

VOTC May, 28, 2017 C. Bosch

Jesus Will Return

“ Two men, that is, angels, said, “ Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven”.

Acts 1:11

On Thursday, May 25, the Christian church celebrated the Ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a feast which on the one hand calls for sober reflection. On the other hand it is a great reason for joy and thanksgiving.

I know, it is so that this date on the church's calendar of glorious events does not trigger a lot of enthusiasm and praise in the minds of many. It is for them a “better-be-forgotten” festival with little or no meaning for your life and mine.

Furthermore, isn't a little much to believe that Jesus Christ supposedly risen from the dead, should be able to travel through space as if by magic . This in order to reach heaven, his destination from which it is said he returns to judge the living and the dead?

After all, no one, it is said, has ever discovered heaven. This while scientists are in possession of some powerful telescopes. Including the ones aboard the spacecraft Cassini, presently diving in between the planet Saturn's rings. Not to mention the Hubble telescope which, until the James Webb Space telescope becomes (it is hoped)

operational within the next two years, is only one of an increasing number of fabulous, far-reaching 'eyes' into the universe.

Learned scientists who have gathered information of galaxies and black holes, even planets left undiscovered for thousands of years, have never had a glimpse of heaven.

Yet the bible says in unmistakable words that Jesus, after lifting up his hands and blessing his disciples, "parted from them and was taken up into heaven." (Luke 24: 51).

His work here on earth was done. He had suffered and died on Calvary's cross to be the ransom that set free all those sinful people who believe in Him. He rose in triumph from the grave and although also this wonder is denied by many, he was seen alive by dozens of people.

Forty days after his resurrection he went home. Yet not to disappear from the scene for before long he would send the Holy Spirit down. That the church of Christ might be prepared for Jesus' return. His return in which the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with a trumpet of God." (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 18).

No doubt the very thought of Jesus' return as a righteous judge strikes fear in the hearts of not as few unbelievers. For then they will have to face the dreadful consequences of their sinful and rebellious actions.

Yet to those who believe and long for Christ's return he will grant an eternity of blessed fellowship in his presence and with those whom he

has been busy gathering, defending and preserving throughout the centuries.

There is tremendous comfort, hope and joy for those who believe in Jesus Christ and do not doubt his return. Their troubles today, in what the bible calls a “valley of tears” may be many, grievous, and at times seem hopeless. Yet the Lord gave them, and gives you, if you believe this, assurance, “ *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me, and I give eternal life to them. And they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand.*” (John 6:40).

There is a great deal of comfort offered by Jesus’ return that is not exclusive to those who enjoy good health and are able to do their daily work without difficulties. The comfort of Jesus’ return is also for those who are on I.V. lines in a hospital, and undergoing long-term treatment or confined to a wheelchair. There is comfort for those in the last stages of their life here on earth and for those whose doctors have to say, “ *There is no hope of recovery for him/her.*” For Jesus gives this lasting encouragement to those who believe in him. Speaking about the will of his Father he said,

Everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day (John 6:40).

But then, believers, though their thoughts and hopes are surely focussed on the future nevertheless receive great encouragement for today as well. For though he went home to his Father in heaven Christ Jesus is there for his believing children today. He sympathizes with them. He’s there, in that gloried human body which was his when he had conquered the powers of death. One of the confessions of the

churches sponsoring this broadcast speak of the “benefits” of Christ’s ascension for Christians.

These include his “*pouring out of heavenly gifts*” on them. These gifts are a veritable cornucopia, a shower of gracious blessings. They include the fact we have the whole bible today. It is that Word which the Holy Spirit, sent down in such abundance on the Day of Pentecost works into the hearts of people. There are also those people we call special office bearers in the church: preachers, elders, deacons, who perform acts of ministry for the comfort, admonition, and direction of the believers.

There is the beauty of knowing that one’s life is not useless, not without purpose because the ascended Christ is working towards the fulfilment, the culmination of all things. Life and history is not some dreary merry-go-round in which nothing ever changes. No, but it is because Jesus ascended to the throne room has all things in his hands, that we’re moving on. Moving on to his certain return.

O I know there is a lot of difference of opinion about the stages or details of that return of his. Perhaps we can come back to some of those details including what is called “the rapture” and the “millennium” or his thousand year reign, at a later time. Let us realize here and now that when he returns there will be a simultaneous resurrection unto everlasting life for believers and a resurrection that spells everlasting punishment and death for unbelievers.

In the Book of Daniel, ch. 12: 2 we read that at that time

Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

Each day and every hour the Lord Jesus Christ gives us opportunities to use the precious gifts that we all have for good. The peace, patience, wisdom, understanding, as well as the ability to comfort someone and to work for public justice and the protection of vulnerable children as well as the aged must not just lie unused, dormant, or neglected.

Even Timothy, the apostle Paul's fellow labourer had to be reminded, "*Do not neglect the gift you have*" (1 Timothy 4:14), that is, the gift of faith the Spirit worked in Him through the Gospel.

There are those who find themselves in horrible, life-threatening, tortured situations. yet they may take great comfort from the knowledge that Christ will come back to judge the living and the dead. In all their "sorrow and persecution"¹ they can and do lift up their heads and eagerly await as judge from heaven, Jesus Christ, "the very same person who submitted himself to the judgment of God for their sake."²

We may consider the ascension of Jesus the wages the Father gave to Christ Jesus for his completed work here below. It is, as well the answer of his heavenly Father on Jesus' prayer recorded in Joh 17: 5,

¹ a term used in the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 19, Q. and A. 52

² Ibid.

And now Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.

This gloried and ascended Savior pleads the cause of his faithful children before his Father's throne, day in and day out. What a joy and what a comfort then to believe in Him and to entrust one's life to him. I pray that you may have a blessed Ascension Day in rejoicing in the wonder of his royal homecoming. Amen, and may the Lord be with you.