

## REFORMED CHURCH CLANWILLIAM : SUNDAY 18 AUGUST 2013 EVENING SERVICE

**Sing before:** 149:1

*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: 47:4

**Prayer:**

- **Doxology**
- **Worship**
- **Confession of sins**
- **Forgiveness**
- **Gratitude**
- **Prayer for the need of the congregation of 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**

Scripture Versification 12-2:3

**Scripture reading:** Acts 1

**Scripture text:** Acts 1:9 & 11, Catechism Sunday 18

**9 Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.**

(Acts 1:9)

**11 who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven."**

(Acts1: 11)

This event in the history of the world is so immense that there are only a few who can really comprehend this event of the ascension of Christ.

- The disciples stand there gazing at the heavens – without comprehension.
- Now the angels must come and tell that this time Jesus is finally gone but that He will re-appear in exactly the same way.

When we examine the Bible we find the same thing:

- Matthew wrote nothing about the ascension.

- Mark writes nothing about the ascension and neither does John.
- It is only Luke who describes it.

He closes the Gospel of Luke by the ascension.

- Then he starts the book of Acts with it as well.
- It is as if the matter was too great to encompass for all the other writers of this part of the history and they just never came to writing about it.

Let us today examine everything the Bible teaches about the ascension and the matters directly preceding it.

- Jesus was crucified.
- On the third day He arose,
- During the duration of forty days He appeared to people in various places.

He does this for two reasons:

- The first is because He especially wanted to make use of this time to issue commands to His disciples via the Holy Spirit (verse 2)
  - In verse two the work of the Holy Spirit is heavily underlined.
  - The work of the Holy Spirit was co-determining to the election of the apostles – and also to everything they learnt.
  - Now the Holy Spirit determines their final polishing during these forty days.
  - The last enabling of the apostles took place by the descent of the Holy Spirit.

The ascension and the descent of the Holy Spirit thus together determine the work of the apostles. We keep this in mind whilst listening to the rest of the sermon.

The second reason for the appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ is because He wanted to display Himself clearly alive and physically to His disciples.

- They must make very sure that it is he and that He physically arose from the dead.
- Therefore during these times He even eats together with them.

This is also why it is every time clearly added that Jesus appeared after His suffering to so and so – like here in Acts 1:3

- We understand under “His suffering” also “His death”.
- Thus after His death He appeared to all.

By these repeated physical and live appearances the life of the Lord Jesus stronger and stronger gains the meaning of victory.

- It was events that convinced more and more about the power of God.
- Take note of the fact that it took place over the time of forty days.

In the times of the Bible forty days was the time that had to expire in aid of nullifying any mistake or doubt.

- It a matter could carry on for forty days then it was no longer questioned.
- Forty days was also a time of completeness – together with the certainty.

Let us quote a few examples from the Bible:

- During the Flood it rained for forty days.
- Moses was for forty days on the mountain when he received the Law.
- After His baptism the Lord Jesus is in the desert for forty days and then the devil went to tempt Him.
- Now, over the time of forty days the Lord Jesus often appeared to the believers.

But observe what took place hereby: people bound by sin suddenly experience the joy of victory!

- No longer are they the lost in hell and in death!
- God, Jesus Christ is their living king that physically and spiritually destroyed the power of hell and became alive again.
- We can all enjoy living by knowing that we physically will arise from death as the Lord Jesus Christ repeatedly proved during this time.

But what meaning has this all? This is what the Lord Jesus now teaches during these last moments:

- We must wet to work and proclaim that God maintains His right in two ways.
- Certainly to punish the sinners, but even more: He grants, for the sakes of the Lord Jesus Christ, also grace to those who believe and are converted.

The disciples then immediately understood that here kingdom work is mentioned.

- Then they asked: Lord, are You, during this time, going to re-establish the kingdom for Israel?
- Take note that Jesus did not chastise them about the question whether the kingdom would be re-established, but indeed about the TIME thereof.

Knowing the times is not the privilege of mankind.

- It is mere inquisitiveness and has very little to do with salvation.
- The times and the occasions God determined in His almight.
- The double use of words indicates that God determined every time and occasion to the smallest detail.

In verse 8 it is again written that we must work. As history progresses we must do something with the Gospel.

**"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."**

(Acts1: 8)

Now we are back at the start of this sermon – at verse 2.

- The Holy Spirit will grant us power and then we must be witnesses for the Lord.
- We must testify that the Lord Jesus lives, and that He ascended to heaven.

