

DAILY DOSE OF DOCTRINE

March 24-28, 2008



March 24, 2008 **“He Descended into Hades”**

“For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. In that state he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits—”¹

In the Apostles Creed, the statement “he descended into hell” is problematic. It is based upon the scripture above and Ephesians 4:9-10: *“What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.”*

While Reformed theologians would prefer to see in these verses a metaphorical statement of the depth of Christ’s abasement on the cross, the Lutheran understanding that this is the beginning of Jesus’ exaltation seems closer to the truth.

By his death, Jesus paid the price of sin for all people, past, present and future. His descent into the abode of the dead was a triumphant journey of liberation. There he proclaimed the freedom of the gospel to all the righteous ones who would look to him in faith. By receiving the offer of grace, those in ‘Abraham’s bosom’² were set free to ascend with the risen Christ to dwell in glory forever.

For now, we understand these passages ‘as through a glass darkly’³, but in the life to come we shall fully comprehend all the nuances of Jesus’ victory over death and the grave.

¹ 1 Peter 3:18-19 (TNIV)

² See Luke 16:22ff

³ 1 Corinthians 13:12 (KJV)

March 25, 2008

Christ Exalted!

“Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”¹

Justice must not only be done, it must be seen to be done. If a person is wrongly convicted of a crime, it is only right that his/her innocence be proclaimed at least as publicly as was her/his alleged guilt.

At its most basic level, the resurrection of Jesus was a public vindication of his teachings and claims. Though rejected by religious and secular authorities and by the people at his trial, Jesus was indeed the Messianic King. Christ’s claims to divine status, his controversial teachings about the nature of God, his gracious reaching out to Gentiles and the gospel truth that his death would atone for our sins were all vindicated when God’s power raised him from the tomb.

In a pointed way the Bible states that this vindication and exaltation demand a personal response on our part. It is not enough to acknowledge the historic truth of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. It is not even enough to trust in him as the Saviour who will resurrect us from death and bring us safely to heaven. We are called to ‘bow the knee’ and acknowledge him as King and Lord of our lives. This surrender to the sovereignty of the risen Christ is the basic prerequisite to being one of his kingdom people. Anything less is a snub to his glory and falls short of true saving, life transforming faith.

¹ Philippians 2:9-11 (TNIV)

March 26, 2008

Exalted in Body!

“But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a human being. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.”¹

When Christ was raised from the dead it was resurrection, not merely resuscitation. On a number of occasions, Jesus raised the dead. However, at some point thereafter each of them died again. Although these were glorious miracle, those who had been dead and were resuscitated back into this temporal existence, not into an eternal one.

Jesus, however, was the ‘firstfruits’ of the resurrection. His risen body was transformed into one that was fit for eternity. It will never experience illness, age or decay. It appears to be have been more powerful and to have added faculties, including the ability to enter locked rooms and to appear and disappear suddenly.² At the same time, the resurrected Christ was known and recognized by his friends. The resurrection body is one fit for eternity and adapted perfectly for a new, higher spiritual existence.

‘Firstfruit’ was the token thank-offering for the harvest that was still out in the field, ready to be taken into the barns. So the Bible declares that, as the harvest to come, we too shall experience the same sort of resurrection to a new and glorious bodily existence. Jesus’ resurrection exaltation shall, in this sense, be our exaltation as well.

¹ 1 Corinthians 15:20-22 (TNIV)

² 1 Corinthians 15:41-44; Luke 24:31, 36, John 20:13, 19; 21:7

March 27, 2008

A Bodily Resurrection

“Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.’ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet.”¹

In recent decades, some ministers and theologians have taken the position that Jesus’ resurrection was a ‘spiritual’ one. In part this arises out of a modernist worldview that miracles simply do not happen. In part it seems to be an attempt to ‘firewall’ the Christian faith from attacks on the historicity of the Biblical accounts.

However, the apostle Paul put it in a nutshell when he wrote, *“if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith”*.² As he points out, the resurrected Christ was encountered by many, including Paul himself. Many of these witnesses were persecuted and suffered painful deaths precisely because they adhered to this claim that Jesus had risen from the grave.

As human beings, we are not just spiritual creatures. We live in a bodily existence in time-space history. The clear claim of the witnesses of the resurrection was that Jesus was raised in tangible, bodily form. It was the ultimate intervention of God in our time-space history, proclaiming his existence and calling us back to himself.

The exaltation of Jesus in his resurrection was not just an ethereal, spiritual event. It was tangibly true in every dimension, a triumph to sight and touch as well as to the heart and mind.

¹ Luke 24:39-40 (TNIV)

² 1 Corinthians 15:14 (TNIV)

March 28, 2008

Victor over Death!

*"Death has been swallowed up in victory.
 'Where, O death, is your victory?
 Where, O death, is your sting?'
 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the
 law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory
 through our Lord Jesus Christ."¹*

Wherever there is a victory, there is also a defeat. In the victorious resurrection of Jesus, there are a number of losers. The first and greatest of these defeated foes is Death itself. The resurrection of Jesus defeated the stranglehold that death had on the human race in every way.

It cancelled the sentence of spiritual death, our exile from fellowship with God. When Jesus told Mary that he would ascend to "*my Father and your Father, to my God and your God*"², he was emphasizing that the barrier of sin between ourselves and God was gone. Through Jesus we are able to have peace with God. The prodigals can come home. The Father is waiting, looking for us on the road.

Jesus' resurrection also defeats physical death, the termination of our existence and separation from all the goodness of life. As Jesus was raised, so we will be raised to live forever with him in glory!³

With the resurrection of Jesus, Death experienced its D-Day. While still around for a while, it is a defeated foe. Death's own annihilation is a sure thing. Each time a person says 'yes!' to Christ and is reconciled with God, Death loses a citizen. Each time a believer crosses over to awaken in heaven, one of Death's prisoners is set free!

¹ 1 Corinthians 15:54b-57 (TNIV)

² John 20:18

³ See John 14:1-6; 1 Corinthians 15