

**“Our Ascended Savior – Absent and Yet Present”**  
(Mark 16:14-16, 19 – Ascension – May 17, 2026)

Mark 16:14-16, 19 – <sup>14</sup>Later He appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; and He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen. <sup>15</sup>And He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. <sup>16</sup>He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.... <sup>19</sup>So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God.

Dear Redeemed followers in our ascended Lord, Jesus Christ:

In Psalm 47:5-8 we read: “God has gone up with a shout, the LORD with the sound of a trumpet. Sing praises to God, sing praises! Sing praises to our King, sing praises! For God is the King of all the earth; sing praises with understanding. God reigns over the nations; God sits on His holy throne.” That is how David rejoiced in the Old Testament when the Holy Spirit revealed to him that the Savior would ascend triumphantly to heaven and sit at the right hand of God the Father almighty.

But is Jesus’ ascension into heaven really an occasion for rejoicing? Doesn’t it mean that He has left this earth and withdrawn His presence from us? It is true that in a sense, Jesus has made Himself absent by His ascension, in that we are unable to see Him now. Yet we can rejoice with David because, though Jesus is unseen, in a higher and more important way He is still present with us. Let us consider: **“Our Ascended Savior – Absent and Yet Present.”**

**1) In what sense He is absent from us**

First, in what sense is our Savior absent from us? It says: “So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God” (vs. 19). Acts 1:9 says: “Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.” So Jesus was taken up into heaven and was seen no more. That is the nature of His absence. By His ascension, He has changed His resurrection body into one we cannot see now.

Occasionally after His resurrection, Jesus had done the same thing. During those 40 days after His resurrection, from time to time He would suddenly appear among His disciples. He would speak with them, eat with them, and reassure them with

many convincing proofs that He was alive (Acts 1:3). Then He would again vanish from sight.

But on this fortieth day after His resurrection it was different. This time He rose up before the disciples' eyes and a cloud hid Him from their sight. This special departure showed them that from now on, they would not see Jesus any more on earth as they had.

Then it says, "*He sat down at the right hand of God*" Already according to His divine nature, Christ was at the right hand of His Father from eternity. But in His ascension, now also according to His human nature, He sits at His Father's right hand.

What does this mean? The right hand of God indicates His position of authority and power. During His time on earth, the man Jesus lived in humble form, poor and lowly. But now, the glorified Jesus fully exercises His divine rule over heaven and earth. His enemies and ours have been placed under His feet (Ephesians 1:20-23; Psalm 110); for He has saved us from the devil, sin, and death. From His glorified position, Jesus rules for the good of His Church, for our good.

So how are we to think of our ascended Savior as He sits at the right hand of God the Father? Has He totally removed from this earth His human body, so that He is confined somewhere way out there beyond the stars where God sits on a throne, far from us?

No. As we read of Christ in Ephesians 4:10: "*He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.*" The Son of God had descended to this earth and taken on our human flesh as the Son of Man. "*For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily*" (Colossians 2:9). His divine and human natures cannot be separated. Now, our Savior has ascended in glory to fill the universe, both according to His divine and human natures.

## **2) In what sense He is present with us**

Now, though our eyes cannot see His gracious face, and our ears cannot hear His comforting voice in person, yet He is still very present with us. As Jesus promised before His ascension: "*I am with you always, even to the end of the age*" (Matthew 28:20). He is here with us in all His fullness.

This is why we can rejoice in Christ's ascension. He no longer confines His human presence to a certain location in the world, or far off beyond the stars. Just as

He is present in person before the eyes of the saints in heaven, so He is present with us here on earth, as our Lord and Brother in the flesh. Just as He stood among His disciples many times before His ascension, showing Himself alive, He stands among us, though unseen.

Christ's presence may be either very disturbing or very comforting for the sinner. If our Lord were suddenly to reveal His presence to us here, what sort of words would we expect from Him: good or bad news?

In our text, when Jesus *"appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; and He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen"* (vs. 14). He had been there to see their stubbornness and unbelief, and they deserved His rebuke.