This is also exactly what took place at that moment because when the Lord Jesus told the disciples that they have to be His witnesses, a cloud took Him away from their sight.

- A very powerful event takes place here: in front of their eyes the Lord Jesus moves from the time into eternity.
- This is a confirmation of God's allmight – He is not bound to any borders in His power and also not in the execution of His council.

Now the disciples are staring at the heaven.

- They are so dumbfounded that in fact for a moment they are brought to a standstill.
- The two men in the white clothes had to send them away to go and start their work.

Just prior to the ascension the Lord Jesus issues commands and then He unexpectedly departed.

- The disciples were not prepared for it.
- The two men in the shiny clothes afterwards tell them that Jesus will come back in the same way He left. Unexpectedly.
- At that moment of His Second Coming He would want to see what happened to His command in the meanwhile.

The moment of the departure of the Lord Jesus the end of times started.

- The ascension and the Second Coming of Christ are thus indivisibly joined to each other.
- We now wait upon the Second Coming – but do our lives and our world display the signs of the expectation of the Second Coming?

It rather seems that our world – like the world of the times of Noah – use the power and time granted by God to ripen himself for the judgement of the Lord.

- Revelation 13 up to the last chapter also teaches so.
- When the world will be at the peak of it's power then it will suddenly collapse with the appearance of Christ.
- The last days will also be terrible days.

But we do not need to worry us to death about these days. We are safe.

- For us our Lord has worked the eternal life and atonement of all our sins.
- By His ascension He in fact proved that no power will and can stop Him to do what He decided to do.
- What He earned on earth by His suffering and death that He now cares for from heaven with His Word and the powerful working of the Holy Spirit amongst us. Right up to His Second Coming.

We read that the Second Coming will take place as follows: (Matthew 24:30 onwards)

**30 "Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.**

**31 "And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.**

(Matthew 24:30-31)

The meaning of the ascension is thus that God wants to thereby reveal to us that His power reaches over this world and the one of the angels.

- His power reaches over this time and over the hereafter.
- This revelation of His power must strengthen our faith to glorify and praise Him.
- We must strengthen ourselves to always live with the certainty that we belong to God and that nothing can estrange us from Him – not now and also not till eternity.

Come, let us read together what we confess in the Heidelberg Catechism about the ascension of our Lord Jesus in Sunday 18:

Sunday 18

46. Q. What do you confess when you say, He ascended into heaven?

A. That Christ, before the eyes of His disciples, was taken up from the earth into heaven,[1] and that He is there for our benefit[2] until He comes again to judge the living and the dead.[3]

[1] Mark 16:19; Luke 24:50, 51; Acts 1:9-11. [2] Rom. 8:34; Heb. 4:14; 7:23-25; 9:24. [3] Matt. 24:30; Acts 1:11.

47. Q. Is Christ, then, not with us until the end of the world, as He has promised us?[1]

A. Christ is true man and true God. With respect to His human nature He is no longer on earth,[2] but with respect to His divinity, majesty, grace, and Spirit He is never absent from us.[3]

[1] Matt. 28:20. [2] Matt. 26:11; John 16:28; 17:11; Acts 3:19-21; Heb. 8:4. [3] Matt. 28:18-20; John 14:16-19; 16:13.

48. Q. But are the two natures in Christ not separated from each other if His human nature is not present wherever His divinity is?

A. Not at all, for His divinity has no limits and is present everywhere.[1] So it must follow that His divinity is indeed beyond the human nature which He has taken on and nevertheless is within this human nature and remains personally united with it.[2]

[1] Jer. 23:23, 24; Acts 7:48, 49. [2] John 1:14; 3:13; Col. 2:9.

49. Q. How does Christ's ascension into heaven benefit us?

A. First, He is our Advocate in heaven before His Father.[1] Second, we have our flesh in heaven as a sure pledge that He, our Head, will also take us, His members, up to Himself.[2] Third, He sends us His Spirit as a counter-pledge,[3] by whose power we seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God, and not the things that are on earth.[4]

[1] Rom. 8:34; I John 2:1. [2] John 14:2; 17:24; Eph. 2:4-6. [3] John 14:16; Acts 2:33; II Cor. 1:21, 22; 5:5. [4] Col. 3:1-4.

**Amen.**

Closing prayer.

Closing Psalm: 145:1, 2

The Lord bless and keep you, the Lord make his face shine on you, the Lord turn His countenance to you and give peace.

**Amen**

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