



Reflection on the Scriptures of the Day
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The Ascension of the Lord

On November 19, 1999, an interesting, and somewhat memorable moment in TV history occurred. There was a popular new game show on the air in fall of 1999, it was called "Who Wants to be a Millionaire?" It was a wildly successful big money game show that has been on the air, either on network TV or in syndication, for 21 years. As a matter of fact it's still on the air. I really liked the show when it began in 1999; Regis Philbin was the host and the audiences were mesmerized at the size of the top prize.

In any event, on November 19, 1999, on the television game show, "Who Wants to be a Millionaire," a 31-year-old man named John Carpenter was the contestant. He was an IRS agent from Massachusetts, and a pretty smart guy. He needed to correctly answer 15 multiple choice questions, starting with a \$100 question, then \$200, then \$300, then \$500, then \$1000, and growing in value through the 15th questions which would be worth \$1,000,000. However, if he got even one question wrong, he was out of the game. His mission was to win the million dollars.

And John Carpenter blazed through those questions – and kept going, one after another. I should mention that on "Who Wants to be a Millionaire," to help-out contestants, there is feature called "Life Lines." "Life Lines" are used by a contestant who may be unsure of an answer. There are three types of these "Life Lines" – a contestant could call a friend or family member for help with the answer, he could poll the studio audience, or he could ask the host to knock out 2 of the 4 multiple choice answers to narrow his choices.

However, a contestant could only use each of these "Life Lines" once. Well, during the first 14 questions on the show he appeared on, John Carpenter didn't use one single "Life Line" – he didn't seek any help, he just did what he had to do complete the mission of winning \$1,000,000.

Then, finally, he got up to the \$1,000,000 question. If he answered it correctly it would make him the first million-dollar winner on the show. The audience was quiet and the million-dollar question was read: "Which of these U.S. Presidents appeared on the television series 'Laugh-In'?", and his four choices were A) Lyndon Johnson, B) Richard Nixon, C) Jimmy Carter, and D) Gerald Ford. Carpenter looked at the question pensively, then paused, and then told the host, "I think I'm going to need to use a lifeline... I want to call my father."

There was a bit of excitement in the air, because this is the first time this player looked like he needed help to complete the mission of winning \$1,000,000. And so, the call was placed, and the father's voice was heard on the phone line. The host told the father of John Carpenter that his son had reached the million-dollar question... and that was calling on him for assistance. The host read the question to the father, verbatim, and then put his son on the line. And something unexpected happened.

Rather than asking his father for help with the correct answer, John Carpenter said this to his father: "Hi, Dad. I don't really need your help. I just wanted to let you know that I'm about to win a million dollars." The audience applauded, and the Carpenter said "Richard Nixon, final answer." And the host, equally excited, paused for a moment and then announced, "You've just won \$1,000,000." The audience went nuts, cheering, joy everywhere – confetti flying everywhere. It was a moment worth remembering: when a son's first thought upon realizing the accomplishment of his million-dollar mission was not to be smug, not to be self-congratulatory, but rather to first share his joy with his father, and then to show other future contestants, that the seemingly elusive prize was winnable. It could be done!

Today, we celebrate the Solemnity of the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ. Today, we celebrate Jesus making his return to the Father, back to the heavenly homeland, to the paradise of paradises, God's kingdom. This event, this Ascension, is a most pivotal part of our faith, not because the Son of God goes back from whence he came; that was expected. The distinction made to the faithful at this moment is when Jesus tells them to wait for "the promise of the Father" to be fulfilled – and that promise was identified two Sundays ago when we heard Christ tell his followers that after he goes: "I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be. Where I am going you know the way."

In other words, Christ is telling his follower, basically, what John Carpenter told the audience and the other contestant on that game show: "I won the ultimate prize, so can you, I showed you the way to do it. Follow me!" Similarly, Christ also had His "John Carpenter moment" with his Father. On the game show John Carpenter revealed to his father that he accomplished what he set out to do. Likewise, Christ, in John's Gospel, in Chapter 17, before the Ascension, calls to his Father and says:

"Father, the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one... that they may be made perfect... that the world may know that You have sent Me... and that they ... may be with Me where I am... [and] behold My glory which You have given Me."