Don't we also deserve His rebuke at times? Hasn't He seen us living as if we didn't have a Savior who was risen from the grave? Haven't we lived as if, in His ascension, Christ were no longer with us? Sometimes we mope about our life situation as if He had given us no hope. We try to handle life's problems by our own strength, without Him. We fail to trust His promises and call on Him in prayer. Sometimes we act as though our ascended Savior were not here for us or caring to help us. Don't we deserve His rebuke?

How many times does Jesus, unseen and yet here with us, observe our sinful attitudes and actions? Our God, our brother in the flesh, is so close in person that when we sin against another person it grieves and hurts Him as if we did it to Him! Yes, we deserve that He should once and for all remove His presence from us, for all the ways we have stubbornly not believed nor brought forth fruits of faith as we ought.

Yet as Jesus mercifully and lovingly gathered His disciples around Himself in our text, He still gathers us around Himself in His church. He turns our focus to His Good News of forgiveness and salvation. He wants us to seek His gracious face and hear His comforting Words as He chooses to come to us in this world, through His Gospel in His Word and Sacraments. He emphasized this in our text as *"He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned'"* (vs. 15-16).

Here Christ commands His disciples to preach His Gospel in all the world. "Go and tell disturbed sinners everywhere that I have paid for their sins in full, so that all

who believe are saved. Go tell the people at this church that I have died on the cross for each one of them, and heaven's joys await them. Tell them that through faith in My name, they now stand as righteous brothers and sisters before My face." As Jesus stands among us here today, He speaks tenderly to us and says: "*I am with you always*, looking on each of you with a perfect, divine and human love. I am present to bring you all the treasures of My grace. I am sending you to tell the world of all I have done for them."

The ascended Christ remains with His comforting presence, not only in His Word but also in His sacraments. As He says, "*He who believes and is baptized will be saved.*" When a child is baptized, though unseen to our eyes, Jesus is present to bless that child, to pour out His forgiveness and His Spirit and faith on that child. When an adult is baptized, He is there to impart to the believer His forgiveness and to strengthen the faith that is begun by His Spirit.

In the Lord's Supper too, here He is, fully present with His blessings of salvation. Those who teach that Jesus' human nature is confined to some location far away say He cannot be humanly present, but only spiritually. So they teach that the Supper He instituted can only be symbolic of eating and drinking of His body and blood. But according to Jesus' words, as we receive the bread and wine, He is also present to give us His true body and blood in a miraculous way. He wants this to be for our full comfort, that we partake of the very body and blood He gave to forgive our sins. (Matthew 26:26-28)

Therefore since His ascension, Jesus is absent only in the sense that we cannot see Him. Yet He is truly present in the fullest sense, as our Lord and our Brother. Let us take comfort in this. Our Savior, who is enthroned in power and majesty, is here with us, giving Himself to us, bringing His grace to us through His Word and Sacraments.

When our sins bother us and we fear we are lost and condemned, His Word reassures us that He "*is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us*" (Romans 8:34). When our burdens in life overwhelm us, He is our great High Priest who can fully sympathize with our weaknesses. Since He bore the cross in His own body, He looks on the crosses we bear in life with full understanding. He knows our sorrow, our pain, our confusion, our frustrations in life; and He is right here with His divine hand to ensure that all things will turn out for our good.

Finally, since our Savior Himself has ascended bodily into His glory, we know He will come one day to raise us bodily into His heavenly glory. He will bring us home, where He is preparing a place in heaven for us. As we sing in our hymn:

On Christ's ascension I now build  
The hope of mine ascension;  
This hope alone has ever stilled  
All doubt and apprehension;  
For where the Head is, there full well  
I know His members are to dwell  
When Christ shall come and call them.

Therefore, we have every reason to join David in his psalm of praise: "*God has gone up with a shout, the LORD with the sound of a trumpet. Sing praises to God, sing praises! Sing praises to our King.*" Our ascended Savior lives and reigns for our good! He is with us now, and we will live with Him forever!

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be. Amen.