

**He said to them, "These are my words, which I spoke to you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms."**

**<sup>45</sup>Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. <sup>46</sup>He said to them, "This is what is written and so it must be: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, <sup>47</sup>and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup>You are witnesses of these things. <sup>49</sup>Look, I am sending you what my Father promised. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."**

**<sup>50</sup>He led them out as far as the vicinity of Bethany. He lifted up his hands and blessed them. <sup>51</sup>And while he was blessing them, he parted from them and was taken up into heaven. <sup>52</sup>So they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. <sup>53</sup>They were continually in the temple courts, praising and blessing God. Amen. (EHV)**

Theme: Our Ascended Lord Keeps his Word

1. He fulfilled the prophecies about him.
2. He will keep his promises to us.
3. We serve as witnesses to this truth.

What is Ascension all about? It's a day that can easily get lost in the shuffle of life. How many of you even noted, outside of Pastor Gartner's Bytes of Bread, this past Thursday that it was Ascension Day. It used to be that many churches had a special services on that Thursday, 40 days after Easter, but most of those have fallen by the wayside because attendance had been so poor—it simply isn't a priority in the lives of many Christians to have a special service for Ascension. The weather is finally nice, confirmation just took place, graduations are coming up—whatever the reason, Ascension isn't a big deal even for many Christians. Maybe it's because many don't understand the significance of Christ's Ascension.

So, once again, what is Ascension all about? You can call it the culmination of Jesus' earthly life, which started with his conception and birth, the pinnacle of which was his death on the cross and resurrection! And then he ascended into heaven and took the place at the right hand of God, on his heavenly throne. And so, Ascension is basically Christ's coronation day! Like a king who returned home after winning an astounding victory over his enemies, so Christ left heaven to come to earth to win for us an astounding victory. Ascension is his return home to heaven where is crowned king and he takes his rightful spot on God's throne.

But today, we focus on another aspect of Christ's Ascension—today we see that Christ's ascension means that he keeps his word!

First, it's interesting to note that the beginning portion of our text—verses 44-49 didn't take place on the day of Christ's ascension, but 40 days earlier on Easter evening. Even though Jesus had made a handful of appearances earlier in the day and all the disciples heard rumors that Jesus had truly risen from the dead, they were hiding behind locked doors in fear of the Jews. They doubted Jesus' prophecies about himself. The one they thought was their Savior and the long-promised Messiah, was put to death on a cross. How, then, could Jesus be alive—it's simply impossible, so they doubted.

Don't we do the same thing in a way? How often, don't we hear God's word, and know what it says, but doubts still come up in our hearts. There may be times when we doubt certain teachings: like divine creation or Christ's dual nature; or certain events: like the flood or the resurrection. Sometimes it is the devil and the world that lead us to doubt God's word—they use science to promote evolution against Creation and say that there isn't enough moisture in our atmosphere for there to be a world-wide flood. Reason and logic tell us that no one can be both God and man at the same time, and that's impossible for someone to rise from the dead. At other times, it's not the devil and the world, but our own sinful nature that leads us to doubt. God promises to love you, to be with you, and to provide for you. But your sinful nature questions those promises, "Does he? If he really does, then why is my life going the way it is?"

Yes, we all have our doubts from time to time; but that's one of the things our text for today shows us: the Lord keeps his word!

Jesus says in verse 44 to his disciples, **These are my words, which I spoke to you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms.** All the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah were fulfilled by Jesus. The list is long and impressive: his birth in Bethlehem to a Virgin, his flight into Egypt, being from the area of Galilee, betrayed for 30 pieces of silver, he was smitten, stricken, and afflicted on the cross when he took up our infirmities—yet none of his bones were broken. His body did not see decay because he rose from the dead and crushed Satan's head. Those are just the highlights—his birth, life, death, and resurrection are all prophesied about in the Old Testament—and Jesus fulfilled them all!

But it wasn't just those prophecies that Jesus was talking about. It was also the prophecies that Jesus said about himself! Luke records that on three separate occasions—In Luke 9, 13, and 18, that Jesus told his disciples that it was necessary for him to suffer and die only to rise from the dead. He says in Luke 9, **The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and experts in the law. He must be killed and be raised on the third day.** He told his disciples that this was going to happen on multiple occasions, they should have known it was coming, but they doubted. But then Christ rose from the dead and proved that he keeps his word!

