

May 24, 2020 (Queen Victoria's Birthday, 1819)  
Ascension Sunday  
Acts 1:12-26, 1 Peter 4:12-19, 5:6-11, John 17:1-11

## **"Things are looking up"**

If one thing is perfectly evident because of this Covid-19 crisis, it is how sports plays such a huge role in a lot of people's lives and how people long to see their favorite teams play again.

In our country, and really all over the world, sports are a big thing whether you are a fan of golf, or football, or baseball, or curling, car or horse racing, track and field, or just something local.

People like to be on teams – baseball teams, soccer teams and if you're on a team that's winning, it's even better. As your team heads for the championship, and you're a part of it, you feel a sense of purpose – there's a goal you're striving for and if you achieve that goal and win, you feel a sense of joy.

But, there's a let down after everything is over. The celebrating is over, the season is over, and that's it. That sense of purpose and joy you had before – it's gone. Now you're going to have to find something else to do, something else that gives you a sense of purpose and joy.

That's true not just in sports, but in just about everything we do in this world. We all want to have a sense of purpose in our lives and we all want to have something that gives us joy. Sports can provide that, but only for a little while.

Some people like to dive into gardening, home improvement projects, and that works too, but only for a while. Hobbies are good, but the purpose and the joy they bring to us lasts only a little while too. Today, I want to show you where you can find a sense of purpose in your life and a sense of joy, that can last a long long time.

Today is Ascension Sunday, the day that we remember how our Lord spoke one last time to his disciples and then ascended into heaven. Today we're going to look at Jesus' words, and Jesus' actions, and as we do, we're going to discover something.

We're going to discover that if we really want to have a sense of purpose in our lives, we don't need to look down into this world for that. Instead, we can look up, at our ascending Lord, and there we will find a permanent sense of purpose.

And if you're looking for joy in your life, you don't need to look down at this world where everything is so temporary. Look up, and you'll find a deeper and longer lasting kind of joy in Christ.

Today we find Jesus and his disciples together. It was a little over five and a half weeks after his resurrection from the dead. Jesus gathered with his followers on the Mount of Olives, the same general area where he had been arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Not too far away from that mountain was the hill where he was crucified. Today, the resurrected Jesus gathered his disciples together because he had a few more things he wanted to say to them before his ascension.

And as you watch those disciples here, you can see that they are still confused about why Jesus had come. They asked him if he was now going to restore Israel to the grandeur it had enjoyed in the past.

Jesus told them not to think about those sorts of things. What he really wanted them to think about was their purpose in life, now that he was about to leave them.

Over the last 3 years, their purpose had been to follow him, and to watch him fulfill every single Messianic prophecy that was ever written about him in the Old Testament.

Their purpose was to watch him suffer and die and rise from the dead. Very soon, with the Holy Spirit's help, they would come to understand what all these things meant.

For now, they were done. Done following. Done learning. Now, Jesus was going to give them a new job, a new purpose for their lives. Look at what Jesus tells them in Acts, 1:8: "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

That's what Jesus wanted those disciples to do – that was their new purpose in life - to be witnesses to other people. They had seen all these things happen. Soon they would understand why they happened. **Their purpose now, was to witness the things they have seen and learned to other people.**

As a Christian today, that's your purpose too. We just celebrated Easter not too long ago. Through God's Word, you watched Jesus as He suffered, died, but then rose again.

Even though you didn't see those things with your eyes, we heard about it and believed it with your hearts and God the Holy Spirit has led you to understand why Jesus died, and why He rose from the dead.

He was your sacrifice. He is the reason you are forgiven of your sins and have the sure hope of eternal life. Today, your purpose is to be a witness of these things to others. That's why you're here, why God has put you here on this planet – to be a witness.

Sometimes, I think we get confused about the purpose of our lives – why God has placed us on this planet. We do have lots of temporary, earthly purposes – to earn a living, to be a good son or daughter, to be a good mother or father or spouse – those are all good purposes.

