

Wednesday Night Bible Study & Discussion Guide

May 27, 2020

Opening Prayer

Please make sure your device is muted. The leader will offer the opening prayer with participants joining in their own environment.

Lord Jesus Christ, tonight we address our prayers to you as you sit at the right hand of our Father in heaven. By your life, death, and resurrection you made it known that you were truly God's eternal Son, the Word from the beginning, who put on flesh and dwelled with us.

As you dwell in heaven, you promise that you are constantly working for the good of the church, that is, you are working for our good. We are the church, your special people whom by the Holy Spirit you have marked and set apart for you. For this wonderful gift we thank and praise you. Day by day increase our faith in that promise. Let us look at everything that happens in our world and in our lives and see your good hand. Your ways are higher than our ways, your thoughts higher than our thoughts. We repent of the times we have doubted your goodness. Despite our doubts, you have always continued to love us, dear Jesus.

As your special people, we know and trust your Ascension promise to be with us and protect us from your heavenly throne. Yet many whom we know - family, friends, acquaintances - do not know you and do not see your good hand at work in their lives. By your grace we are witnesses of your grace, Lord Jesus. May our every word both in person and online, may our every action, serve to give witness to your love. Use us and the blessings you have given us to be the means by which you show your love to others. By your Spirit we ask for all these things in your name, knowing that the Father hears you and through you hears us. Amen.

Introductions

The leader will introduce those who've identified themselves via Zoom. The leader will then ask those who are unidentified to share their names.

Please note that at 7:45 p.m. the study & discussion portion of our time together will end. The leader will then ask for prayer requests from participants. We will then close our time together with prayer.

The Setting

Both the Gospel lesson and Sunday's message reading (Luke 24:36-53 and Acts 1:1-11) relate the account of Jesus' last moments here on Earth. He has spent forty days since Easter showing himself to be alive and continuing to teach his disciples. Now, on this Thursday forty days later, he gives them some instructions, blesses them, and ascends into the sky, where a cloud hides him from their view.

Looking at the Lesson Again

The leader will ask for a volunteer to read Acts 1:1-11. Please note that for the purpose of this study & discussion the leader is using the New International Version 2011.

Any questions about Acts 1:1-11 (or anything you heard/saw in Sunday's live stream)?

Into the Bible and Making Application to Our Lives

1. Luke relates the account of the Ascension twice, at the end of his Gospel and at the beginning of the book of Acts. The main goal of each of the four Gospels is to tell us about Jesus and show him to us as our Savior. (See *John 20:31*.) Why then does the Ascension serve as a fitting conclusion to the Gospel of Luke?
2. The Ascension is also related at the beginning of the book of Acts, the history of the early Christian church. Why is the Ascension a fitting way to begin the missionary history of the Christian Church? (Consider both what Jesus **says** and what Jesus **does** in Acts 1:1-11, especially verses 4-9.)

3. In Sunday's message, Vicar said this:

Jesus only appeared to his followers after Easter¹. When he rose from the dead he was done talking to people who would reject him. There aren't any stories of showdowns between Jesus and the Pharisees or the other religious leaders [...] After his resurrection, Jesus only appears to his people.

Is it surprising to note that Jesus interacts only with his followers after his resurrection?

Why would Jesus choose to do that?

Are you comforted by knowing this, and if so why/how?

4. Before ascending, Jesus promised to pour out the Holy Spirit on his disciples in Jerusalem. We know that the specific event to which he referred with that promise (Acts 1:5,8) was Pentecost (ten days later). Yet the gift of the Holy Spirit was not something that was given solely and specifically to them. **Read Ephesians 1:13-14**, the first verses of our first reading from Sunday.

How did/do we receive the Spirit?

To what end does the Holy Spirit serve in our lives, according to these verses?

5. Later in the reading from Ephesians, Paul speaks some words of praise regarding our ascended Lord Jesus. **Read Ephesians 1:22**.

Why does our sinful nature scoff at this verse?

Why do we have to take this verse "on faith"?

What might tempt us to doubt this verse and the promise therein?

¹ Excluding the descent into hell, where Jesus proclaimed his victory to Satan, his evil angels, and the people in hell. It would have been more accurate to say, "Of all the humans then still alive in the world, Jesus only appeared to his followers after his Ascension..." but that was too wordy to fit into the sermon. ;)

6. Consider the following statements.

Although Jesus is not now on earth, we are.

What does this say to you about your role as “witness to the ends of the earth”?

Although Jesus is not now on earth, he has given and still gives his Spirit.

What does this say to you as you face life’s trials? (Think again on Ephesians 1:13-14.)

Although Jesus is not now on earth, he has given us his Word.

What does this say to help you in your role as “witness”? What does this say to you to comfort you in life?

Although Jesus is not now on earth, he will return.

What does this say to you to comfort you in life? What does this say to encourage you in your role as “witness”?

Prayer Requests... followed by Martin Luther’s Evening Prayer

Martin Luther’s Evening Prayer

In the name of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen. I thank you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, your dear Son, that you have graciously kept me this day. Forgive me all my sins, and graciously keep me this night. Into your hands I commend my body and soul and all things. Let your holy angel be with me, that the wicked foe have no power over me. Amen.