

*<sup>1</sup> In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach <sup>2</sup> until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. <sup>3</sup> After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. <sup>4</sup> On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. <sup>5</sup> For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”*

*<sup>6</sup> So when they met together, they asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”*

*<sup>7</sup> He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. <sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

*<sup>9</sup> After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.*

*<sup>10</sup> They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. <sup>11</sup> “Men of Galilee,” they said, “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.” (NIV84)*

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## **IT IS GOOD THAT HE LEFT!!**

Most of you have lived in Alaska long enough to experience the joy of the long term visitor! When family stops by, unless they are coming from across town instead of across the continent, they stick around for a while right? Three or four week visits from family or friends are not uncommon at all! Alaska usually means that you will spend a long time apart from loved ones. And that gives an opportunity to spend a long time together when the visits work out! And that’s a really good thing!

And you know what else is a really good thing? When those visits are over! When loved ones go back home! It’s not fun to say good-bye, but when life can continue as normal it’s always a good thing.

(I feel like I have to put a Mothers’ Day disclaimer in here – because I know that they read our sermons online! Both of my moms are planning visits to Alaska this August when our baby is born and I can’t wait! Their long visits are so welcome. When my mom or my mother-in-law are here – I don’t have to change a single diaper, I’m not allowed near a dirty dish, the sewing pile disappears. Long visits from moms are welcome in our house!!)

Both mothers excluded from the conversation – you know what I’m saying, right? As great as it is to catch up and make memories and spend time with friends, it’s nice to get back to normal. It’s nice to be able to go to bed early when you need it, to sit around doing nothing, to catch up on TV watching, to wear pajamas around the house again. Even when it’s pleasant company, it’s always good when company leaves!

Have you ever been in a position of telling someone that it was time for them to leave? Maybe a child is becoming an adult but they are doing it in your basement! The time comes to kick them in the butt and tell them to leave (lovingly of course!) Maybe an argument was bubbling over and space is

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what you both needed. Maybe it was a requirement of your parenting to tell someone to leave so that you and your child could talk. Maybe it was a painful break up that ended in “Just Go!”

“Just Go!” is the last thing that we would say to Jesus. If we were given the choice, we’d want him to stick around, right? Like Martha we’d want to sit at Jesus feet forever. Like Peter on the transfiguration mountain we’d say “It’s good, Lord, to be here!” And maybe we’d add – “It’s good for you to be here with us!!”

But today, we mark Jesus’ last day on earth, and his miraculous Ascension. Though it might seem odd to say about our Savior, I think you’ll understand and agree! **It is Good that He Left!!**

Imagine that you needed some work done on your house. You hire out a contractor to find and fix the leak in your roof. The worker comes and works for a few hours and then you hear the doorbell ring. It’s the worker, so you assume that he needs something in the house and you let him in. But instead of going to the back room where the roof had been leaking, he walks into the living and sits down on the couch. He grabs a beer from his cooler and offers you one! “So, tell me about your family!” he says. You’re a bit confused and you ask! “How’s the roof? Are you waiting on a part? Does something need to dry?” “Oh know,” he says “The roof is fixed. I found the leak and fixed it! You’re off the clock. I just don’t have plans tonight, so I’m going to hang here, if that’s OK!”

That might be one of those times where you might say – “I think it would be good if you left!” Right? When a worker comes to work at your house, it’s good for them to finish the work and then to leave.

That’s exactly what Jesus did! He came with a job to do and when he finished the job, he left! Just like you’d want your carpenter to do, that’s what the carpenter from Nazareth did as well! He came with a mighty task to do, to be the Savior, to live a perfect life to pay for a world’s worth of failures. He did it! It was mission accomplished! On Good Friday paid the price and on Easter God accepted the price that was offered. The work was done so Jesus left and we can be glad that he did! Jesus’ Ascension guarantees us that the work of salvation is complete.

The disciples play interesting roles in the Ascension account. In a story that’s all about Jesus and his trip to heaven and his promise to return to take us with him, they sure have their eyes fixed firmly on earthly things, don’t they? Their question is astonishing. They witnessed his life, his suffering, death. They heard his promises and had seen them fulfilled. They even saw him rise from the dead!! They touched him, ate with him, celebrated with him. And then after all that. After being firsthand witnesses to the *many convincing proofs that he was alive*, then they ask him **“Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”** Now Lord are you going to set us free from our enemies? They were still confused about why Jesus came – still confused about which kingdom really matters. Even as they watch Jesus leave, they gaze perplexed into the sky – wondering not only what they just saw, but what they were going to do without him. It’s the angels who have to snap them out of it and remind them of his promised return.

