

## **Acts 1:8-11 Be witnesses for the ascended Christ! Ascension Day May 14, 2015**

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Our risen and ascended Lord, Jesus Christ, assures us of God's grace and peace for now and eternity. Amen. Jesus last words to His disciples before His ascension are written in Acts 1:8-11

These are Your powerful words and help us live as Your people and be Your witnesses. Your Word is....

Dear Christian friends, in our ascended Savior,

I don't know how many of you woke up this morning thinking that today is Ascension Day. It's not like Christmas, Good Friday, or Easter. So why are we having this service tonight? What is important about Christ's ascension? His ascending was God's way of saying that heaven's doors are open to all who are in Christ. Jesus, as a human, ascended to heaven, and as His people we will follow. Christ is now ruling over all things in heaven just as He promised. The reins of the world are in His hands for our present and future! We can't be in better hands than Christ's, who loves us and intercedes for us! Christ's ascension also sets heaven as the goal for all Christians. With all these great blessings we can't help but tell the news of His ascension so others know what blessings are ahead in Christ. That is the mission that Jesus gave to His disciples on the day He ascended and it is still our mission today. We want to do all we can for Christ's sake before the end comes and He visibly returns just as He said. Through our verses God encourages us to

### **Be witnesses for the ascended Christ!**

**We're privileged to be His chosen witnesses.** Jesus specifically chose His disciples not only to learn from him but to be witnesses. The disciples were not professional speakers, but everyday people. It's been said, Christ could have chosen His angels to tell the world about Him. But, He chose the very people that He saved. He said, "*You will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*"(v.8) The disciples immediately began to speak of the great things that Jesus had done.

We weren't eye witnesses like them. We didn't see Jesus do miracles, die on the cross, be raised from death, or ascend to heaven. How can we be witnesses? As He promised, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to the disciples so that they not only spoke about Him; they wrote down exactly what God wanted them to say. We can be so thankful that we have God's Word first to believe and be saved and second to bring the disciple's witness to others. Jesus said "Jerusalem" that is with people who are close. We want our family, friends, classmates, and co-workers to believe in Jesus. We can speak of eternal life as a gift and we can show it. Every time we attend worship, we are witnessing that Jesus is our Savior and His Word is truth.

But our work is not limited just to people nearby. Jesus also said to go to "*Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*"(v.8) When the Jews began to persecute believers for their faith in Jesus, many were forced to leave their homes for distant places. Acts states, "*Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.*" (Acts 8:4) We can't be everywhere. But like the early Christians, we can support missionaries through our offerings. They know languages and travel to faraway places that we will never know. But one day in heaven, people from those nations will thank us for sending those missionaries with the news of Christ. We can also pray for them. Jesus prayed daily that His work be completed. The early church in the book of Acts was always praying for God's help and guidance. We, too, can pray that God will bless those witnessing for Christ near and far so more people will be saved. Our ascended Lord is praying, too!

Our verses mention that after the disciples saw Jesus ascend to heaven they kept looking up. But, two angels appeared and told them, “*Why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen Him go into heaven.*” (v.11) There is a time to contemplate what Jesus has done and there is a time for action. The disciples’ time on earth was limited. They didn’t know how long they would live. They didn’t know when Jesus was going to return in glory to end the world. So, they went back to Jerusalem and began to witness of Jesus that day.

The devil will try to distract us to focus on things that have no value. He wants us to forget about the lost souls in the world and to forget how blessed we are as the children of God. Christ has taken away our sins. We know where we are going after death. Our ascended Savior has gone before us and He is not only preparing a place for us and but He is preparing us for that place. So, we set our priorities. All of us have had people who helped us to better understand about Christ. How happy we can be as we help others to better understand Christ’s work of love. We can bring eternal encouragement to someone by our witnessing! What a privilege to be witnesses!

**Second, Christ will help us witness.** Jesus trained His disciples before He sent them out as witnesses. He gave them the message, so they didn’t need to come up with their own words. Through the Bible, we have been blessed with the same teaching of Christ. The first disciples only had the Old Testament to explain God’s purpose and plan. We are so blessed to have God’s entire Word to see the full picture of what God has done in Christ!

The Bible is the reliable source for the truth of God. Today too many people want to be “spiritual” but not connected to God through His Word. That kind of spirituality will let them do whatever they want to do in life, but it won’t make them right with God. Only God’s Word tells us of His Son who became one of us to be a perfect witness for His Father through His words and life. Only God’s Son became one of us to give up His life as a sacrifice to make all things right with God.

People make sacrifices every day by taking time to visit the sick or lonely, by sharing food, by doing nice things for other people. We hope that those who benefit will respond with thanks! How much more we can respond with thanks when we think of the sacrifice Christ made for us! He suffered for our sins in complete humility, even to the point of death on a cross. But God raised Him from death to assure us that Christ’s sacrifice is complete. There is nothing more we need for eternal life. Heaven as a free gift!

Jesus has ascended to heaven where He rules over all things for His people. He has all power and authority to protect and guide us. There is no limit to what He can do. He “*is with us always.*” (Matthew 28:20) as we bring His saving Word to people, baptizing in His name and teaching all things He has commanded us. We witness knowing that great blessings are ahead. The Bible states, “*When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.*” (Colossians 3:4) The Bible describes that Jesus will honor us for what He did through us. He will remember the things that we did for the least of His people. (Matthew 25) Daniel wrote that we who witness will shine like stars in sky forever. (Daniel 12:3)

So, we tonight we celebrate the ascension of our Lord. We are not replacing Good Friday or Easter. It’s just that the message doesn’t end with these events. Jesus’ death won our forgiveness before God. His resurrection assures us that we will live forever! His ascension assures us that heaven is open to us. While Jesus prepares a place for us in heaven He also remains with us wherever we are! We pray that God would give us boldness like those early disciples be witnesses of Christ and tell of all the good things He has done. Amen.