

Theme: WHY DID JESUS LEAVE?

- I. To send his Holy Spirit, who enlightens our understanding
- II. To ascend the throne, where he rules the world for his Church
- III. So we would fill in his fullness

“God...give [us] the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that [we] may know [you] better.”

I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ I pray 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 his holy people, ¹⁹ and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength ²⁰ he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, ²¹ far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. ²² And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

Subjects of our ascended King,

“Elvis has left the building.” Some of you are old enough to remember how that phrase started. It’s taken on a new meaning since 1977, when the King fell off the throne. Then Elvis left planet Earth, not just the building.

Our Lord Jesus ascended into heaven. We can’t help but wonder if King Jesus has left the building. Especially because we worship at home, online, not in the church building. If Jesus is King, what’s he doing? For that matter, WHY DID JESUS LEAVE? God answers WHY JESUS LEFT in his Word: to send his Holy Spirit, to ascend the throne, and to fill up his fullness.

Our text for this evening is a pastor's prayer. This Pastor, the apostle Paul, wrote to people he hadn't seen in years. From prison. Talk about social distancing! Still, Paul prayed. **"I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers."** Your pastors don't stop giving thanks for you when you've "left the building," either. We thank God until you leave this world and reach heaven.

God's people, with Paul, 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."** Paul prays God would send the Holy Spirit. The Spirit gives wisdom. Wisdom's first step is trusting in Jesus. The Spirit also reveals what Jesus did for us. The Spirit's tool, like a butcher's knife, is the Bible.

"Jesus loves me; this I know, for the Bible tells me so." This simple song swiftly says what Scripture says. Some have said, "Jesus loves me; this I know, and that's all I need to know." That is all you need to know to get to heaven, but why would you ever stop there? Might as well sing, "Jesus loves me; this I know, and that's all I want to know." That attitude comes not from a heart that loves God, but a heart that loves self.

But if Jesus loves me, WHY DID HE LEAVE? It doesn't always feel like he loves us. But Jesus said he left for our good. **"It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate"**—that's the Holy Spirit—**"will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you."** One reason Jesus left was to send us **"the Spirit of wisdom and revelation."** The Spirit tells us who God is and what he does.

"I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened." In English we say, "Your eyes are a window to your soul." But you know, the eyes of your heart are a window to your whole being.

Here's where the whole thing breaks down. Windows work two ways. When you pass people in your car, maybe you look into their window. They see you; you see them. Unless you've got tinted windows. The eyes of our hearts were tainted, not tinted. So dark, they couldn't see. Our sinful nature made us clueless to know God or understand his power. Or how he uses his power against his enemies. Without God, we are spiritually blind and sentenced to eternal punishment.

So our ascended Lord Jesus sent the Holy Spirit. In the Bible, he comes to us, enlightens our hearts. He calls us by the gospel, the good news about Jesus. He tells

us Jesus loves us. He fills us with hope. But that word “hope” hardly does it justice. It is the eager expectation of those the Spirit calls. **“The riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people.”**

If you’re like many people, the most valuable thing you own is your house. Even if you are a millionaire with mansions upon mansions, your wealth is a drop in the bucket compared to God. He owns the universe. Every house. Every 401K. Every precious gem. That all pales in comparison to God’s inheritance for **“his holy people.”** That’s WHY JESUS LEFT—to prepare a mansion for the saints.

But that’s for holy people. Holy means “fully dedicated to God.” In other words, “perfect.” You’ve got to be a saint to get that inheritance. Since “nobody’s perfect,” who makes the cut?

Maybe you hate stepping on the scale. Whether it’s because you don’t like what you see or you’re afraid you’ll break it, some people would rather do just about anything other than weigh themselves.

If we put our sin on a scale, what would it read? Might it break the scale? No matter how heavy our sin is, God’s **“incomparably great power”** can lift it. That power sends his Holy Spirit, which is WHY JESUS LEFT. The Spirit works God’s **“incomparably great power”**, the good news about Jesus. In the gospel, the Spirit calls us to faith. His power smashes the scale of our sin. It guts the gravity of our guilt. It opens the eyes of this blind heart to see God’s love.

