

LOOKING UNTO JESUS!

Mk. 16:19 So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. **20** And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen.

These two verses describe how the Lord Jesus had finished speaking to His disciples ... Then, secondly, they tell us He returned to Heaven. Thirdly, He sat down at the right-hand of His Father. Fourthly, the disciples departed from that place. Fifthly, they began their ministries telling others about Jesus. Sixthly, the presence of the Lord worked through them. Seventhly, they preached the Good News powerfully. Eighthly, signs confirmed the truth they were presenting. ... And ninthly, the word “Amen”, - “so be it”, - indicates that what has been commenced is to be continued.

As you might appreciate, there are many studies which flow out of those nine points ... The summit, - the peak, - though, of the first coming of the Lord Jesus Christ is His death and resurrection which culminate at Calvary and at the empty tomb. Therefore, Calvary and the empty tomb render Christianity distinct and unique from every other religion ... *Our Jesus is alive!* ... He is not the Victim on the cross, but He is the Victor from the grave.

The four major events which ‘sparkle’ brightly in the Saviour’s story are His birth, His death, His resurrection and His ascension, - no one else was born like Jesus, no one else died like Jesus, no one else rose from the dead like Jesus, and no one else left this world like Jesus. ... And there is *another* ‘golden link’ in the chain, - ... there is His birth, His death, His resurrection, His ascension, *and* His second coming. No other religious figure promised his followers what Jesus promised for He has promised to return.

Let’s go to the Mount of Olives, on the eastern side of the city of Jerusalem. At over 2,900 feet, it has served as one of the most important burial grounds. It also features in the Old Testament when David fled from his son Absalom across the brook Kidron, **II Sam. 15:30** And David went up by the ascent of mount Olivet, and wept as he went up, and had his head covered, and he went barefoot: and all the people that was with him covered every man his head, and they went up, weeping as they went up. ... It is where Solomon built idolatrous altars for his wives, **I Kings 11:7** Then did Solomon build an high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, in the hill that is before Jerusalem, and for Molech, the abomination of the children of Ammon. ... On a more positive note, it is where Ezekiel prophesied, **Ezek. 11:23** And the glory of the LORD went up from the midst of the city, and stood upon the mountain which is on the east side of the city.

Jesus made many visits to the Mount of Olives. For example, it was from there He delivered His Olivet Discourse (Mt. 24-25; Mk. 13; Lk. 21), which was in response to His disciples' question, **Mt. 24:3** Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?

... And it was from the Mount of Olives Jesus ascended into Heaven. Let's read about it, **Acts 1:1** The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, **2** Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen: **3** To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God: **4** And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. **5** For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. **6** When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? **7** And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. **8** But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. **9** And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. **10** And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; **11** Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven. **12** Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet ...

Prior to this, the disciples had been hiding for fear of the Jewish authorities. However, when the Lord Jesus found them, **Acts 1:3** he shewed himself alive after his passion [*suffering*] by many infallible [*incontrovertible*] proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God: **4** And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but *wait for the promise of the Father*, which, saith he, ye have heard of me [*i.e. concerning the coming of the Holy Spirit*]. Jesus was about to *ascend* into the Heavenly glory, and the Holy Spirit was waiting to *descend* on the Day of Pentecost. ... As Jesus stood in their midst, on the Mount of Olives, He lifted His hands towards Heaven, He spoke His final words to them (Mk. 16:15; Lk. 24:50) and He began to rise from the earth and enter Glory.

As the disciples stood and watched, **v.10 they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up** ... They could not take their eyes off Him ... They were transfixed. ... Let's look into the future to another day which is coming ... a day the

Scriptures describe so graphically. Jude tells us about Enoch in the Old Testament who prophesied, **Jude v.14** Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints. Isaiah prophesied, **Is. 24:23** the LORD of hosts shall reign in mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before his ancients gloriously ... **25:9** And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and ... we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation. ... **Zech. 13:9** ... they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The LORD is my God ... **14:4** And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east ... He is coming back, - that is *Jesus* the prophets are proclaiming. ... Even before He came the first time, the Scriptures were already speaking about His second coming! ... And He is coming back again to the same Mount of Olives He ascended from almost two thousand years ago!

The Mount of Olives ... On that day, as the disciples were standing in astonishment, - as Jesus was taken up into Heaven, and as they watched, **Acts 1:10** behold, two men stood by them in white apparel (the linen clothing of Heaven, ... and two men had also witnessed to His resurrection) ... The disciples remained riveted to the spot, standing looking upward into the clouds, ... when these two men from Heaven appeared.

... Doesn't it seem a slightly strange question the two men asked, **Acts 1:11** *Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven?* Surely it was obvious why they were standing gazing up into the sky! ... They had just seen something that defied belief! It was unbelievable! ... Do you know how astonished and speechless those disciples were? They were so astonished that *not even Peter had anything to say!!* ... That's how surprised they were!

Mind you, *that* is something else ... Jesus had already said He would leave them, for example, **Jn. 14:2** *I go to prepare a place for you ...* **16:5** *But now I go my way to him that sent me ...* **16** *A little while, and ye shall not see me ... because I go to the Father ...* **28** *I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father. ...* So, they should have known, - they should have been prepared for this parting. They had no warrant for asking Him, **Acts 1:6** *Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?* ... No, for He had already told them He was returning to His Father.

The lesson is this ... The disciples were taken unawares when Jesus left them, - even though He had previously instructed them. They heard, but they weren't listening! Similarly, - even among God's people, - when Jesus returns, they will be many taken unawares ... and that is why we need to be believing the Scriptures, as we watch and wait for Him.

