

The all-inclusive vacation has become a popular vacation option the last couple of decades. Cruises to Alaska or the Caribbean, resorts in Jamaica, Cancun or the Dominican Republic—many of them specialize in these all-inclusive vacations. This is how they work: you pay a set price upfront for everything—a place to stay, all the food and drink you want, different kinds of entertainment—and then you check in and go and enjoy yourself, with no worries at all. That’s an all-inclusive resort. Of course, you still have to get there. You have to fly down to where the cruise embarks or drive to the place where the resort is located.

God has set up an all-inclusive resort for us Christians. He calls it “heaven” in our text. It’s all been paid for by Jesus Christ, and God’s power will make sure we get there. That’s God’s ascension message to us this evening:

WE’RE GOING TO GOD’S ALL-INCLUSIVE RESORT

- 1. Jesus already paid for our reservations**
- 2. God’s power gets us there**

The Apostle Peter says, ***“In his great mercy God has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”*** Jesus lived for us and died for us to pay for our reservations in heaven. His perfect life in our place was lived for us, and His death in our place was a full payment for all our sins. Jesus took away the full debt we owed God. He shouted out from the cross, ***“It is finished!”***, which in the original Greek means, “It has been completely fulfilled, it has been paid for in full!” Heaven is ours. Eternal life belongs to us. God has a heavenly resort all ready for us, because Jesus has paid for the reservations.

The proof of that is Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. When you pay for something in a store, the merchant gives you a receipt for all the goods you bought. That receipt proves you really purchased those items. So also Jesus’ resurrection is God’s receipt to us, God’s proof to us that we are bought and paid for. We know for sure that our sins are forgiven, we know for sure we have become holy before God, we know for sure that we have eternal life—because Jesus is alive. His resurrection is God’s proof of purchase. His life means our life. His resurrection means our resurrection. We’re going to God’s all-inclusive resort because Jesus has paid for it in full.

Jesus’ ascension into heaven is simply a follow up to His resurrection. Ascension is a sequel to Easter. Jesus ascended back to heaven as a conquering hero. His ascension proves that we also will ascend into heaven, just as His resurrection proves that we will rise from the dead. Jesus said, ***“I’m going to prepare a place for you, and if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come***

back and take you to be with me, that where I am, you may be also.” Jesus is ruling the whole universe now in glory so that He can receive us when we leave this earth and enter into glory with Him. God’s heavenly, all-inclusive resort is ready for us whenever we leave this earth. It’s been bought and paid for in advance, just waiting for us to enjoy it when we get there.

That is a wonderful comfort for us as we go through life. We don’t have to do anything to obtain heaven. We can’t do anything to earn heaven. Jesus has already paid the complete price, and He’s there in heaven now making everything works together for our good until we get there. The biggest lie the devil foists upon people in this world is the lie that they have to do something to get right with God. By nature every person in this world is a little Pharisee who thinks that he or she has to do something to earn God’s favor. Even many Christian churches teach that God did the big thing with Jesus dying on the cross, but that wasn’t enough to pay the full price. Many Christian churches teach that mankind has to help God along a little bit or cooperate with God to get God to open the doors to His heavenly resort. But such a teaching undermines God’s gospel. Heaven is absolutely free, God’s unconditional gift, and it’s absolutely prepared, all ready for us to go there and enjoy it. For anybody to try and pay for what God has already paid for is to slap God in the face and tell Him Jesus’ pre-payment wasn’t good enough.

Look how God’s all-inclusive resort is described in our text: ***“an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you.”*** God’s heavenly all-inclusive resort is so spectacular that Peter has to use three words to tell us what **doesn’t** happen to it. It can’t perish, spoil or fade. That’s what happens to earthly resorts, doesn’t it? Tsunamis, hurricanes or tornadoes can wipe them out with waves and winds, or they get old and outdated after a few years of use. The carpeting gets worn out, the rooms need painting and remodeling, the swimming pools get gunked up and everything gets old and decrepit. Not so God’s heavenly resort! Life in heaven will never get old. We’ll never be bored in heaven. The thrill, the joy, the glory will never end. Nothing will be able to make heaven lose its luster. The heavenly resort Jesus paid for us is glorious and eternal. Like you, I just can’t wait to get there!

