

Ascension of Jesus

Luke 24.50-53

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We go to flea markets, we have a walk on the beach, we do some shopping. And ah, o yes, it is Ascension Day. For me Ascension Day will in my mind always be connected with playing volleyball; In my better days, I would always play in a tournament in my hometown, Soest.

And with a few of the die-hard believers we go to church.

The Ascension of Jesus was certainly an interesting event in the life of Jesus, but what is it for us, today?



1. Jesus is Lord

We see Jesus going up to heaven and his disciples looking up, as you could read in the somewhat longer account of the same event in Luke's other book, the book of Acts.

Look up at heaven is actually also the attitude of many Christians - they think this world is not so important, and their faith is all about looking forward to heaven. As if this world is bad and heaven is the only good thing.

This is a unhelpful dualistic attitude, as if anything physical is not as important as anything "spiritual" and as if this tangible world is in a way less true or real or important than the world of God. As if God is not fully related to our world.

So what is the Ascension of Jesus about?

The Evangelist John, in his gospel, has recorded a prayer of Jesus that relates to his ascending into heaven.

Jesus [...] looked toward heaven and prayed: "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.
(John 17.1-5, NIV)

This prayer shows that the ascension of Jesus was in fact his glorification - we see that Jesus returned to the glory that He had enjoyed with the Father even before the world began. Even before creation.

Before Jesus had come to earth, as the Son of God He had lived in eternal bliss with the Father and with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Trinity enjoyed the purest fellowship, and love, and joy within His own Being.

No wonder that the disciples, when the Lord Jesus Christ blessed them while He ascended into heaven, fell down before Him, worshipping Him, and praising God.

2. Jesus is creator of this our life

He existed before this world even existed. He was even involved in creating our wonderful world. He made you, he made elephants, he made the oceans and the mountains.



With the Father and the Holy Spirit our Lord sat on his throne and together they rejoiced in creating our wonderful world; our Lord Jesus laughed when as a team they designed whales, cats, monkeys, flowers, and human beings.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit rejoiced together when they made the mountains and the oceans. Our Lord enjoyed hanging the sun and the moon and the stars in the heavens.

They loved creation.

Ascension Day is the day on which Jesus - the creator of all things - went back to sit with God in the throne of the universe. He went back home, to fully participate in the life of the Holy Trinity again. Noyt to simply enjoy eternal bliss, but to sit in the control-room of the universe again.

This does not indicate that heaven is more important than this world - God does not look with disdain at this world. He made it, the soil, the water, the people, the animals, the plants. He loved making it, he loves maintaining it. Do we show similar love for his creation, or do we only look up to heaven?

He created our ecosystems, the rain forests, the oceans. As the crown of creation, He made us humans as social beings, made for community with him and with each other.

If God did this and he loved all that, then we may miss out on God if we do not share the same love for this his world. For our world.

We must never think that we are just passing through and that it is really heaven that Christian life is about. This world of us is made by God, and God loves it, and He wants to restore it. And he wants us to play a role in this.

3. God embraced humanity

So Jesus went back to the Father and after his ascension all was back to normal again? As when before Jesus was born? No. Not really.

Because something then changed in the Trinity. The Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, is eternally God, but He also became a true man at Christmas, born from the Virgin Mary.

He adopted humanity as part of himself.

Even after his resurrection, Jesus was not a ghost. He could be touched, he could eat, and the wounds could still be seen in his hands and feet.

So think of this: When Jesus ascended to be seated on his throne, God thereby adopted something human into the eternal and perfect life of the Trinity. How? It would be presumptuous to even try to answer this. We do not know of course.



But Jesus bringing something human into God is yet another clear indication that this tangible world is important for God. He is not adverse to this world - he has lovingly adopted it into his existence. So we must reject the idea that this world is not important and heaven, or eternity is all.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ, even the Gospel of his ascension, is that God and this world are now reconciled. Heaven and earth come together.

In his beautiful anti-dualistic letter, the apostle John describes Jesus. Listen carefully to what the Apostle describes:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.

The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.

We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete. (1 John 1.1-4, NIV)

John uses terms like eternal life, fellowship, and joy; these are qualities of life that are part and parcel of the inner life of the Holy Trinity. And these great eternal-life qualities have been made available to us! They have been made available to those who by faith have fellowship with God.

John unpacks this idea in the book of Revelation. He says to the church in Laodicea:

To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne. (Rev 3.21, NIV)

This is the grand finale of the ascension of Jesus Christ. He returned to the throne of God, to the intimate life in the Trinity, but He also draws us up into the eternal fellowship and joy of the Holy Trinity. This is our destiny, the goal of our redemption: It is participation in the community of the Holy Trinity.

But this expectation of participation in God is not escapism. Our community is with the God who created this world, who redeems this world, who embraces this world. He loves your daily life. Your prayers, yes, but also how you wash dishes, how you repair your car, how you take care of your garden, how you vote, how you eat, how you sleep. How you feast.

Conclusion

What does this mean for us today?

In our daily life, his ascension most certainly lead us to recognising his Lordship. He rules his church and he rules his world from the divine control room. We may not always understand how he rules this world, but there is comfort in the thought that the one who rules heaven and earth, has deep knowledge of and love for humankind. And for you personally.



It is also clear that our Trinitarian view of God is not an add-on to the Christian faith, but it is the heart of our faith. Only a Trinitarian view of God makes communion with God possible. God is a community and Jesus has placed us in this community of God. Our destiny is to sit with Jesus in the throneroom of the universe.

And as God adopted humanity into himself, we also hold a very high view of each person we meet with. God cares for mankind, and that includes those people that you may not like. God likes them and that should impact how we live.

The expectation of better things in the future, when God will be all in all, does not make this world less important. The opposite is true - because we expect the renewal of all things, this world, nature, your life, your daily life, all this is incredibly important and this whole world we live in is to be taken care of, and loved.

For God there is no contradiction between physical and spiritual. He even uses bread and wine to communicate himself to us. Even our eucharist shows that for God, this world in which we live is not wrong; it is not less; it is not something to escape from. It is where we find God; where we touch the God who rules this world, and your life.

+ Amen