We end up with our heads in the clouds sometimes as well – but not in a good way! We often get shell shocked by what we see happening around us. We need constant reminders that this world, its governments and powers, its wealth and wisdom are not what it’s really about! It’s not about power or

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health, but faith!! We often show our misguided and misplaced trust in the world in the way we respond when some of those things are taken away. When health is fleeting, when relationships fail, when job security is called into question – sometimes in the face of tragedy we show despair. We wonder how we can go on! We zone out in worry or distress and forget the promises of God – promises to be with us always, promises to strengthen us for life’s battles and to fight those battles at our side. Our wonder turns into worry as we feel that God may be abandoning us and leaving us alone. His promises are clear to us. Jesus’ life and his love are spelled out clearly for us in his Word, but so often we send up fixating on the world around us and forgetting what he’s done for us!!

The child who doesn’t pay attention in class deserves to get thrown out of the classroom and when we tune out God and fail to hear his Word and trust his promises, we deserve worse than detention. We deserve an eternal expulsion from God’s kingdom. We deserve to be cast out of his presence forever.

But instead God snaps us out of our daze. He sends his angels, his messengers to remind us of his promises. ***“Men of Galilee,” they said, “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.”*** That’s what the angels told the disciples to get them to snap out of their gaze. He’s promised you his love. You need not fear!!

That’s the message that God puts in our ears as well. No matter what distractions there are in life. No matter what challenges or trials God allows in our paths – no of them can change your Savior’s love. None of them can change the fact that Jesus died to take away our doubts and fears, our failing and misguided trust. Nothing can take away the fact that Jesus’ work for us has been completed! Life has us perplexed sometimes – like a deer in the headlights. But we need not be perplexed. Instead let’s stand in the light of Jesus. Let’s bask in the brightness of his glory and sit in the warmth of his love.

**It is Good that He Left.** It is good that he left and that he left us with his words of hope! His work is complete. Easter proves it! Ascension supports that truth. The work was done, so he left the jobsite!!

But he’s coming back!! Another reason that **It’s Good that He Left!** ***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.*** He’s coming back to take you to be where he is.

***In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. <sup>3</sup> And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am*** (John 14:2-3).

**It’s Good that He Left,** because he’s preparing for a return. **It’s Good that He Left,** because he’s preparing for our arrival with him in glory!

**It’s Good that He Left,** so that we can share that news with the world. If Jesus were still teaching and preaching here on earth – you’d probably choose him over me! And that would be a great choice!! If Jesus were here, people would flock to hear him and I don’t know, maybe wouldn’t be so concerned with sharing the news with others. There would be way more focus on how do I get to see Jesus and less reminders that we can see Jesus in his Word. If Jesus’ were here, you’d maybe rely on him to spread the gospel instead of stepping up and doing it yourself.

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If Jesus thought the Church would grow better if he stuck around, then he would have done just that! But in fact the opposite is true. Jesus knew that the Church would grow faster with him not around, so **It's Good that He Left!**

And since he left, we can step up! We can be the angels that share his message of love with those in our lives. We can be the ones that shake others from a spiritual stupor with a life giving gospel. We can get others' heads out of the clouds and remind them that it's not about this world and what it has to offer – but it's about Jesus and what he has already offered and given and accomplished for his Church. It's about a Savior God and the life that he has secured for us with him forever. We can be the ones that share that message. We can be the ones that are supporters of gospel ministry and participants in gospel ministry as our prayers, our offerings our efforts promote the spread of Jesus' love. The disciples' commission is ours: ***But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.***

**It's Good that He Left** – now we can share his love! We can be a part of exciting mission work – right here in your very own Jerusalem. Start where you are and then watch it spread and grow – to ***Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.*** Share the gospel with those that are close to you and watch your faith and theirs be strengthened. Start where you are and God will bless you to be able to take it further and further. The internet helps with that a lot, doesn't it! Share a sermon or a devotion with a loved one across town or across the world. Put them in contact with the resources at your disposal – daily devotions, online Bible studies, pastors to answer the questions that you can't. Invite those close to you to hear the gospel with you at worship, at VBS, in bible study with you at home or in Bible Class with you at church. Be a witness. You've seen it and heard it, now tell others what you've seen and share what you've heard.

“I think it's time for you to go!!” That's not an easy phrase to speak to someone especially someone you love. But when they go, it's better for everyone!! It's even true with Jesus. It was beyond words - wonderful, amazing Grace when he came to live for us, to pay for sin, to die so that we could live. But **It's Good that He Left** as well. He left to show us his work is done. He left to show us that our work is just beginning. So with the joy of forgiveness in our hearts and the words of his grace on our lips – let's go! Let's go witness his love to a desperately needy world.

You know I hate to say it!! It's good for you to be here! But my friends, It's going to be good for you to leave as well” – to leave this place and let your light shine in the dark world. It's a joy to have you here, “But it's time for you to go!” Amen.