It was, therefore, a justifiable question the angels asked, Acts 1:11 *Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? ... and then they proceeded, 11 this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven. ... Now, read the first part slowly ... their question was clear, simple and to the point, why stand ye gazing? ... There is the slightest of rebukes in their question, why stand ye gazing? ... What are you doing standing, - ... idling, - around here?! ... He's off! Jesus is away! ... Now get on and do the work He commanded you to do! ... Stop standing around looking into the clouds! ... Surely, that is something of a rebuke!*

Yes, they were enthralled with the glorious spectacle of Jesus returning to His Father ... and you would not have expected them to have been looking anywhere else when Jesus rose from the earth! ... But now, He is gone, and there is nothing more to see ... and that is why the angels asked their question, *why stand ye gazing up into heaven?* ... He's gone! He is not there anymore! ... They were standing *gazing* into the clouds ... but there was nothing more to see ... and the angels were instructing them to get on with the work! ... Jesus has gone to Glory, and they have been left to continue His work, just as Luke described it when he opened the new chapter in the Book of Acts, Acts 1:1 *The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, 2 Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen.*

Sometimes we do things that *appear* to be right ... and yet, they are not right for that particular moment. They might have been appropriate and right for another setting, ... but just for now, *no*. ... A few moments earlier, - when the disciples were watching Jesus ascend, it was right for them to be there ... but He had gone, and so there was no longer any point standing there. ... It is like when Paul wanted to go to Bithynia, - and there would have been nothing wrong with going to Bithynia to preach the Gospel for the people in Bithynia needed to be saved ... but the Holy Spirit stopped him (Acts 16:7) because it was not the right time or the right circumstances ... And yet, the Gospel *did* reach Bithynia at a later stage because Peter began his epistle, **I Peter 1:1** *Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.*

God has His way for doing His work, and His work fits within His plan, and it must be done His way which means we have to be open and ready for His leading. ... It wasn't the right thing for those disciples to be standing there *at that time* because standing there looking up into the clouds was no longer

achieving anything. In fact, it was wasting valuable time ... time when they should have been in pursuit of what Jesus had previously instructed them to be doing for looking into the clouds was keeping them back. Instead, they were to begin the action of *waiting* Acts 1:10 for the promise of the Father, and that 'waiting' implied waiting somewhere else ... *and not looking into the clouds!* ... *why stand ye gazing up into heaven?*

And, actually, their waiting for the promise of the Father involved them making the walk down the paths of the Mount of Olives, across the Kidron valley, and back up into Jerusalem, ... for Jesus had charged them, Lk. 24:49 *behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.* Most likely, they would have returned to the upper room. ... So, you see, the angels were right to gently admonish the disciples for simply standing there gazing. ... God had far greater things awaiting them. ...

What are the lessons here? Standing around doing nothing is not an activity in which God expects His people to be engaged! ... What are the practical points to learn? ... Idleness is no occupation for the Christian for we have been saved to follow the Lord's lead, Jn. 9:4 *I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.,* You'll get nothing done 'standing gazing into the clouds', and so, they, - in obedience, - Lk. 24:52 *returned to Jerusalem with great joy: 53 And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God ...* What a witness! ... To anyone who asked them what they were *praising* about, it was their opportunity to tell them Jesus is alive. ... And then, on the Day of Pentecost, they were in the right place at the right time for the right reason ... and all in the right company. Acts 1:14 *These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren. ... 2:2 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. 3 And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost.*

To arrive at that point, though, standing gazing on the Mount of Olives was no longer an option ... they had to 'get their heads out of the clouds' and on to Jerusalem. ... And that is how Mark ends his Gospel account, Mk. 16:20 *And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following.*

Being a Christian is living in the real world. It is not having your 'head in the clouds', hanging on to some superficial ideology, - being a Christian is living

Christ and living for Christ in a world, with real people, and with real circumstances. ... It is not trying to escape the rigours and realities by believing some silly nonsense. Some people think when you become a Christian, all the pathways ought to be smooth, with no bumps in the road, or holes, or obstacles. The plain truth is the Christian faces the same realities of life as everyone else, but they face them with the Saviour, and He helps to bring them through.

In another series of studies, we looked at the disciples individually, and there wasn't any of them who lived an easy life ... *but*, no matter how difficult their circumstances became, they had this, - the Lord's promise, - **Mt. 28:20** *I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.* ... Sometimes, as a Christian, you might feel lonely ... but remember this, you are never *alone*, because you have God's promise, **Heb. 13:5** ... *for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.* **6** *So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.*

When the Lord calls you to be His child, - to be saved, to become a Christian, - He sets His indelible seal upon you that marks you especially out as His, and no one nor nothing can remove that seal. You are His forever. ... Nothing compares, for as a Christian, you are a child of the Heavenly King. Earthly kingdoms come and go, but God's Kingdom is eternal! ... Yes, as long as you are in this world, you have to contend with its issues ... but even when you are passing through them, He has promised, **Is. 43:1** *Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine.* **2** *When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.* **3** *For I am the LORD thy God ...* He is your Shepherd, and He will never lose any of His sheep, and He will bring them all into His fold (Jn. 10). ... Never hesitate to trust Him!

That is His promise, but in the meantime, - in the words of the angels to the disciples, - don't just stand there gazing! They had a work to be getting on with, and that same work has been passed on through the years to us today ... as the hymn so simply describes it ...

There's a work for Jesus, ready at your hand,
'Tis a task the Master just for you has planned.
Haste to do His bidding, yield Him service true;
There's a work for Jesus none but you can do.