

Chapter 95

The Ascension

Matthew 28 vv 16-20

1 Corinthians 15 v 6

We have already told you about some of the appearances of the Lord Jesus to His disciples. On the first day He appeared to Mary Magdalene; to the women; to Peter; to the Emmaus travellers and to the disciples except Thomas. A week later He appeared to His disciples with Thomas. In the last chapter you read about His appearing to the seven disciples at the sea of Tiberias. That was the seventh time then that He appeared after His RESURRECTION. After that He appeared unto more than five hundred brethren at once upon a mountain in Galilee. Those were five hundred men who truly believed in the Lord Jesus.

Where had all those men come from? ... Oh, that is not told us in the Word of God. But you can well believe that they came from all parts of the land of Canaan. From Galilee, from Judea, from Decapolis and Perea. They journeyed to Galilee, to the Mount which the Lord Jesus had appointed them before his death.

While they are gathered there together, longing for His appearing, the Lord Jesus suddenly stands in their midst. Oh, some still do not yet dare to believe that He is truly risen. In God's Word it says that some doubted. Yet they must now believe, for He is standing in their midst. They see Him with their eyes; they hear His well known voice. They listen to His words of encouragement as He assures them: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth."

He, the King of Israel, reigns. He will

protect and keep His people.

They have no need to fear, for He will never, never leave them. He has bought them with the price of His own blood.

May you become jealous of the Lord's people, children.

Those five hundred brethren returned once more to their homes, but they never forgot that day.

God's Word also makes mention of the Lord's appearing to James alone. But what was said at that meeting I cannot tell you because the Bible tells us no more. (1 Corinthians 15 v.7).

By all these appearances the Saviour had clearly shown that He had truly risen from the dead. The Lord Jesus lives. No, that is no imagination, it is truth. These appearances are a comfort to the whole Church of God.

Mark 16 vv 15-20

Luke 24 vv 50-53

Acts 1 vv 4-9

Some time later the eleven disciples are again to be found in Jerusalem. So they have left Galilee and journeyed once more to Judea.

And there in Jerusalem the Lord Jesus appeared to His disciples for the last time. They were assembled in Jerusalem, perhaps even in the upper room where they had celebrated Passover, though we cannot say that with certainty.

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We do read, however, in God's Word that Jesus led them out as far as to Bethany. Look, there they are leaving Jerusalem. On the way from Jerusalem to the Mount of Olives, the Lord speaks for the last time with His disciples. He commands them to remain in Jerusalem. They are to wait.

Wait? ... What for? ... They must wait for the outpouring of the Holy Ghost. The Lord promises them that this will take place.

All at once the disciples ask Him: "Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?"

Do you hear that? ... The disciples are still unable to rid themselves of the thought of an earthly kingdom. They hope that Jesus will now restore the kingdom of David. Even now they still dream of earthly power and glory.

The Messiah answers that they must leave that in God's hands. Certainly the kingdom of King Jesus shall one day have dominion in full glory. That will happen at the Judgment Day, when the whole Church of God, redeemed from guilt and punishment, shall enter, soul and body, into heavenly bliss and evermore shall sing to the glory of God.

But the disciples are now also given a task - a commission. They are to go forth and preach, in Jerusalem, in Judea, in Samaria - yes in all the world.

Thus, as they speak together they arrive at last at the Mount of Olives. Look, there they stand on top of the mount.

Below, in the valley lies the garden of Gethsemane. Will the disciples have thought again of that fearful night, a few weeks ago? What a great deal has taken place in that time. It is now forty days since their Master arose from the dead.

Silently they stand there together for a moment.

They do not have long to consider these things however, for ... Oh, just look! Jesus spreads His hands over them and blesses His disciples. And then? ... Slowly the Lord Jesus is carried up from the earth. Higher and higher still He mounts.

The disciples, speechless with amazement, gaze upon their beloved Master. They see how He departs from them and ascends to heaven. Sacred awe fills their hearts. They watch their King, their Saviour depart upwards.

But just read what else is written in God's Word: "and a cloud received Him out of their sight". That means that between the Lord Jesus and the earth there wafted a cloud, so that His disciples could see Him no longer.

What sort of cloud was that? ... I do not know. Some think that it was a cloud of angels, because in Psalm 68 it says: "The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels." Also in Psalm 47 it says: "God is gone up with a shout." According to them that cloud of angels would have brought the King of kings into heaven with rejoicing. But I cannot tell with certainty whether that was in fact so, for in the Bible it is just written: "A cloud received Him out of their sight."

What a moment that must have been, boys and girls, when the Lord Jesus re-entered heaven. He, who had left heaven, returned again. Not as one defeated, but as the Conqueror. How the souls of those of His people who had already passed away, rejoiced when their Surety and Saviour, their King entered.

Can you still remember that the high priest entered, once a year, on the great day of Atonement, into the Holy of Holies? Can you

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remember that he took with him the blood of a he-goat, to make atonement for the sins of the people? ... Well then, the Jewish high priest was a type of the Lord Jesus - the heavenly High Priest.

On this Ascension Day the heavenly High Priest entered heaven, not with the blood of bulls and of goats, but with His own blood.

Ascension day is the "Coronation Day" of the Lord Jesus. He, the King of kings entered again into heavenly glory. He took His place at His Father's right hand and henceforth He rules from heaven His whole Church.

Certainly, the Lord Jesus rules the whole world, but He looks down in favour upon His people who still live on earth. God's people are not left here to their own devices. Oh no, happily not. He watches over them. He cares for them. He protects them. One day He shall take them to Himself into eternal felicity.

This part is a very difficult portion for you, boys and girls, but I had to tell you something about it. Have you understood it? ...

Acts 1 v 10-12

The eleven disciples are still standing on the Mount of Olives. But, why eleven? ... You know why, don't you? ... Judas, the traitor was no more.

The disciples still stare upwards. Their beloved Master is no longer visible. A cloud had received Him.

Jesus is now in heaven, and they stand upon earth. But though their feet stand upon the Mount of Olives, their souls are as it were in heaven, in their thoughts they have travelled with Him. A sense of heavenly joy fills their souls.

How long they stood there like this we

do not know.

Suddenly they are startled. Two angels in white clothing, reflecting the glory of heaven, stand beside them. They have come with a message — a message from their Master, who had gone thither.

The butler of Pharaoh's court forgot Joseph when he returned to the King's palace, but the Lord Jesus does not forget His disciples. He knows what is going on in their hearts. No, not sorrow, not sadness, but a sacred longing. The Lord has scarcely returned to heaven before He sends two heavenly messengers to the earth. They come to encourage them.

Listen to what they say: "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." It is as though they say: "You gaze upwards as though your Master might return any moment, certainly that shall happen. He shall come again in the clouds of heaven, to judge between the living and the dead. One day He shall return as King, and also as Judge, but that will not happen yet. That will happen in God's time."

The angels then mount heavenwards, and the disciples make their way back to Jerusalem. How do they return? ... in sadness? ... down-heartedly? No, not by any means. Luke writes that they returned with great joy. Through faith they saw and embraced the fact that their Master had gone before them.

The Lord Jesus had told them that in His Father's house, that is, in heaven, were many mansions. He had told them that He would go to prepare a place for them. Oh, they believed that in God's own time they would one day follow.

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Jesus had bought them with the price of His own blood. That faith, that certain knowledge, filled their souls. To weep? ... to cry mournfully, because their Master was no longer with them? ... No! They return with great joy to the city of danger, to the city of blood. They would go forth to preach. They would cry unto those living there that for them too there was still a way open unto salvation. They evidently longed to begin.

*Ascension Day! ... I know Ascension Day is not a Sunday, but it is a day of remembrance. Does the Lord Jesus stand as the centre point in all that you do? ... Do you do all for His glory? Now, just give an answer....

but God knows. Is there no attraction in these things for you? ... Does enmity grow in your heart? ... Do you not wish to be any different? ... Well then you must go your way. If you follow your own heart's desires, then I cannot prevent it. But know this, that the Lord shall so come again. He SHALL come. We do not know WHEN, but come He will. And what then? Will you then be able to answer for those days spent in vanity and sin? ...

Just give these things your very earnest consideration.

*Note by the translator: This paragraph in the original is written as a warning about the misuse of "Ascension Day", which is in Holland celebrated as a Church festival and "public holiday". Parts have been omitted, since the day is generally not so celebrated in English speaking Protestant lands. This is not to say however that the remarks here translated are not applicable to EVERY day.

Probably there are many who must bow their heads in shame. I do not know about you,