And his ascension proves the same thing. First of all, it fulfills numerous Old Testament prophecy's. In Daniel 7, he sees a vision in which Christ, the Son of Man, returns to heaven and sits down on God's throne. We saw the prophecy given in Psalm 47 in the introduction of our service today and our Psalm of the Day. Finally, David writes in Psalm 68, which Paul quotes in Ephesians 4—our second lesson for today, **You ascended on high. You led captivity captive. You received gifts among men, so that even among the rebellious the Lord God might dwell.** Once Jesus defeated sin, death, and the devil—which at one time held us captive, he ascended into heaven. And as Paul points out, the fact that Christ ascended into heaven indicates he once lived in heaven before he came down to earth to save us from our sins and take us home to live with him! So Christ at his ascension fulfilled this prophecy!

And once again, it wasn't just an Old Testament prophecy, but Jesus told his disciples he was going to return to heaven. In John 8 Jesus said to the unbelieving Pharisees, probably in front of the disciples, **I am going away. You will look for me, and you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come...You are from below, I am from above. You are of this world. I am not of this world.**

But it was especially in the Upper Room on Maundy Thursday that Jesus made known to his disciples that he was going to the Father. In John 14 Jesus said, **In my Father's house are many mansions. If it were not so, I would have told you. I am going to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to be with me, so that you may also be where I am.** And then in John 16, just a little bit later, Jesus said, **In a**

**little while you are not going to see me anymore, and again in a little while you will see me, because I am going away to the Father.**

Jesus' ascension proves that he keeps his promises. He ascended into heaven, returning to the Heavenly Father, just as he said he would. And if the ascended Lord keeps his word, then he keeps all his promises to us! And the list of promises that the Lord makes us is long and impressive!

He promises, **I will never leave you and I will never forsake you. And, Surely I will be with you always to the very end of the age. And, I will strengthen you. Yes, I will help you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. And, all things will work out for the good of those who love (God). And—as we just heard from John 14, if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to be with me, so that you may also be where I am.**

And this reminds us of what the angels told the disciples right after Jesus ascended into heaven, recorded by Luke in Acts, **This same Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.** On the Last Day Christ will return in the same way he left—on the clouds of heaven, so that we will dwell with him forever!

Those are just the highlights—we are just scratching the surface. Each and every promise the Lord has made to you will be kept because the ascended Lord keeps his word—as his ascension proves to us!

The first time that Jesus left the disciples—when he was put to death on Good Friday—they were distraught, thinking that everything they believed about Jesus was a lie. And so they went into hiding. Contrast that with the way the disciples responded after Jesus left them when he ascended into heaven.

Luke writes, **they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. They were continually in the temple courts, praising and blessing God.** Instead of being afraid or worrying about what might happen to them, they rejoiced and worshiped God. Even though Jesus left they still worshiped him because they believed, and did not doubt, that Jesus was their Savior; they knew that he went home to heaven, they knew that he keeps his promises, and that one day they would see him again.

The Disciples knew this to be true—and so do we. So what is our reaction? We share the message of the gospel! Jesus brought this up on multiple occasions between his resurrection and ascension. He said, **You are witnesses of these things.** And he commanded them to proclaim the good news of the gospel to all creation. The disciples saw the risen Savior with their own eyes, we have seen the risen and ascended Savior through the eyes of faith. So like the disciples we are to serve as witnesses.

Witness. That's an important word. A witness simply tells what he knows—a witness isn't responsible for convincing anyone he is telling the truth, he just tells it how it is. A witness doesn't have to give a detailed theological treatment on the person of Christ, or regurgitate every aspect of Christian doctrine. No, a witness tells the simple, yet profound, story of our salvation—he shares the law and the gospel, so that others may see themselves as helpless sinners and Jesus as the world's one and only Savior!

We want, like God, all people to be saved. And as Paul points out in Romans 10, **how can they call on one in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe in one about whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without a preacher?** We must tell others about Christ if we want them to ever believe in Christ. And again, we don't have to do the convincing, just the sharing. Being a witness takes all the focus and pressure off of us because we simply share the message and we let the Holy Spirit work through his gospel.

Jesus pointed his disciples to another prophecy, **repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.** This fulfills what David says

in Psalm 22, **All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations will bow down before you.** The Lord keeps his word—including this one to spread the gospel throughout the world. So, he might has well keep his word through you. As you serve as witnesses about Christ and tell others about our risen and ascended Savior, many will be brought to faith, be ready when he comes on the clouds of heaven, and join us in his heavenly home! Amen.