Nothing matches the incomparably great power of the gospel. No scale could measure it. All the weights in all the weightrooms of the world only cover a fraction of a fraction of a percent of God’s lifting prowess. The good news about Jesus, power so great it held Jesus on the cross so he could be the perfect Savior. Power so great God died. Power that raised Jesus to life. Power that makes you holy, a saint in Jesus. He gives you the inheritance. He rose. You rise. He lives. You live.

WHY DID JESUS LEAVE, then? He sent the Spirit, but that’s not all. Jesus rose from the dead. He also rose to the right hand of God. The Ascension of our Lord celebrates the crowning of Christ the King forever. Jesus ascends the throne, receives the crown, takes the scepter, and gets his enemies as the footstool for his feet. Sin, death, and hell have all lost their power. King Jesus is much greater, **“far above every rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked.”**

“My dad can beat up your dad,” the kid claims, confident dad can crush any combatant. He trusts dad. Truth is, our God can beat any god, any force in heaven or hell. He trounced death. No challenger in the ring can compare with God’s greatness. We see it in the way God piles up words for power: “**incomparably great power,**” “**mighty strength,**” “**exerted.**” JESUS LEFT to take up his full power as God again.

So, why, you ask, doesn’t he use it? The world looks like it went to hell in a hand basket. If coronavirus is the best Jesus can do, what kind of powerful God is that? Christ the King’s coronation causes complete comfort. “**I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened**” so you can see Christ is still in control. He rules the world now. We rule with him now. “**God placed all things under his feet and appointed him head over everything for the church, which is his body.**” Jesus rules everything. Nothing can take his control away. Jesus, our head even bends evil to his will “**for the church.**” King Christ does everything for you. He gave up heaven for you. He lived for you. He died for you. He rose for you. He rules for you.

We would never have come up with that plan to save us. God gives us faith to believe it. God still wants you to trust him when what he does doesn’t make sense. In his wisdom, he has allowed plagues, famines, earthquakes. He allowed a pandemic to slow our country to a stall. Maybe we can’t see why, but he promises this is for our good. What’s there’s to worry about? The economy? Death? We believe Jesus has power over those things too! All authority in heaven and on earth. God who loves, is at the wheel. Let him drive the car. He doesn’t need your backseat driving, your advice, or your hand to cover the wheel. Jesus, head over everything for the church, knows how the story ends. He’s got this. That’s WHY JESUS LEFT—to rule the entire universe for our good.

We have this comfort from our King now. But Christ, the head, the command center, has given orders to the body, the church. As head, he gives us protection. He gives us life, our glorious inheritance. Yet since he left, the world does not see him. It sees you, “**the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.**”

But wait, that can’t be me! It’s hard enough to believe even God’s incomparable power can make me a saint, but complete Christ? We can’t give God anything he doesn’t have. He wants nothing. Needs nothing. In his infinite wisdom and power, he has chosen to need you. The world cannot see Jesus, our head. It sees you, his body. You fill out the God so big he fills the universe. You have the power

of God: the good news about Jesus. God, who rules the universe, is working for you. Jesus, who ascended to the right hand of God, has promised to be with you always.

So fill in Christ's body! How? Spread the message of our ascended King! When you see people worried about what they're going to do about coronavirus, ask them: "Can I tell you something that gives me comfort?" Let them know you don't believe in a God who abandoned the world to death, but who loved the world to death. Tell them how Jesus lived, died, rose. Tell them your King controls all things. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you wisdom to share and give them revelation to understand. Jesus, true God with all power, will go with you. He'll accomplish his purpose.

Elvis may have left the building. Even though conspiracy theories say otherwise, he won't come back again unless Jesus wants him to. But Jesus didn't leave the building. WHY DID JESUS LEAVE? He went to send the Holy Spirit, who gives us hope: our inheritance in heaven, won by Jesus. The Spirit creates faith to understand God's power. By that power, Jesus rose and took the throne. Jesus ascended to the right hand of God, the position of all power. He rules the universe for his church. Jesus hasn't left the building. He's still here, in Word and Sacrament. He still comes to people as we, his body, serve one another and proclaim his power, the good news. WHY DID JESUS LEAVE? So as our King, he would always be with us, now and forever. Amen.

"I pray 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 his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe."