

MAY 16, 2010

UP IN THE AIR
ACTS:1:6-11; JOHN 17:20-26

THE RECENT ACCLAIMED MOVIE, *UP IN THE AIR*, STARRED GEORGE CLOONEY AS RYAN BINGHAM, A MAN WHOSE JOB IT WAS TO FLY ALL OVER AMERICA FIRING PEOPLE. CORPORATE MANAGERS, WHO FOUND LETTING PEOPLE GO TOO STRESSFUL, HIRE THIS MAN TO DO IT. HE RELISHED THE JOB, BECAUSE HE WAS SO GOOD AT IT. HE PRIDED HIMSELF ON BEING EMOTIONALLY DETACHED FROM EVERYONE. HE WAS PROUD TO BE THE QUINTESSENTIAL AMERICAN INDIVIDUALIST/LONER.

I WON'T GIVE YOU ANY SPOILERS, IN CASE YOU WANT TO SEE THE MOVIE. SUFFICE IT TO SAY THAT THE TITLE REFERS TO A FEW THINGS. FIRST, THAT RYAN BINGHAM'S GOAL IN LIFE IS TO ACQUIRE 5 MILLION FREQUENT FLYER MILES. ALSO, THAT HE IS "AT HOME" ONLY WHEN HE IS FLYING (HE HATES TO TOUCH DOWN IN HIS STERILE, BARELY-FURNISHED APARTMENT) "UP IN THE AIR" REFERS TO WHAT HAPPENS WHEN HE MEETS TWO PEOPLE HE FORMS ATTACHMENTS TO. WHAT HAPPENS IN THE END ADDS ANOTHER LAYER.

THIS MOVIE CAPTURED WHAT MIGHT BE HAPPENING TO MANY PEOPLE IN THIS HYPER WORLD. EVERYTHING WE KNOW IS "UP IN THE AIR". WE ARE LOSING CONNECTIONS WITH MANY THINGS. TRUTH IS UP IN THE AIR. THE CONSENSUS OF MANY PEOPLE IS BASICALLY THAT THERE IS NONE. EVERY PERSON IS SUSPECT. EVERY PERSON HAS HIS OR HER OWN TRUTH AND WHEN THEY TRY TO FOIST UPON ANOTHER PERSON, THEY ARE DANGEROUS. TRY BEING A CHRISTIAN PREACHER IN THAT MILIEU. MANY DISTRUST BEFORE WE EVEN OPEN OUR MOUTHS. ALL UTTERANCES ARE IMMEDIATELY VIEWED AS PERSONAL OPINION.

RELATIONSHIPS CAN BE UP IN THE AIR. WE USE THAT TERM TO MEAN THAT THERE IS NO ASSURED ENDING IN SIGHT. WHAT'S THE ANSWER, OFTEN WE DO NOT KNOW, WE SAY "EVERYTHING IS UP IN THE AIR". OUR WORK IN THIS ECONOMY CAN BE. OUR MARRIAGES AMIDST THE ALL TOO MANY DIVORCES CAN SEEM "UP IN THE AIR." THE YOUNG ADULTS TODAY LIVE IN A TOTAL DIFFERENT REALITY FROM US. THEY EXPECT TO EXPERIENCE SERIAL EMPLOYMENT RATHER THAN WORK IN ONE PLACE. THERE ARE FEW RULES, LITTLE LOYALTY, ALL SEEMS TO BE RULED BY THE "BOTTOM LINE".

**OUR FUTURE IS UP IN THE AIR. OUR PENSIONS ARE UP IN THE AIR. OUR LIVES
CAN SEEM UP IN THE AIR.**

**IS IT ANY WONDER WHY THE UPTICK IN ANXIETY, PANIC, FEAR,
DEPRESSION, ACTING OUT? PEOPLE HAVE LITTLE THEY CAN RELY ON.
THERE IS ALWAYS VERY LITTLE TO GRAB ONTO WHEN IN A WHIRLWIND OR
A REALITY TORNADO. THERE IS NO PLACE TO ALIGHT. IT IS HARD TO FIND A
PLACE UPON WHICH TO CENTER OUR LIVES. WHERE IS OUR FOUNDATION?
WHERE IS OUR HANDLE? WHERE IS OUR ROCK? WHERE IS OUR LIFEBOAT?**

**WHEN JESUS WAS “UP IN THE AIR” IT MEANT THAT HE ASCENDED TO
THE FATHER AFTER 40 DAYS OF RESURRECTION APPEARANCES. IT WAS HIS
LAST GOODBYE, HIS PHYSICAL PARTING, UNTIL SUCH TIME THAT HE
WOULD RETURN. LUKE, WHO WROTE ACTS, DESCRIBES THE EVENT, JESUS
TELLS THEM THAT THIS IS NOT THE END TIME YET, “BUT YOU WILL
RECEIVE POWER WHEN THE HOLY SPIRIT HAS COME UPON YOU; AND YOU
SHALL BE MY WITNESSES....TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH” WHEN HE HAD
SAID THIS , AS THEY WERE WATCHING, HE WAS LIFTED UP, AND A CLOUD
TOOK HIM OUT OF THEIR SIGHT.**

