to wait for in Jerusalem, we find in the 2nd chapter of Acts was God’s Holy Spirit. The Spirit came upon them so that they had the ability to speak in the many languages of the people gathered there and to continue with the second command given to them in verse 8. This second command was, *“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”* This command, though given directly to Jesus’ apostles and disciples, still remains in effect on us today as His disciples. This is the ‘Great Commission’ spoken of as the responsibility of all believers for all time in this world - to share the Gospel of salvation with everyone.

I use the word “everyone” as I feel this depicts what Jesus said when He stated *“You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”* What is a witness and what are we witnessing for Him? According to most dictionaries witness means to testify to a known fact or occurrence. This is the testimony Jesus personally spoke of recorded at John 15:27 (NIV) *“...and you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.”* This was the testimony of those who had actually witnessed His entire ministry. But, does it end there? Are the Apostles the only ones commanded to witness to all nations? NO. Look at the report of Paul’s witness statement to the crowd when his sight was restored at the end of his trip to Damascus; *“A certain Ananias, a man who was devout by the standard of the Law, and well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, came to me, and standing near said to me, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight!’ And at that very time I looked up at him. And he said, ‘The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will and to see the Righteous One and to hear an utterance from His mouth. For you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard....”* Acts 22:13-15

Paul, Saul at this time, had not been with Him throughout Jesus ministry, yet was commanded and commissioned to be a witness for Jesus even to the Gentiles. In like manner we, as true believers in our risen Savior, must also be witness to the things we have heard, learned and believe regarding Him. I have said it many times we need to give witness to our family, friends and neighbors, but let me take it one important step further. How do we treat our kids, not just our own, but all kids? Do we treat them any differently if they come from Christian families? Do we treat them differently if they don't go to our church? What about the un-churched children, how do we look at them?

In the creation account it is written thus: *"So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."* Do you think this ends with Adam and Eve? Look what God told Jeremiah; *"...Now the word of the LORD came to me saying, 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you.'"* Jeremiah 1:5 God created all men in His image, male and female; this includes the children of this fallen world. Remember the words of rebuke that Jesus gave to His disciples when they were bringing the children to Jesus for healing: *"But Jesus called for them, saying, 'Permit the children to come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all.'"*

If you truly believe the words of Jesus, then you must realize the children also were made in the image of God with the ability to believe and love Him as He loves us all. This knowledge must influence how you approach, teach and nurture these little ones, believers or not, Christian or not. They are creations of God and we are commissioned, no, commanded to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, Ephesians 6:4. Although this command was given directly to fathers it has to apply to anyone in a position to teach and educate our little ones. Remember, many children in this sin riddled world today do not have or know their fathers. Be that father to the ones in need of learning the promises of God for their lives. At every opportunity, educate them; nurture them in the love of their Savior. You have no idea how these random acts of kindness could affect the way your neighbors, your community and your enemies might be reconditioned to how they feel about you, your church and your God.

You may never see or ever know how much your act of kindness and love might affect their lives in the future or how they might in turn affect the lives of all they come in contact with throughout their personal journeys with their Lord. Remember, it is not about us seeing the results of our love for these little ones but about the difference they will experience and promote through the love of God and the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives. In the end it is all about following our Lord's command to "feed my sheep." Think how glorious it will be when we are all together for eternity with our Lord and God and get to be reunited with these little ones again and then witness what our random acts of kindness began in their young lives. Let's change these random acts to Christ centered acts of kindness. Remember, we have an awesome God and He will tell us all when we face Him at His throne of undeserved grace, *"Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'"* Matthew 25:34