Yes, before ascending away from his ministry on Earth, he announced the completion of his mission to his Father. Jesus knew that he had brought salvation to fallen man, which was the mission of the Father for Him. And now, before making His Ascension, and before telling his Apostles and followers, he had first told his Father: Mission completed.

Once that pronouncement was made to the Father, then Christ went on to give His "right answer" that is, the "good news" to his Apostles and followers. And it is ultimately the same answer that he gave to Mary Magdalene on the day of the Resurrection in St. John's Gospel (20:17), "I am going to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." He then told her and his Apostles to make that known, and further commended them on many occasions to "follow me."

So, what's the significance of all this? Good question. Here's the Monarch Notes version of the significance of what happens here: In Salvation history, Heaven had been closed off to mankind from the time that the original sin of Adam and Eve breached our relationship with God, and successive covenants, and admonitions of prophets failed to fix the breach. Then, in the fullness of time, God came to his people in the flesh, in the person of Jesus Christ, and ministered to his people. And we know how the story goes from there. But four key events follow:

- On Good Friday, Christ sacrificed to heal that relationship between God and man, taking our sins to the cross. He made the perfect sacrifice once, and for all time, for us men and for our salvation.

- On Easter Sunday as he conquered death, we benefitted from His victory as the gates of Heaven swung open, and the souls of the just abiding in the Limbo of Fathers, like Moses, Abraham, etc., were able to enter Heaven, as would generations upon generations to come. This too, is our hope today, that Heaven awaits us.
- On the day of the Ascension, Christ goes back to the Father, to the Kingdom. And because it's a good neighborhood up there, he doesn't lock the door behind him.
- Next Sunday, on Pentecost, the Holy Spirit is being sent into the Church to enliven and guide us –the Church militant on Earth. By that act, God is giving us all we need to follow Christ; to follow his ways in this world, and then, to follow him into the next.

Salvation won.

Death conquered.

Heaven restored.

The Spirit sent.

All good news.

And all for us, by a God who loves us, even at our most unlovable. That's the significance, that's the story.

And to put that story in context with the story I began with, consider this:

Back in 1999, John Carpenter won what many would consider the ultimate prize: \$1,000,000. And he let his father know before anyone else that he was about to complete his mission; he gave glory to his father on live TV. Then he gave that final answer, those final words, and made TV history, and earned his glory. And afterwards, went back to his father victorious.

Jesus Christ, our Lord, our Savior, the Alpha, the Omega, the beginning, and the end, won what is for us the actual ultimate prize: not some stinkin' million dollar prize, but something a trillion-times better: Salvation. The ultimate prize. And Christ let his Father know of, and be glorified by the completion of his mission on the Earth. Then as promised, he ascended before his Apostles, living out his promise to them, that "I am going to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God

But before Christ left physically from this world, with His mission completed, He then gave his followers, the faithful, and especially his Apostles, their own mission to complete before they could follow him. He said, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

And with that admonition, the final question, that million-dollar question, before us is most clear: "Will we know, love and serve our Lord in this world, so as to be happy with him in the next? That is, will we be his witness in this world?"

That's the question, and the answer to that is worth far more than a million dollar.

If you aren't sure of your answer, use a lifeline:

- **Lifeline #1: You can call a friend**, that is seek God in prayer and allow His Holy Spirit to move you to serve him well and be his witness in the world.
- **Lifeline #2: You can poll the audience**, that is you can seek the example of the saints who over the centuries have been a vast cloud of witnesses to how to answer God's call.
- **Lifeline #3: You can narrow down the choices of possible answers.** Yes, if all is else fails, you can ask the host narrow down the choices for you. I'll do that for you: the choices are now simply twofold: Yes or No.

Yes or No?

The choice is yours.

What is your final answer?