To look for ways to help other people, to make this world a better place – those are good purposes too but there's something deeper. Something more spiritual, that is keeping you here on this planet.

If you want to know what it is, don't look at this world. Look up, at the ascended Christ. Those other purposes are good, and may God bless you as you seek to fulfill them. But your deeper, more spiritual purpose can be found in Luke 24:48: **"You are witnesses of these things."** In other words, **God has put us on this planet to witness what Christ has done to others.**

Last week we talked about witnessing Christ by doing what? By showing love. Remember that special, agape-kind of love? That's part of witnessing and the other part is talking about what Jesus has done, having conversations with people about the deeper things of life.

It is a fact – Jesus Christ has come. He has died on a cross. He has taken away your sins and the sins of all mankind. Some day He is coming back. That's amazing stuff that you know. God wants you to be a witness of those things to others.

After talking with His disciples, Jesus performed one last visible miracle for them. He lifted up his hands to bless them, just as we do at the end of the service and then He ascended into the sky, right before their eyes, and eventually, He was hidden by a cloud.

As the disciples were staring up at the sky, two angels appeared to them, and told them that someday, Jesus would come back, in the same way that they saw Him go into heaven.

And so what did those disciples do? We are told in Luke's account that they worshipped Christ on that mountain and then they returned to Jerusalem, filled with a sense of great joy. They met with each other in the temple courts, praising God for the things they had heard and seen.

Think about that. Before, the disciples would hide in their houses, afraid of the Jewish leaders. Now, we see them out in public, worshiping Jesus, filled with joy. Why the big change?

They had just seen Jesus victoriously ascend to His heavenly throne. There was no doubt in their minds anymore that He was the God of the universe, the King of heaven and earth.

They had just heard two angels tell them that someday, Jesus would return on the clouds, just as they had seen Him go. That's what filled them with joy. The angry, growling Jewish leaders couldn't keep those disciples from publicly displaying their joy in the temple courts.

You see, though Jesus was no longer with them in body, they knew He was with them in spirit, and this assurance gave them all the courage they needed to face the world and build the church. So far as you and I are concerned, Jesus Christ is with us too.

Sometimes, however, you perhaps are inclined to think like me, that we would be much better Christians and that the church would be much stronger if Jesus Christ were only with us in visible form.

We are inclined to think that He made a mistake when He ascended into heaven and left us alone by ourselves. However, let me assure you that Christ's ascension involves all assets and no liabilities.

He knew what He was doing. He is an ever-present and ever-ready power plant, offering you and me the opportunity to plug ourselves in for life. When we do, we find love, hope and heaven.

In addition, He assures you and me that though He is in heaven and we are on earth, He will be with us always, even to the end of the world. Think of it like this: just as a cloud that obscures one's view of a mountain doesn't cause the mountain to actually disappear into thin air, so the cloud that covered Jesus did not make him evaporate from this world; it only hid our view of him.

He assures us that He will never leave or forsake us, that He will walk with us every step of the way, even through the valley of the shadow of death.

By ascending into heaven, Christ is to be everywhere together at the same time. For where two or three are gathered together in His name, there He is in the midst of them.

Christ is here with us today, tonight, every day and every night. If you're looking for a sense of joy in your life, a deeper, longer-lasting sense of joy, look where the disciples looked. Look to Jesus.

Sure, there will be times in your life when you are upset. Things will happen that will anger you, sadden you, depress you. But for a Christian, underneath that anger or sadness, you will find a layer of joy that the world can't take away. "I know God's not punishing me," a Christian can say. "All my sins have been taken away by Jesus.

I know I'm forgiven. I know that God will work this problem out. I know that God will give me the strength I need. This world isn't perfect, but I'm OK. There's a better world coming anyway." That's Christian joy.

The disciples had it after they saw Jesus ascend. May God give that same kind of joy to you right now. Today you have watched Jesus ascend. Today, He has reminded you of your purpose and today, He has given you a kind of joy that you can't find anywhere else. **So don't hesitate to witness that to others.** Amen.