

REFORMED CHURCH CLANWILLIAM : SUNDAY 27 JULY 2014 EVENING SERVICE

Sing before: Scripture Versification 9-1:11

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

Scripture Versification 1-1:1

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 5-2:5

Scripture reading: Revelation 5

Scripture text: Revelation 5; Catechism Sunday 18

On Patmos, John was in heaven in the Spirit. He saw and heard inexpressible things. He saw the Lord Jesus Who had departed from earth in all His glory. He also saw how the work of Jesus Christ became fulfilled.

Let us in this sermon consider the following two matters:

1. **The eternal King in heaven.**
2. **The departure from earth of the eternal King.**

1. **The eternal King in heaven.**

John saw that at the right hand of God there was a remarkable scroll.

- Ordinary scrolls were inscribed on the inside only,
- But this scroll was filled with writing on both the inside and the back.
- On this scroll was inscribed all of God's planning for the world and its history.

- The significance of the scroll's being inscribed on both sides is to indicate that the Lord had planned everything so thoroughly that no time or space had been wasted.

This scroll then led to tension in heaven. A challenge was issued to anyone on earth or in heaven to break open the seals of this scroll. Nobody was able to do so. Not even one of the mightiest angels dared to attempt it.

John understood the importance of this.

- If the seals of this scroll could not be broken, the history of the world would not have developed any further.
- This meant that the glory of God could not have been revealed to us,
- nor could the eternal existence after death, and with that the new heaven and the new earth, have come about.

One of the elders brought it to John's attention that the seals would nevertheless be broken.

- There was a Lion who would accomplish it (v.5)
- When John looked up, he saw that it was not a lion, but a Lamb, in their midst, a Lamb standing as though it had been slain.
- This means that the Lamb bore signs on His body indicating that He had been done to death violently.
- He had also other remarkable features:
 - He had seven horns.
 - These symbolize perfect and divine power.

The application of this is that Jesus Christ has the divine power to reign over everything that happens in time and eternity. For that reason everyone in heaven fell down before Him when He took the scroll in order to open it.

They then join in singing a hymn in which the excellence of the Lamb is extolled:

**"Worthy are You to take the book
and to break its seals;
for You were slain,
and purchased for God
with Your blood
men from every tribe and tongue
and people and nation."**

Then a choir of all the angels and other living beings in heaven joined them, saying:

**"Worthy is the Lamb that was slain
to receive power and riches
and wisdom and might
and honour and glory and blessing.
To Him who sits upon the throne,
and to the lamb,
be blessing and honour
and glory and dominion"**

**forever and ever.
Amen."**

The nature of Jesus Christ's victory is summarized by all these events coming to pass in heaven:

- Jesus Christ laid down His life, rose from the dead and then ascended to heaven.
- The Lamb was slain on earth, but then went to heaven, there becoming the Lion who reigns with power and might.
- From heaven He now determines and reigns over the course of history on earth.
- His omnipotence is indicated clearly and unambiguously by that fact that everyone in heaven worships Him and honours Him as the God of all history.

2. The departure from earth of the eternal King.

There is much more in heaven than the people could see during Jesus' ascension, because that was such an apparently simple event.

- He ascended before the eyes of His disciples.
- A cloud moved in between Him and them.

We know that there were things which the people did not see, things which were terrible, namely:

- that the devil and his forces attempted to attack and destroy Jesus after the cloud separated Him from the sight of His disciples,
- and that Michael and his angels assembled their forces against the devil and conquered him.

Psalm 47:6 (5, in some versions), prophesied that God ascended amid jubilation.

God has ascended with a shout,
The Lord, with the sound of a trumpet.

- In the Old Testament a trumpet was sounded to announce the arrival of a king,
- but also to announce the commencement of battle and an attack by the enemy.

Psalm 47 prophesied both.

The war was fought between the archangel Michael and the devil, while the supreme King ascended. When the supreme King arrived in heaven, the angels and spiritual forces rejoiced at His victory.

- The Bible thereby reveals how the suffering of Jesus was succeeded by His victory.
- From His being mocked on the cross His situation was transformed into His becoming the eternal Judge who would sit in judgement upon all and everything.

Before coming as Judge, He will first accomplish something else:

- He will prepare a place in His kingdom for those on whose behalf he won eternal life while on the cross.

- That is why we confess that Jesus is in heaven for our sakes.

In the kingdom of God Jesus Christ's blessing upon us will become completely fulfilled.

- During His earthly life we saw various aspects of this everywhere.
 - He repeatedly pronounced His blessing upon believers - and thereby also upon His church.
 - Think of all His utterances: e.g. "Blessed are those who believe", "Your sins are forgiven you".
- Luke closes his gospel with a description of the ascension including the following words:

... and He lifted up His hands and blessed them.
While He was blessing them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven.
 (Luke 24:50,51).

Jesus' blessing entails that we will be resurrected from the dead as He was, so that we may enter His kingdom with body and soul at His Second Coming.

We live in a time in which people want to explain everything in terms of science.

- Even every miracle which the Lord performed needs to be explained.
- What cannot be explained in scientific terms, is usually rejected.

That is why various matters regarding Jesus are attacked, all of them matters which were attacked during His life and also immediately afterwards.

- The virgin birth is attacked.
- His resurrection from the dead is not accepted.
- Science cannot explain Jesus' ascension and final destination. Consequently there is, in general, growing unbelief among people.

It is naturally true that one can accept and understand the bodily resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ only in faith.

- Consequently these have meaning only for believers.
- What will happen to one after death is of importance only to believers:
 - Their bodies will be resurrected after death just like that of Jesus.
 - They will enter the kingdom of God with body and soul, just like Jesus.

The ascension is proof of God's omnipotence.

- Before the eyes of people He ascended from earth to heaven in His body.
- That proves that He can enable all bodies - also our bodies - to ascend from earth to heaven.

That Jesus departed from earth in His body does not mean that He is thereby cut off from us.

- We must always remember that Jesus and the Father and the Holy Spirit are one Being, one God.

- Because He and the Holy Spirit are of one Being, Jesus is - through the Holy Spirit - still with us.

That is why it is stated in our confession:

"...He sends His Spirit to us on earth as a further guarantee. By the Spirit's power we make the goal of our lives, not earthly things, but the things above where Christ is, sitting at God's right hand." (Question 49, Heidelberg Catechism, Sunday 18).

Let us go back for a moment to the passage in Revelation, which we read together. What must we make of the image of the Lion and the Lamb?

- The Lion comes to devour and destroy, because the time of grace is passing.
 - When Christ returns with the clouds, He will most certainly permit no resistance against Him.
 - He will then bring to pass the final judgement and the final separation between all powers in the heavens and on the earth.
- The Lamb accomplished the atonement.
 - He bestowed grace upon all who believed.

He prays for us daily and prepares the place where He will receive us in the hereafter.

We no longer expect the Lamb. His work is done. We now await the Lion, Who will let the dawn of eternal life break upon us.

Come, let us read what our confession teaches in the Heidelberg Catechism, 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 Song: Scripture Versification 18-1:1, 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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