

To God Alone Be The Glory

I wonder who your hero is. A hero is anyone you admire enough that you want to be like them. It's easier to have heroes when you're young and you haven't figured out who you are yet. But what about when you're older, when you can articulate your values, when, hopefully, you still work at attaining certain ideals? Can you still have heroes? Not only do I think it's possible for mature adults to have people they look up to and strive to imitate, I believe it is an important component of a life that brings God glory.

You might expect that, on Ascension Sunday, we would hold up Jesus as our hero. And we do. Without Jesus we would have no chance of getting to heaven. Jesus is the only person that we can pattern our lives after who had no character flaws—no flaws at all. There are, however, many other people for us to imitate, especially in the Bible—people who looked to the Lord in faith—people who, by God's grace, lived obediently according to God's commands. They were not sinless, but they were blameless. If we strive to be like these believers, we will find ourselves becoming more and more like Jesus. And so on this Ascension Sunday, **BECAUSE CHRIST ASCENDED**, our Lord comes to us through Genesis 5 and urges: **BE LIKE ENOCH**.

BE LIKE ENOCH: Walk With God...

(21-24a) We sure don't know much about Enoch. His biography in Genesis (5:18-24) comprises all of 90 words in English. The New Testament book of Hebrews (11:5-6) adds 39 more words to Enoch's sketchy bio, but no new info. And Jude (14-15) points out that Enoch warned the people of his time about the coming judgment. Well, how can we try to **BE LIKE ENOCH**, if we know so little about him? Answer: because what we do know is sufficient.

BE LIKE ENOCH. What does that mean in practical terms? Enoch lived 65 years before he fathered a child. Could it be that God wants us all to wait till we're 65 to have children? Perhaps God wants us to give our children wild and crazy names like Methuselah. (I wonder what children on the playground would do with that.) Then there's the fact that Enoch lived 365 years. Come on, folks, you can make it a few hundred more years, can't you? Does **BEING LIKE ENOCH** mean you have to have sons and daughters? That's unattainable for us childless couples, and by God's grace should remain unavailable to the not-yet-married.

No, when God's Word holds up Enoch as a hero to be imitated, it's because he "walked with God." Enoch's walking with God must be important, because the Holy Spirit had Moses (the human author of Genesis) write that phrase twice. So

then what does it mean to ‘walk with God’? It means to have a close relationship with the Lord, to cling to God even though we can’t touch him or see him ...to live in such a way that our words, our actions, even our thoughts reflect the truth that God is always near us, with us, in us. But don’t be afraid that God will treat you like McDonalds treats their French fries: drown them in hot oil till they’re crispy and throw them out when they can’t stand up any longer. You’re his precious child. Because of Jesus’ ascension, God wants you to walk through life with him, even though he knows your sins. He’s not counting them against you because of Jesus. Walk with God. All the time. If you stray, come back. You’re forgiven through Jesus. Walk with God.

In Enoch’s day, things were very much like in ours. Society was bungee jumping off a 90-foot high bridge with 100 feet of bungee cord. More and more people were headed for sure destruction in hell because they refused to believe in the God who promised to send a Savior. Assuming that the genealogy in Genesis 5 didn’t skip any generations, Adam was still alive in Enoch’s day: any person on earth could have looked him up and said, “Adam, tell us the story again about how God promised to send the serpent-Crusher.” But instead—“We don’t want a Savior!” their lives shouted. “We want to do our own thing!” their actions asserted.

It’s hard to swim against the current. “Come on, Enoch, you can’t really expect me to consider marrying so-n-so before we find out if we’re compatible. Enoch, you’re not homophobic, are you? Enoch, if you spank your kids for any reason, I’m calling DCFS on you. Enoch, your religion isn’t the only truth; mine’s just as good as yours. Come on, Enoch, connecting with others through Instagram or Facebook or gaming or fishing is more important than connecting with Jesus.” Of course, the people in Enoch’s day would have phrased their words to fit that culture, but rejecting God is rejecting God, no matter how you phrase it. Yet even though Enoch faced the same kind of opposition we do in our day, Enoch walked with God. God was his whole life.

