

On Christ's Ascension I Now Build

✦ **Better knowledge (vv.16-17)**

✦ **Brighter hope (vv.18-19a)**

✦ **High powered confidence (vv.19b-23)**

In the name of Jesus, our victorious ascended Lord, dearly redeemed disciples:

Throughout history folks have had their eyes on the skies. In the decadent city of Pompeii they apparently looked up too late. Mount Vesuvius blew its top and rained destruction that sealed citizens in death's grip until discovered in those positions by archaeologists. Most famous of all was the sentry still at his post. Where his commander ordered him, there he stood for centuries under the ash. We marvel at such courage and realize with our eyes on the skies that we have every reason to stand our ground and persevere under trial. In his letter to the Ephesians Paul prayed for us too: *"I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better."* **On Christ's Ascension I Now Build.** First, **I...Build** by...

✦ **Better knowledge (vv.16-17)**

In so many ways we Americans are spoiled with God's blessings that our eyes on the skies don't see what others have to see. I think of this in summertime when we have air pollution alerts in the Twin Cities. The sky to the naked eye can look almost clear and sunny. I think back on "sunny" days in Wuhan, central China, where the thick haze from coal fires in that city of over four million people blocks out the sun on the best days. They're well aware, but can't do much about it.

Neither could the Londoners in the early days of the Battle of Britain. Air raid sirens would go off and everyone had to learn where to run for shelter. Sentries with their eyes on the skies were posted all along the English channel to signal the coming of the German bombers. But at first all they people could do was run. Very quickly the Royal Air Force learned to scramble their *Spitfires* to intercept Hitler's fire breathing bombers. Defending their homeland meant one *Spitfire* would take on any and all incoming enemy planes. British pilots soon earned a name for never backing down no matter what the odds. They were one main reason England survived those dark days when she stood alone against the Nazis.

Forty days after Easter Jesus' disciples got a lesson in reality as they stood there gazing into the sky. One minute Jesus had His hands lifted up in blessing, the next He was rising into the sky. Wisps of cloud quickly hid Him from view. Wouldn't you and I keep on looking in wonder whether He would reappear? Did those two men in white chuckle a little when they asked, *"Men of Galilee, 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."* (Acts 1:11 NIV84)

That, dear friends, is the **Better knowledge** we all need, so that we can **Build** our lives **On Christ's Ascension**. He's coming back as He said, *"Where I am, there shall also my servant be."* Think how differently you would spend this night if you knew for sure a thief would try to break in. Like a thief in the night Jesus has promised to come again. But **Christ's Ascension** gives us proof positive that *"every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him."* (Revelation 1:7 NIV84) The Apostle Peter asks a key question in connection with Christ's coming and the destruction planned for Judgment Day: *"Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming."* (2 Peter 3:11f NIV84) Keep your eyes on the skies and be honest with yourself. Are there some days when you don't really want Christ to come find you sinning?

✦ **Brighter hope** (vv.18-19a)

Paul was praying for us, wasn't he? *"I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe."*

Nothing in all the world can outshine our **hope** in Jesus. He is truly our living **Hope**. By His death He destroyed death. He took captivity captive in His triumph over sin, death and hell. It would be like a patriot jet flying through the skies, sucking all the enemy planes out through its engines. They flutter down like little plastic toys that can't hurt the boys and girls who pick them up and laugh. Christ's blood washes away every failure to live holy lives, every moment we feel hopeless and defeated. His resurrection gives us the life of God's full and free justification from all crimes against God. Christ's ascension puts Him in heaven to rule from God's right hand for the good of His church. Not matter how dark the day, knowing our Savior and our Brother rules lights up your heart with **Brighter hope**.

I just love that vivid description of our **Brighter hope** quoted from a WELS pastor a few weeks ago. Some of you said you appreciated this too: "Here's how hope brings joy to your soul. You don't live in the past with bitterness and regrets; you are looking forward because you have an incredible future. No matter how rough life may be right now, someday soon you're going to be pain-free and celebrating in everlasting glory. Hope is how you face surgery or tough it out in a difficult work situation. *Hope is where your heart is when your body is limping along.*"¹ Our **Brighter hope** in Christ also brings...

✦ **High powered confidence** (vv.19b-23)

"That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way."

Most of us never get to meet a real fighter pilot; sometimes we do, but don't realized it. You may remember our WELS member Art Reeder who used to report afternoon traffic on the radio before 911. When our kids were in high school together, Art told me he was once a fighter pilot. "Why not anymore?" I asked. "As soon as you get a family they don't want you anymore," he explained. "Somehow that brings on indecision that can be deadly in the skies." By then Art Reeder was flying Medivac all over the Midwest and training young fighter pilots for the MN Air National Guard.

Now imagine the greatest fighter pilot who conquered death itself is at the world's controls. He is present everywhere. And all His angels fly to protect His own. Jesus just speaks the word and His protection fills the skies. Everything is *"under his feet"* by God's direct command. Soon death itself will be forced into final and unconditional surrender when the angel sounds the last trumpet and by order of our Commander and Savior all the graves will open. Believers and unbelievers will rise – those whose lives evidenced faith by good works, will live eternally with God in heaven; those whose lives of sin proved unbelief will spend eternity in hell away from God.

We're winning mop-up skirmishes now. But Christ alone won the victory. Trust the crucified, risen and ascended Lord Jesus. **On Christ's Ascension I Now Build with Better knowledge, Brighter hope, and High powered confidence** – in Christ alone. Amen.

¹ Quoted from a WELS sermon by Pastor Daron Lindemann, current Editor of *PREACH THE WORD* – January / February 2007, p. 2. Emphasis mine – M.C. 5/08/2011. These sermon helps are available with back issues at www.wels.net/ptw.

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