

Luke 24:50-53 Our Ascended Lord Blesses Us! May 10, 2018

Grace and peace are yours from God our Father and from our risen and ascended Lord and Savior... Amen. God's Word for this Ascension Day service is in Luke 24:50-53
This is Your word heavenly Father. Sanctify us by the truth of our ascended Savior. Your Word is truth!

Dear Christian Friends,

There are many times when we might see people raise their hands. A student raises a hand to get the attention of the teacher. A sports fan raises a hand for a team victory. A person may win a race or a contest and raise hands in joy. We read in Luke that Jesus raised His hands. We'll consider why with the theme:

Our Ascended Lord Blesses Us!

First, Jesus had every reason to raise His hand in anger. The first mention of someone rising up against another was in Genesis 4, "*They were in the field and Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.*" (v.8) This was a result of sin that controlled Cain's life. When God confronted him about his sin, Cain basically shook his fist against God in defiance. But, rather than destroy him, God allowed him a time of grace to repent of his sin and turn back to God to be forgiven. Another occasion was when God sent Moses to Egypt to tell Pharaoh the king to let God's people go. When he refused, Moses lifted up the staff in his hand and God sent one plague after another to show that the false gods of Pharaoh had no power to stop God. God wanted all the Egyptians and Israelites to turn from their false gods and trust in Him to save them. Three months later, Moses was at Mt. Sinai to receive the 10 Commandments as part of the covenant between God and His people. But when Moses returned to the people, he saw many of them worshipping one of those Egyptian idols that the true God had just shown to be useless. Would the people never learn? Moses was so angry that he raised the two stone tablets and smashed them. God's judgment broke out against those committing this wicked idolatry and 1,000's of people died, until Moses interceded for them.

We are not except from God's command to do His will. He has given us the law in His Word and demands perfect compliance for everything not just outwardly but with perfect love and with no sinful motives. This is as impossible for us as it was for Cain or Israel at Mt. Sinai. This night God should raise His hand to judge and condemn us and send us away from Him eternally!

But out of love, God sent His Son for us. Many weeks prior to Jesus' ascension from the Mt. of Olives, He had been at another part of the hill at the garden of Gethsemane. There His hands were raised in prayer. His hands were pure in love and works, and always did exactly as the Father commanded. Yet in the garden, Jesus held His hands out to His Father pleading that if there was another way besides the intense suffering for our sins that God would allow Him to take it. But, God's will was clear. Jesus would be the perfect Substitute for sinners. His hands were extended on the cross so that He became cursed by God. Jesus suffered for all the sinful thoughts, words, and times that our hands have committed sin. God the Father had Jesus suffer and die in the place of all sinners.

Thinking of Jesus' suffering should make us think twice about raising our hands in anger. It should cause us to shutter when we think that He suffered eternal separation from God instead of us. It was all part of God's plan. Jesus said earlier in Luke 24, "*This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day.*" (v. 46) Not only in life, but in death Christ perfectly accomplished God's will. God had said that His body would not be abandoned in the grave but would come alive. First, He descended into hell to show Satan and all his forces of sin and death that He was victor. Soon after, Jesus showed His hands to His followers to prove that He was their risen Savior. He appeared for 40 days to give them certainty.

Second, our Lord continues to bless His people. Our verses state, “*When He had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany (Mt. of Olives), He lifted up His hands and blessed them. While He was blessing them, He left them and was taken up into heaven.*” (v.50-51) Why did Jesus have His hands up as He ascended to heaven? In the Old Testament, when a parent was soon to die or children left home, the parent would place his hands on his children to bless them and they were blessed! So, Jesus’ hands were raised to bless His people. Do you think that Jesus is still holding His hands up to bless us? It is not necessary. Yet, we can be sure of His blessings. How can we know? He said, “*Repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in [My] name to all nations....*” (v.47) As we learned in Confirmation, where there is forgiveness of sins, there is life and salvation instead of death and condemnation. By faith in Christ we have it all!

We are blessed with freedom from Satan’s power. After rising, Jesus descended into hell to show that Satan had no power over us. Jesus’ ascension into heaven offered us a greater power in the Holy Spirit. Jesus had promised to send the disciples the Holy Spirit, who would help them to understand the Scriptures (v.45) and He would make them bold witnesses for Jesus. He brought many people to faith in Him.

Thankfully we have God’s Word in baptism and in hearing the message of Christ. The Holy Spirit has given us faith to receive the blessings that Jesus extends to us from heaven! We should never think that because Jesus ascended, we are beyond the reach of His blessing. Christ is present everywhere in His glorified body. Paul wrote of Christ, “*He... ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.*” (Ephesians 4:10) Jesus is with us always just as He promised!

Also, Jesus pleads for us. Paul wrote, “*Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.*” (Romans 8:34) Heaven is like a courtroom for perfect people. Christ stands before God’s court interceding for us by His perfect life and death so that we are declared innocent by God. The Bible states that in Christ, God has a place for us in heaven! “*God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus...*” (Ephesians 2:6)

It is comforting to know that Jesus intercedes for us now. How much more we will enjoy His blessing when we join Him in heaven! An angel promised, “*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.*” (Acts 1:11) So, when He returns, Jesus’ hands will be raised. For those who have rejected Him, His hands will be raised in eternal judgment. But for us who trust in Him as the Savior, there will be no end to His blessing! Paul wrote, “*Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who ...will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.*” (Philippians 3:20-21)

With such blessings from our ascended Lord, we should respond like His disciples: “*Then they worshiped Him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed ... at the temple, praising God.*” (v.52-53) Tonight and every time we meet for worship, we celebrate with joy the blessings of our ascended Savior. At the close of each service, the minister raises his hand to give the benediction or blessing reminding all of us that that blessing comes from our ascended Christ!

So, this is a day of celebration! Christ has ascended into heaven, not to leave us but to extend His blessing to us wherever we are in life and even in death! Nothing will separate us from His love! In God’s time, Jesus will take us to heaven. We will experience blessings beyond what we can imagine! Even now, may Jesus’ forgiveness and love fill us and lead us to serve as His hands to bring blessings to others! Amen.