



Bishop's Letter – Ascension Day - 29 May 2014, Anno Domini

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. (Acts 1:9-11)

When I was just a very young boy, I loved to go out in the sage fields near our mountain home on sunny autumn days and just lie there looking at the high, white, puffy clouds. The only sound was the chill-autumn wind and an occasional distant droning of an aircraft. Though I have always loved planes, my curious attention was more focused on those mysterious clouds – so very high, and constantly changing. I wondered what they were made of, and how they kept from falling. I imagined some figure in every cloud. In those days, I had an unbounded imagination. I saw generals on horseback, sabers drawn, fixed in time during the charge against the enemy.

Sometimes, I thought I saw angels, or castles, and every other object that occupies the imagination of youth. I was unaware, at that age, of the majesty and glory of one particular cloud that hovered over Mount Olivet outside the gates of Jerusalem, and overlooking the village of His friends – Bethany - some two thousand years ago. It was a very special cloud, unlike any others that had ever formed. It did not appear as different from any other cloud. The thing that made it special was that which the cloud was privileged to receive – our Lord Jesus Christ. The same is true of the heart of man. We may not often tell by looks, but the difference is in whether that heart, like the cloud, has received the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord knows because He is One who looks upon the heart and not the outward appearance.

Jesus came into the world – into Time and Space – to work out His wonderful plan of redemption for us. He came from the Eternal Halls of Heaven into a world that had rejected Him and grown gross in sin and sparing of beauty. Upon the completion of His atoning sacrifice, He rose from the grave and, at the appointed time, ascended back into that Eternity into which no man can look from his platform on this sphere. I refer to that great Church Calendar event of Ascension Day. It occurs always on the 40th day past Easter Sunday (on Thursday). The Ascension of Christ is one of the five major milestones recorded in the gospels of the Life of Christ and is re-confirmed in both the Nicene and the Apostles Creeds.

Just before He was taken up in bodily form, the Lord spoke to the eleven Apostles (and to you and me): *“Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things. And, 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.”* (Luke 24:46-49) All who believe have been endued with that “Power from on High – the Holy Ghost!” The leading question that should grip your heart is this: Have we, each clergy and laity, preached the

Gospel of Christ, and the repentance and remission of sins, to every remunerative audience? Is the Gospel that we preach the full Gospel and not diluted with the soiled hands of translators and critics? THAT is the question, friend.

As Christ ascended from Mount Olivet, He was received into that blessed cloud – out of the sight, for a time, of all beholders – but not out of mind or Spirit. That same cloud that received Christ shall be seen again at the return of Christ. We have God's promise on that: “. . . *behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; 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.*” To the weathered seaman, clouds building in the East may not be welcomed, but to those who grow and produce crops, such clouds would be a welcome harbinger of plenty. To the Christian, we should remember that cloud that received Christ when we look into the heavens. We should remember, as well, that One (King of Kings and Lord of Lords) shall receive you into that same Cloud of Glory at His return. Remember that cloud in which God appeared on Mt Sinai in the days of Moses (Ex 19:18); that Cloud (Pillar) of Fire by Night and Smoke by Day that followed Israel in the Wilderness (*And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night: He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people.* Ex 13:21-22); and remember that cloud that covered the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration to protect their frailty from the Bright Glory of God – *“While he thus spake, there came a cloud, and overshadowed them: and they feared as they entered into the cloud. And there came a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him.”* (Luke 9:34-35) Here, as in the last day, the disciples were WITH Christ in the Cloud. Any clouds in YOUR forecast, friend?

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