God wants us to walk with him. But how do we know which path God is taking so we can walk with him? To walk with God is to believe the promises God revealed in the Bible, especially the ones that say that all our sins are forgiven in Jesus, that God is not ashamed of us, no matter how bad we’ve been. To walk with God is to respond to our gracious God by faithfully attending worship—not because God issues a rewards card, and when we reach 5000 services, our card is full and we get into heaven. No. We gather for worship (by electronic means again this week) so we

can hear God's Word and get strength to walk with God. We read the Bible or a devotion book at home so our households are joyfully devoted to walking with God between Sundays. After we've been instructed and have stated our agreement with the teachings, we normally attend Lord's Supper often for the forgiveness of sins. It's great to walk with God after he assures us of forgiveness through Jesus' body and blood. To walk with God includes 'lotsa' prayers: prayers of confession and thanksgiving and requests for ourselves and others. To walk with God is to believe that he has heard all your requests and will give you what you've asked for sooner or later. Or maybe he'll give you something better than what you asked for. To walk with God is to live as if Jesus' ascension to God's right hand means what God's Word says: that he really is in charge, even if you think life is falling apart.

BE LIKE ENOCH. Walk with God. But we don't walk with God all the time, do we? Sometimes we'll be walking with our heavenly Father, our hand in his, and yet we want to be away from him so much that we squirm, trying to free our little hand from his, so we can run away from him. You know what I'm talking about, don't you? "Yeah, yeah, God, you don't want me to be materialistic, but I like nice things. Yeah, yeah, God, you don't want me to worry, and you promise me daily bread, but life is really

scary when the economy goes south. How will I ever have enough for school? How will my savings last till the end of retirement? God, I know your Word is important, but I can't take time for it now because I have to pay off my credit card and my property tax, and my friends want me to hang out with them. Yeah, yeah, God, you want me to honor my parents and others in authority, but there's no way you meant my parents, or my governor, or my president. Yeah, yeah, God, you want me to bring all my anxieties to you, but I feel better faster when I have a few drinks or distract myself with earthly activities." That's not how Enoch was. And we are not walking with God when we try to control things that are clearly outside of our control. Yes, the Lord wants us to work at solving the challenges we face, but the ultimate outcome is in his hands. We are not being like Enoch when we act as if Jesus recently got up from his throne and left the right hand of God for a little bite to eat, and now solving our problems is all up to us. If you're having a problem and you aren't asking God for help, aren't you walking by yourself?

Enoch walked with God. But many of Enoch's relatives did not. In fact, during the life of Enoch's great-grandson, there were only eight believers left in the whole wide world. Do you think Enoch ever prayed for his relatives, asking God to lead them to repentance? I'm guessing

yes. Let's do the same. The ascended Jesus will come back soon. We want everyone to be ready through faith in him. Let's pray for them, and watch for opportunities to tell them about their ascended Lord and the coming judgment.

Do you realize how important Jesus' ascension is in our daily lives? Whenever you are reciting the creed and you say, "Jesus ascended to God's right hand," do you fathom all you have just professed? Jesus' ascension teaches us, "Look backwards and look forwards."

So let's look back. Who ascended to heaven? Jesus. That's right, Jesus' dead body floated up into the sky for God the Father to give him a proper burial on a heavenly hillside overlooking a marvelous meadow with wonderful white wildflowers and a bubbling brook, right? No! It was the *living* Jesus who ascended! So then Jesus' ascension points us back to his resurrection. Why did Jesus rise from the dead? Because God the Father accepted Jesus' death as full payment for our sins (see Romans 4:25). So then Jesus' ascension points us back further to his death on the cross, where the debt of our worry and pride and trying to control things we shouldn't and wandering from God was paid off. **BECAUSE OF JESUS' ASCENSION...** because we're forgiven, the Holy Spirit can urge us to **BE LIKE ENOCH**.

24Enoch walked with God; then he was

no more, because God took him away.

BE LIKE ENOCH: Walk with God...

...Till He Takes You Home (24b). Do you see how Jesus' ascension also points us forward? And what's ahead of us? Eventually death—unless Jesus comes back first. Wouldn't it be awesome not to experience death? So far only two people, Enoch and Elijah, have entered heaven with their soul and body not having been separated by death. Not even Jesus did that. He died and rose first, and then he ascended with soul and body. Everyone else in heaven is there without their bodies. Their bodies remained on earth to return to the dust from which they were taken.

But we're not dead yet! Why is that important? Because on the day Jesus ascended, the angels said he would come back, visibly, on the clouds, so no one can miss his return. And if he comes back tonight or tomorrow, we'll probably be alive. So we'll get to go to heaven without dying, just like Enoch did.

But what if Jesus waits a while longer before he returns? Then **BE LIKE ENOCH:** keep walking with God till he takes you home. In other words, keep trusting Jesus' promise that he's preparing a place for you in his heavenly home. Sooner or later, you too will be no more, because God will take you away to himself in heaven. And then you'll **BE LIKE ENOCH** forever ... **BECAUSE JESUS ASCENDED.**