

JUNE, 2017

Sir Knights:

Of all the teachings, miracles, wonders, and manifestations of Christ that appear in the New Testament, one event stands out to me for perhaps all the wrong reasons. Maybe it is because there is absolutely no agreement amongst the Gospel writers, nor the early Pauline corpus, on what transpired around it, where or when it occurred, or – most disturbing to me – why it receives such short shrift. Especially from a literary standpoint, the description of this seminal event is a weak closing codicil in Mark and Luke, is surprisingly absent in Matthew (not so much so in John), and is unsurprisingly twisted a bit by Paul for more mundane reasons. This event is Ascension.

One might forgive Mark and Luke for being a little terse. After all, the main character in their dramas has worked miracles, has been put to death, has risen from the dead, and has even chosen to stick around and continue to teach his select for a while longer. What more can they say? You have to find a way to get the protagonist off stage somehow – levitation is in character – though to only get a single verse on the event is unsatisfying. After all that has come before, perhaps one really can't expect a prosaic "Exit, pursued by a bear" (William Shakespeare, "A Winter's Tale", Act III Scene 3 stage directions).

Paul's Acts opens with a brief synopsis of Christ's doings post-resurrection, and is the only source for the duration (40 days) of His stay, though is absent of the detailed stories in Mark and Luke. The one story he does relate, however, exists mainly to counter those Orthodox who doubted Jesus by making him out as the political Messiah who would restore Israel but failed. Paul also rolls out new characters as commentators, likely "recasting" the tomb angels of Luke 24 to gain some credibility by mimicking the extant Gospel, which is a familiar technique in the sacred literature of the time, but Paul essentially uses Jesus' Ascension as nothing more than a delaying

statement that the Kingdom is not here yet, and no one knows when it will be, so just wait for it.

Matthew's failure to even report the event is curious, but it does make the closure of his Gospel much more effective. From Matthew's perspective, the point is not that Christ left, only to promise to return (or provide something else through the Holy Spirit), but it is that Christ *never* leaves his true disciples once they have accepted his teachings.

Which brings us to John. Here there is no onstage event for the Ascension. Jesus plainly tells Mary:

"Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" (John 20:17)

And yet just a couple of weeks later, he permits Thomas to physically examine his wounds. So is the Ascension for John something a bit more than a stage direction?

Most likely, for John's Gospel properly ends with Christ's admonition "Follow Me". It is not about who stays, who goes, when He shall return, and in what Form He will appear, but it is all about the journey now with Christ as your Guide. Rise up – ascend – and Follow.

*Soli Deo Gloria!*



S.K.Scott @. Gothe, REGC