Now as wonderful as all-inclusive resorts are on this earth, you still need to get there. Mexico, Jamaica, Cancun and the Dominican Republic--they are thousands of miles from Wisconsin. You need to get airplane tickets and fly there to enjoy them. This is true also for God’s all-inclusive resort, heaven. We still have to get there. And there’s only one way to get to heaven, and that’s by faith in the Lord Jesus. But here’s the good news on that, the second part of our sermon this evening: God’s power gives us that faith in Jesus and preserves us in that faith in Jesus, so that we arrive safely at our divine all-inclusive resort.

Yes, faith in Jesus is our ticket to heaven. A person needs to believe in Jesus to get there. But the Bible makes it clear that we can’t believe in Jesus by ourselves. In fact, we can’t even help a little bit by our own power to believe in Jesus. The Bible describes people by nature as haters of

God, people living in darkness, spiritually dead and followers of Satan. So, because of that, God Himself has to give us His power to believe in Jesus.

That is why Jesus ascended into heaven. He went there in order to send the Holy Spirit to this earth in full measure. Just like the ascension is a follow up or a sequel to the resurrection, so also the ascension is a prelude or a prequel to Pentecost. Jesus ascended into heaven so that He could pour out the Spirit's power on His disciples. The Spirit's power is what gives and maintains faith in Christians' hearts. The ascended Jesus gives His Spirit still today by giving His Word to the Christian church and by giving people to the Christian church who preach and teach that Word with power. Jesus ascended into heaven so that we might have pastors and teachers in our congregations, so that we might maintain colleges and seminaries to train called workers, so that we might have Call days in our Synod and assign workers to proclaim the gospel to the world. This is all God's power at work in our world.

And it's God's power is that gives people the faith they need to get to heaven. Scripture teaches that truth in many passages. The Bible says, ***"No man can say that Jesus is Lord, except by the power of the Holy Spirit."*** The Bible says, ***"We believe according to the working of God's mighty power."*** Jesus says, ***"No man can come unto me unless the Father, who has sent me, draws him unto me."*** Jesus told His disciples on another occasion, ***"You did not choose me, but I chose you to go and bear fruit."*** Our faith in Jesus is completely God's doing. We're going to God's all-inclusive resort in heaven because God's power alone has given us the faith we need to get us there.

And more! God's power alone is what **keeps** us in faith in Jesus. That's Peter's point in verse five in our text when he says, ***"We through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed."*** The word "shielded" here in our text is a military term, a term taken from battle and warfare. Our faith is protected, our faith is preserved, our faith is maintained, because God, like a fierce warrior, like a gallant soldier is shielding us from the devil's attacks on it. We are kept believers in Jesus by God.

Oh what a comfort that is to us as we live our daily lives! God fights for us to preserve us in our faith. God acts like a fierce warrior to keep us Christians. Daily we are attacked by Satan, daily we are exposed to worldly temptations, daily we are pressured to compromise our faith and give up on our Jesus. And daily God gives us His power. Daily God causes us to remember His promises of forgiveness and comfort. Daily God gives us fellow Christians to remind us of God's love. Daily God sends us people who love and embrace us and encourage us not to give up, people who hug us and help us and counsel us with God's gospel. All of these things are God acting like a gallant soldier for us, fighting our battles to keep us in faith in Him.

And where ultimately is that power of God to keep us in faith? In the Word and in the Sacraments. It's through the Bible and through the gospel message in the Bible, the gospel message in our Baptism, the gospel message in the Lord's Supper, that God continues to hold us in faith in Christ. The ascended Jesus entrusted that gospel to His disciples right before He ascended when He said, ***“Go make disciples of all nations. Do it by baptizing in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and do it by teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”*** While God has many ways to channel His power to us, it's always God's Word alone that keeps us from falling away from Jesus and losing our faith in Him. And God promises He will continue to use that Word to keep us in faith when He says, ***“He who has begun a good work in you will keep it unto the day of Jesus Christ.”***

So keep your eyes on the all-inclusive pre-paid heaven God has prepared for us. Rejoice that it's all ours to enjoy, bought and paid for alone by Jesus' blood. Hang on to the receipts we have for it, that prove it's all bought and paid for —Jesus' resurrection and ascension. Trust God's powerful Word to sustain us in our faith throughout our daily life. We're going to God's all-inclusive resort.

AMEN.