**STOP FOR A MOMENT. DO YOU BELIEVE WHAT JUST HAPPENED? OR DO
YOU LAUGH IT OFF LIKE THE GUY WHO CALLED JESUS THE “FIRST
ASTRONAUT”? LUKE TOOK IT SERIOUSLY AND PASSED IT ON. UP UNTIL
RECENT DECADES THE CHURCH CELEBRATED ASCENSION DAY. IN GREECE
IT STILL IS A LEGAL HOLIDAY. ASCENSION DAY WAS OFFICIALLY LAST
THURSDAY, BUT VERY FEW WORSHIP ON THURSDAY. SO WE LIFT IT UP
TODAY. WHY WAS THIS EVENT IMPORTANT TO THE CHURCH? WHAT DID IT
MEAN TO CHRISTIANS THAT JESUS WENT “UP IN THE AIR”?**

**FIRST IT WAS IMPORTANT TO THE EARLY CHURCH. PAUL WRITES (EPH
4:10) “HE WHO DESCENDED TO EARTH IS THE SAME ONE WHO ASCENDED
FAR ABOVE ALL HEAVENS, SO THAT HE MIGHT FILL ALL THINGS WITH THE
SPIRIT.” I TIMOTHY, “WITHOUT ANY DOUBT, THE MYSTERY OF OUR
RELIGION IS GREAT: HE WAS REVEALED IN THE FLESH, VINDICATED IN THE
SPIRIT, SEEN BY ANGELS, PROCLAIMED AMONG GENTILES, BELIEVED IN
THROUGHOUT THE WORLD, TAKEN UP IN GLORY.” HEBREWS: “SINCE THEN
WE HAVE A GREAT HIGH PRIEST WHO HAS PASSED THROUGH THE HEAVENS,
JESUS, THE SON OF GOD, LET US HOLD FAST TO OUR CONFESSION.” I
PETER(3:21,22): “AND BAPTISM...NOW SAVES YOU—NOT AS A REMOVAL OF
DIRT FROM THE BODY, BUT AS AN APPEAL TO GOD FOR A GOOD**

CONSCIENCE, THROUGH THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST, WHO HAS GONE INTO HEAVEN AND IS AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD...” THESE ARE JUST A FEW REFERENCES TO THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ASCENSION.

THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM, THE TEACHING TOOL OF OUR TRADITION PUT IT THIS WAY. THE ASCENSION IS IMPORTANT BECAUSE JESUS BECOMES OUR ADVOCATE IN HEAVEN. HE IS THE MEDIATOR BETWEEN HUMANS AND GOD. HE IS OUR LAWYER WHO HAS THE EAR OF GOD AND PLEADS OUR CASE. HE IS GOD’S REMINDER THAT WE HAVE BEEN SAVED. HE IS THE PATIENCE OF GOD, WAITING FOR AS MANY PEOPLE TO BE SAVED AS POSSIBLE BEFORE THE RETURN OF CHRIST AND THE EXTREME ENDING OF ALL THAT IS SINFUL AND NOT OF GOD.

THE ASCENSION IS IMPORTANT BECAUSE OF OUR FUTURE. IT IS WITH CHRIST. HE PROMISED TO TAKE US WITH HIM WHEN THE TIME COMES. HE IS THE PIONEER WHO PASSED THROUGH DEATH TO LIFE—A NEW LIFE—IT WILL BE BETTER THAN THIS ONE. WE LONG ALWAYS FOR A WORLD WITHOUT SUFFERING AND INJUSTICE. IF WE BELIEVE WE SHALL ONE DAY KNOW THAT DIMENSION OF LOVE AND GRACE.

FINALLY, THE CATECHISM STATES THAT HE WENT UP IN THE AIR IN ORDER TO SEND DOWN THE HOLY SPIRIT. IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN HE IS CALLED THE “COMFORTER”, LIKE THE WARM BLANKET WE ALL LOVED IN OUR CHILDHOOD. THIS SPIRIT IS WHAT KEEP US FILLED WITH SPIRITUAL GIFTS, KEEPS THE DIVINE ALIVE IN OUR HEARTS, KEEPS FAITH ALIVE IN THE WORLD, KEEPS HOPE ALIVE, AND JUSTICE AND LOVE A POSSIBILITY.

WHEN JESUS IS UP IN THE AIR IT IS THE OPPOSITE OF INCONCLUSIVE LIVING. IT ACTUALLY IS ANOTHER PLACE FROMWHERE WE CAN GRAB OUR FAITH IN THE WHIRLWIND OF THIS LIFE. CHRIST IS ALIVE WITH GOD. HIS SENT SPIRIT KEEPS US ALIVE IN FAITH. UP IN THE AIR IS NOT AN INSECURE PLACE FOR CHRISTIANS, IT IS A GRATIFYING CHANGE OF STATE. WHEN WE ARE UP IN THE AIR WITH JESUS, OUR HEARTS SOAR LIKE EAGLES TO GOD. WE ARE BUOYED UP BY LOVE AND COMPASSION. WE LIVE A VIBRANT LIFE HERE, BECAUSE JESUS WENT THERE. “HE IS SEATED AT THE RIGHT HAND OF THE FATHER...AMEN