

REFORMED CHURCH BELLVILLE: ASCENSION DAY 21 MAY 2009

Sing before: Hymn 6-1:1

Let us commence this meeting with God by declaring openly to one another and to God:

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth. Beloved grace and peace be to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, through the mighty working of God the Holy Spirit.

Amen

Psalm of praise: Psalm 47:3+4

Prayer:

- **Doxology**
- **Worship**
- **Confession of sins**
- **Forgiveness**
- **Gratitude**
- **Prayer for the need of the congregation for the church, the authorities and the sinful world and appeal to God's promises.**
- **General prayer**
- **Enlightenment from the Holy Spirit for the sake of the ministry of the Word.**

Amen

Psalm 68:8

Scripture reading: John 6

Scripture text: John 6: 62 and Heidelberg Catechism Lord's day 18

“What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before!”

The ascension proclaims the greatness of the Lord Jesus Christ. The ascension was the fulfilment of the prophecy in Psalm 110:1: “The LORD says to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.””

That is why, immediately after his baptism, God the Father said of Him:

And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”

Why was, and still is, the ascension of the Lord Jesus throughout the centuries so important to the Christians?

Consider firstly the Jews who lived in Jerusalem after the crucifixion.

- Jerusalem, which to the Jews was the place where God's feet stood on earth, had changed into the place where the Son of God in whom they believed was humiliated
- It suddenly became the place where their lives were no longer safe.

In a way it became a symbol of what was to lie ahead for the Christians as the last days neared.

Hence the remembering of this total act of almight of the Lord Jesus is so important – actually it is the occasion of his enthroning and coronation as the eternal King of all time.

In the ascension we confess the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In John 6.62 the Lord Jesus himself points to his glory. First He says:
 “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him.” (John 6.56)
 These words were totally unacceptable to the disciples and to the Jews.

- They could not understand this figure of speech
- And they did not comprehend the contents and meaning thereof.

That is why the Lord Jesus refers to His ascension.

- When they see this their vexation will turn into comprehension
- Because then they will see the promotion and the glorification of the Son of Man.

In practice this means that then they will grasp the meaning of the words of the Lord and come to belief.

- Then they would also comprehend the meaning of the Lord’s Supper where the Lord is in fact in faith consumed spiritually.
- The reason? The Lord Jesus’ body will then be taken away from the earth – which would place the issue of eating his body in perspective.
- **Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, “Does this offend you? What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! The spirit gives life, the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.”** (John 6:61-63)

We confess three issues in particular about the ascension to heaven of the Lord.

- We confess that the Lord Jesus ascended into heaven. We confess that this ascension revealed his glory.
- We confess that Jesus is the Son of God who ascended into heaven as it was promised in the Scriptures. Remember what was written in Psalm 68:17-19:
- **The chariots of God are tens of thousands and thousands of thousands; the Lord has come from Sinai into his sanctuary. When you ascended on high, you led captives in your train; you received gifts from men, even from the rebellious – that you, O Lord God, might dwell there. Praise be to the Lord, to God our Saviour, who daily bears our burdens.**
- The ascension of the Lord Jesus and his placing at the throne of God was also symbolised centuries before in the function of the High Priest who had to enter the sanctuary once a year to make atonement for the sins of the people.
- **For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.** (Hebrews 2:17)

With the ascension of the Lord Jesus the great Day of Atonement for the world arrived. It still continues. Eventually it shall be fulfilled completely at the Second Coming.

When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats

and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. (Hebrews 9:11-12)

In this way the Lord fulfils this which he said to the people in John 6. In this act of ascension lies the greatest revelation of God's almighty and glory.

- With a human body he goes out of this creation into eternity with God.
- With the same body, which he assumed out of Mary and which was crucified, died and was buried, he ascended into heaven. What greater revelation of his Godhead and almighty would we desire?

The ascension was the completion of his ministry of propitiation on earth.

- He went through unspeakable fears and suffering for our sins.
- With his ascension he goes out of the miseries of the grave and death in to the eternal glory of God.
- He goes out of the world of stress and strife in to the realm of God's perfect peace.

The Lord Jesus went to the heaven of heavens where he now prepares a place and intercedes to receive his entire church with him.

Let us read what we confess about this in the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's day 18:

18. Lord's Day

Q. 46.

How dost thou understand these words, "he ascended into heaven"?

A.

That Christ, in sight of his disciples, was taken up from earth into heaven; (a) and that he continues there for our interest, (b) until he comes again to judge the quick and the dead. (c)

(a)

Acts 1:9: And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.

Matt.26:64: Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.

Mark 16:19: So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God.

Luke 24:51: And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven.

(b)

Heb.7:25 : Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.

Heb.4:14: Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession.

Heb.9:24: For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us:

Rom.8:34: Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.

Eph.4:10: He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.)

Col.3:1: If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.

(c)

Acts 1:11: Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.

Matt.24:30: And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

Q. 47.

Is not Christ then with us even to the end of the world, as he has promised? (a)

A.

Christ is very man and very God; with respect to his human nature, he is no more on earth; (b) but with respect to his Godhead, majesty, grace and spirit, he is at no time absent from us. (c)

(a)

Matt.28:20: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

(b)

Heb.8:4: For if he were on earth, he should not be a priest, seeing that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law:

Matt.26:11: For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always.

John 16:28: I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father.

John 17:11: And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are.

Acts 3:21: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.

(c)

John 14:17: Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.

John 14:18: I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.

John 14:19: Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also.

John 16:13: Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.

Matt.28:20: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

Eph.4:8: Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.

Eph.4:12: For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

Q. 48.

But if his human nature is not present, wherever his Godhead is, are not then these two natures in Christ separated from one another?

A.

Not at all, for since the Godhead is illimitable and omnipresent, (a) it must necessarily follow that the same is beyond the limits of the human nature he assumed, (b) and yet is nevertheless in this human nature, and remains personally united to it.

(a)

Acts 7:49: Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest?

Jer.23:24: Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the LORD. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the LORD.

(b)

Col.2:9: For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.

John 3:13: And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.

John 11:15: And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe; nevertheless let us go unto him.

Matt.28:6: He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.

Q. 49.

Of what advantage to us is Christ's ascension into heaven?

A.

First, that he is our advocate in the presence of his Father in heaven; (a) secondly, that we have our flesh in heaven as a sure pledge that he, as the head, will also take up to himself, us, his members; (b) thirdly, that he sends us his Spirit as an earnest, (c) by whose power we "seek the things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God, and not things on earth." (d)

(a)

1 John 2:1: My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:

Rom.8:34: Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.

(b)

John 14:2: In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

John 17:24: Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.

John 20:17: Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.

Eph.2:6: And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:

(c)

John 14:16: And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever;

John 16:7: Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.

Acts 2:1: And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

Acts 2:2: And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.

Acts 2:3: And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.

Acts 2:4: And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Acts 2:33: Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.

2 Cor.1:22: Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.

2 Cor.5:5: Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit.

(d)

Col.3:1: If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.

Philip.3:14: I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Amen.

Closing prayer.

Closing Hymn: 12-2:2+3

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Amen

Dr MJ Du Plessis

Reformed Church Bellville

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Scripture: New International Version