

## “Received by a Cloud”—Acts 1:8-11

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Received by a Cloud”, is Acts 1:8-11 → Speaking to His disciples Jesus said: *“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.”* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

Many people can remember a time in their life when they would lay in the grass, maybe even under a tree, and gaze up at the blue sky, offset by fluffy white clouds of various shapes. Usually such a time was when they were children, pointing out the shapes of the clouds which looked like familiar objects or animals. Oh the wonder of being a child and finding such joy and excitement in something as simple as clouds! Unfortunately, it seems as one grows into adulthood that “cloud gazing” happens from a recliner in the form of watching the local weather on TV,

wondering if one should prepare for the worst.

However, maybe “cloud gazing” is not such a bad idea even from a spiritual perspective. In our text the disciples of Jesus experienced His ascension into heaven as *a cloud took Him out of their sight*. Then the angels informed them that Jesus would come back *in the same way as they saw Him go into heaven*. (Verse 11) For the Christian “cloud gazing” has a different purpose *as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies*. (cf. Romans 8:23)

Clouds played a very important part in God’s revelation of Himself throughout history. The pillar of a cloud led the Israelites out of Egypt (cf. Exodus 13:21-22) and even protected them by hiding them from the Egyptian army (cf. Exodus 14:19-24). Yahweh’s glory appeared to His people, veiled by a cloud from which He spoke to Moses. (cf. Exodus 12:16) When He revealed His glory to Peter, James and John in His Son, Jesus, at His transfiguration, Matthew 17:5 says *a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is My beloved Son, with Whom I am well pleased; listen to Him.”* Apparently such cloud theophanies were symbolic of Yahweh’s presence as He revealed His Word and will to His people.

When Jesus told His disciples about His leaving them, He pointed out the importance of His upcoming ascension into heaven. Even though they were filled with *sorrow* over the thought of His leaving them He told

them in John 16:7 → *Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send Him to you.* Thus, if Jesus had not ascended into heaven we would not have received *the Helper*, that is, the Holy Spirit. It is He Who empowers you to believe in Him and lead a Christian life in service to God and others. Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to continue His work in your life.

In the midst of a world where things may seem so out of control or under the control of evil, Jesus' ascension also assures us of His Lordship over everything on our behalf. Ephesians 1:20-23 says God raised Jesus *from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.* Thus, if one thinks he is in control, beware—Jesus is ultimately the One Who is in control and He has the last word! God also *put all things under His feet and gave Him as head **over all things to the church**, which is His body, the fullness of Him Who fills all in all.* It is great comfort to the church in a world so messed up by sin and the devil to know that Jesus reigns above every ruler and authority, both physical and spiritual!

In our text the two men (i.e. angels) assured the disciples that Jesus would come back again in the same way that He went into heaven.

(verses 10-11) This is in accord with Jesus' statement to the high priest during His "mock trial"—*from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.* (cf. Matthew 26:64) Revelation 1:7 says: *Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of Him.* Not only will they wail on account of Him but as they wail they will also bend the knee before Him and confess that *Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.* (cf. Philippians 2:10-11) Unfortunately it will be a confession of sadness instead of joy if they continue in unrepentant sin and unbelief.

Do the words of these angels ring comfort to your ears or do they fill you with fear? Does the knowledge that **you will** see Jesus descending on the clouds on Judgment Day bring joy or make your heart heavy? Your answer to these questions depends upon whether or not you are harboring unrepentant sin in your heart. If you repent of your sins in confession and absolution you receive these words with joy! If you refuse to repent it is important that you confess your sins now on the basis of Jesus' promise: *Whoever comes to Me I will never cast out.* (cf. John 6:37) Don't wait. Why? Because no matter how much "cloud gazing" you may do, thinking you can put off confession and absolution, Jesus also says in Matthew 24:44 → *You . . . must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.*

Jesus' ascension into heaven brings joy to the Christian because it is the prelude to the fulfillment of all His Person & Work! Along with sending the Holy Spirit and reigning as Lord over all, Jesus said another reason for His ascension is to prepare a place for you in the life Yahweh wants all people to experience and for which He created them: **To live in His presence forever in His physical new heavens and new earth with new glorified bodies.** (cf. John 14:2-3; 2 Corinthians 5:5; Philippians 3:20-21; 2 Peter 3:12-13) When you look up at the clouds they are a sure sign that on the Last Day God will raise you and all the dead and give eternal life to you and all believers in Christ. (Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation, © 2017 Concordia Publishing House) Jesus' ascension is the prelude to your bodily resurrection on the Last Day!

In the meantime we wait. However, we do not just sit around waiting as "cloud gazers," twiddling our thumbs in boredom. Jesus' disciples did not do this. Acts 1:14 says they gathered together with other believers who, *with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer*. We wait prayerfully. They also waited actively as the Holy Spirit worked through them as they shared their with others who had need, gathered together in worship around the Word and Sacrament (cf. Acts 2:42-46) and shared the Gospel of Jesus Christ with others. (cf. Acts 3-4) By the power of the Holy Spirit we too can actively *wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ* in the same way.

Thus, celebrating the ascension of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, happens continually as we look to the clouds for Jesus to descend so that we get to ascend into heaven with Him! As 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18 tells us: *For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up **together with them in the clouds** to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words. Even so. Amen.*

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,  
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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