

VOC May, 2015

## He Ascended into Heaven

Hello Dear Listeners;

Today I ask you to think about an event of worldwide importance for all people. The commemoration of which, however, threatens to receive far less attention than Mother's Day. It is the Ascension of the LORD Jesus Christ who went to His home in heaven forty days after He rose from the dead. Also in this country many celebrated Ascension Day last week Thursday, for the second Thursday in May has for years been set aside for this commemoration.

Now some have suggested that to celebrate what they label as the '*disappearance*' of the Lord Jesus Christ is a rather strange occurrence. They ask, "Where is the LORD, actually?" "No one has ever visited heaven!" Though vast areas of the solar system have been mapped, if there is a heaven, well, no one has ever actually seen it".

Yet if you believe the bible's account of the ascension of the LORD you will have no doubt. For Christ's disciples saw their Master ascend on high the day a marvelous cloud took Him out of their sight. Those disciples are faithful ear and eye witnesses of the event.

The evangelist Luke, also known in the bible as "*The beloved physician*" wrote both his gospel and the Book of Acts. Although the latter is known by many as The Acts of the Apostles it is better named *The Acts of the Lord Jesus Christ which He continued to do through the apostles*. For in the very first verses of that book we read Luke's personal statement to a man named Theophilus that reads like this;

*In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles He had chosen.*

Then Luke went on to give an account of what happened in the intervening forty days between Jesus resurrection and the day He was “ taken up before their very eyes” that very special cloud hiding him from their sight.” ( Acts 1: 9)

We may call that cloud a true “*glory cloud*” for it embraced Christ Jesus as it were, as He went up, up, back to His home in heaven. That cloud reminds us of that glory cloud which once appeared above the tabernacle and later, above the temple ( Exodus 40:34 and 1 Kings 8:10). That cloud too was indicative of the presence of God Almighty.

So Christ’s ascension was really the answer to the prayer of the LORD Jesus who had pleaded with His Father in what is known as His High-Priestly prayer recorded in John 17. In it he said, “ *And now Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began*” ( John 17:5).

Now much has been written and much can be said about the ascension of the LORD Jesus. While the fact of His ascension is being called into question by not a few today I am not going to dwell on the biblical evidence for this fact. For you and I either believe ( as the apostle Paul once wrote to his “dear son” ( 2 Timothy 1: 2) in the faith that “ All” or “Every” Scripture is “God-breathed” and therefore true and reliable, ... or you don’t.

I would like you to think for a moment and realize that although Jesus Christ is no longer with us physically, bodily, (for He went from point A, here on earth to another place, point B, that is heaven) , He nevertheless is

*still with us.* For Jesus Himself told His disciples after His resurrection, when they were at the mountain where the risen Christ had told them to go, “ *All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me....*”

Then His closing words were, “ *And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*” ( Matthew 28: 20b). And although Jesus had told his disciples He would be leaving them He also said, “ *...I will ask the Father and He will give you another Counselor to be with you forever.... The Spirit of truth*” ( John 14: 16). Then immediately following these words He said, “ *I will not leave you as orphans, I will come to you*”. v. 18.

What did He mean but that He would always be with them, no not physically but with his *divinity, majesty, grace and Spirit.*” That’s what the churches which sponsor this program confess in one of their statements of faith <sup>1</sup>

O it is so, just as a bride will greatly miss her husband who had to leave her to go overseas let’s say, for a extended period of time, so the church of Christ which is *Christ’s* bride, will miss her Head and Savior Jesus. She will long for His return. But then Jesus told his disciples, when they were filled with grief at His telling them He was going back home to the Father, “ *But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away.*” John 16:7)

For while He was on earth Jesus, because he was also truly human, could only be in one place at a time. Yet from of old God had promised that the Gospel would go out to *all nations*. Jesus could and would see to that from heaven above, from where He would exercise His universal authority. From heaven directing his disciples by His Word and Spirit so that the Gospel of salvation would also be brought to us and be heard by us and be effective in the lives of many, many people.

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<sup>1</sup> Heidelberg Catechism, LORD’s Day 18.

So then, just as there are great benefits for us in the resurrection of our Lord, there are also benefits, gifts, comforts, and joys for us in Christ's ascension.

Indeed there are: For He is there at God's right hand, that is, the place of honor and authority, to plead our cause. We bow in prayer before God's throne and the Son of God passes our prayers and requests to the Father. He accepts them and will answer them because of Christ's completed obedient work here on earth. Because He was obedient unto death.

The Lord Jesus did not return to heaven to escape the brokenness of this world, and the many times we continue to grieve him with our sin and disobedience. O No! For He opened the way to the throne room of God for us. In the Old Testament only the High Priest could enter the inner sanctuary of the tabernacle and temple, and then only once a year, on the Great Day of Atonement. But Christ Jesus came into the Father's presence "for us" as it says in the letter to the Hebrews.<sup>2</sup> He gained access to the Father for all who believe that we might come into God's presence continually. He gained that access to the Father for us by His supreme sacrifice on the cross.

Furthermore Christ Jesus is in heaven "*in the flesh*" that is with a real human body, be it a glorified body. That too is a marvelous gift for it is His pledge and so His assurance, "*That he will also take those who believe that is His members, up to Himself.*"<sup>3</sup> We may say that with his body He represent us, who live here below. Besides, do we feel hurts, disappointments, loneliness, sorrow, physical and emotional stresses? He knows and He sympathizes and he hears and helps. Today He still has a

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<sup>2</sup> chapter 9:24

<sup>3</sup> Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 18, Q. and A. 49

body and He too suffered, even the most hellish agony. He truly sympathizes with us.

Well then dear listeners, we have every reason to rejoice and to sing about the ascended LORD. He has the whole world in His hands for the sake of those who truly belong to Him and His church.

What does it mean but that while we live here below even in a broken world in which there is much sin and misery, yet we may receive spiritual energy to go about our task, our calling here below. We may place our trust and hope in Jesus Christ. That hope is a sure hope that looks to the return of our Saviour. It is, as the bible says,<sup>4</sup> “ *an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.*” Therefore look up. Look up to the ascended Christ and to heaven where He is seated in glory and honor, and.... from where He comes to judge the living and the dead. He is King Triumphant, and is strong, to Save.

Amen, and till next time have a wonderful day.

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<sup>4</sup> in Hebrews 6: 19