

We bow our hearts in prayer: Dear Ascended Lord, be with us now as we meditate on Your Holy Word. Send us Your Holy Spirit and make us heavenly-minded and heavenly-hearted, confident that You are able and willing to do all things according to Your gracious nature. Amen.

Our text for meditation...

... We read as follows in Jesus' name:

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And while staying with them He ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, He said, "you heard from Me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

So when they had come together, they asked Him, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"

He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by His own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

And when He had said these things, as they were looking on, He was lifted up, and a cloud took Him out of their sight.

And while they were gazing into heaven as He went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw Him go into heaven." <sup>(ESV)</sup>

*This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen.* <sup>(John 17:17)</sup>

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Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Have you noticed in the Collects of the Day (that prayer we pray just before the Scripture lessons), that we ask some pretty grand and, frankly, impossible things.

Consider today's Collect. We pray: "*that just as we believe Your Only-Begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to have ascended into the heavens,*

*so may we also in heart and mind to heaven ascend, and continually dwell with Him...*"

By that prayer, we are asking God to make us heavenly-minded and heavenly-hearted,

so that we desire, above all else, the Lord's will which ultimately is for us to depart this life in faith for our glorified life with Him.

Perhaps at first that may not sound so grand or impossible.

During difficult times, during illness or suffering, when we are mourning the death of a loved one, we are eager to confess, "*heaven is my home.*"

But what about other times? What about the times when things are going well?

Where would you rather be, at your birthday or graduation party or with Jesus in heaven?

Where would you rather be, on your wedding day or at the marriage feast of the Lamb?

Where would you rather be, at the birth of your child or in Abraham's bosom?

Where would you rather be, on your long-awaited, hard-worked-for dream vacation or in paradise?

Or perhaps you have something else that you are eagerly expecting, thinking,

"I hope the Lord, doesn't come until..."

To be clear: birthdays, graduations, weddings, and other things are not in and of themselves bad.

In fact, they are blessings from God to celebrate

But when we have any hesitancy of having those things instead of God's presence,

then take that as proof of the grandness of the prayer,

even the impossibility of its being answered by our own spiritual abilities.

Any such desire to continue living here in this sin and its corruption instead of heaven shows where we have weaknesses and misunderstandings in our faith.

All we humans know, know by experience, is this life and world. To fathom heaven is beyond us.

It was the same with the Apostles at the time of Jesus' ascension.

The OT prophecies about the Messiah's establishing a kingdom that will never end, was on their minds. It still had to be fulfilled... at least according to their thinking.

And when Jesus reminded them that they would receive "**the promise of the Father**," and when Jesus was visibly among them still after 40 days after His resurrection, it seemed like a good time to ask, "**Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?**"

Almost like saying, "What's the next step here, Jesus?"

How are You going to make this life more livable, more glorious?

How are You going to convert everyone to recognize You as their Savior?

Or else, how are You going to show the world that You are the King of heaven and earth?"

Was this a heavenly-minded thought, or a heavenly-hearted desire?

In a sense it was. They wanted the Scripture to be fulfilled.

But mostly it was a misguided thought and desire.

Misguided by their own ignorance of God's will, of both what was revealed and what was not,

They were seeking an earthly reign of power over the world, rather than a spiritual one.

Misguided perhaps also by their own desire for glory and honor,

as they were even the night that Jesus was betrayed, and on other occasions,

vying among themselves for who would be the greatest in Christ's kingdom.

While we have the benefit of hindsight, and can meditate on their question and Jesus' answer,

I think we would have a really hard time convincing ourselves that we would have done better.

But Jesus leads them away from their misguided worldly thoughts to heavenly-minded thoughts.

They do not need to concern themselves with times or seasons.

That is the Father's concern... and He has it taken care of.

Instead, He pointed out what is to be their concern, that Christ's kingdom be spread.

But the spreading of this kingdom would not be by military triumph or human power.

It would be spread by the power of the Holy Spirit as they witnessed, testified to others

what they heard and saw regarding Jesus during His life, death, resurrection, and ascension.

So Christendom, Christ's kingdom, comes as Christ is preached for forgiveness, life and salvation.

But people must first learn of their worldly-mindedness, of our corruption that would hold us back from desiring to be in glory with God over and above all things on this earth.

For some, this worldly-mindedness is rooted in idolatry as the **cares and pleasures of this life** would **choke** Christ, His forgiveness, and their eternal joys out of them. Luke8:14

For some, there are times of testing, when this world's corruptions and Satan's temptations dishearten them or lead them to doubt God's ability to save and restore them.

For some, there is a very strong sense of their godly vocations, which they desire to complete for the sake of loved ones, such as parents for their children, spouses for each other, or adults for their parents, even pastors for the flock placed under them.

The love that is shown in these desires is certainly a love that is God-pleasing,

as you would desire to show the love of God and help bear the burdens of your neighbors. But when fear is behind it, that you are the only one who could provide what is needed for your loved ones... then beware.

When doubt sets in that God would not be able to provide for their needs in any other way... beware. The graveyard is full of people who couldn't be replaced.

But there is no need for fear or doubt, for we pray (as we purposely say at the end of the each Collect), *through Jesus Christ, God's Son, our Lord, who lives AND REIGNS with You and the Holy Spirit.*

That is a confession of the ascension of our Lord.

You then believe and, through the Words of the Creed, confess in the ascended and reigning Lord.

Then You believe that your human brother, Jesus Christ,

sits at the right hand of God, now making full use of His almighty power, <sup>Ephesians 1:12-22</sup>

and doing so for the benefit of His people, both those that believe now and those yet to believe.

You believe that He ascended into heaven to prepare a place for you and all who are elect. <sup>John 14:2</sup>

You believe that though Jesus is not seen, yet He is still here on earth, as well as in heaven.

That He sees and hears and knows all needs, desires, and prayers... and will answer them all according to His good and gracious will, according to His good and gracious timing.

But if He sees and hears, and knows all, then He also knows your heart and your mind.

He knows the temptations of worldly allurements that you fall into and the sins that plague you.

He knows the burdens of your conscience and your fears and doubts.

And for these, He has already provided the answer. He has already taken care of you.

For He has been crucified, and shed His blood on the altar of the cross to take away your sins, AND the sins of your loved ones. The Father, being satisfied with His payment, raised Him to life.

And in exchange for your sins, He has given you His righteousness.

His heavenly-mindedness... His heavenly-heartedness.

And confirms and seals them to you in His Supper, the Holy Communion where your Savior comes to be with you with His present, though invisible, body and blood.

And so He gives you a clean conscience and makes you heavenly-minded and -hearted.

You may say then, along with St. Paul, **For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.**

**If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. ...**

**My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.** <sup>Philippians 1:21</sup>

If you are not yet so convinced then continue to pray for it,

for it is God's will that you be heavenly-minded and -hearted and so seek and desire

His glorious promises in Christ.

And it will be, that after years and years of praying it,

that He will lead you to see the poverty of this world, with its sin and corruption, and the riches of His heavenly kingdom.

But if you are already so convinced and believe, then thank the Lord who has answered your grand and impossible prayer, and continue to pray it, so that He continue to answer it day after day,

year after year, until He makes you, not only heavenly-minded and heavenly-hearted,

but also heavenly-bodied in the resurrection when He comes again

and restores the Kingdom to Israel in glory for all eternity. Amen.

*Soli Deo Gloria*