

“Heavenly Hope”

It always makes a big difference to have something to look forward to.

It may be something for this coming week, or simply and wonderfully when this time of Covid-19 is over. But when we think life, and looking forward, let's have a *big* perspective that really helps.

Ok- let's think back 2000 years ago. Jesus is crucified. Jesus is raised bodily from the grave- but what next? Where is Jesus then in those weeks and months ahead?

Well, just over a month after he comes back to life. Jesus returns to heaven and that is what we know as The Ascension.

Let's see how it is mentioned at the end of Luke's Gospel.

Luke 24:50 When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. ⁵¹ While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. ⁵² Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. ⁵³ And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.

Jesus returns back to God the Father (still blessing them – Jesus is just so into blessing us). But His returning to Heaven says something about how special He is. Jesus is God the Son. He has always been enjoying the presence of God the Father so it is right that he returns back to that face-to-face joy. *But this time there's a difference.*

Because now he isn't just God the Son- He's also God the Son become one of us. He is the One who is the God / Man - 100% God who is also 100% human.

Jesus became one of us to represent us, to give his life for us on the cross. He was our substitute- to pay the price for our sin- our falling short of what it means to properly relate to God. Jesus pays the price for God's good anger against sin: Jesus is the way of forgiveness. And he is also the way of new life- back from the dead; death cannot hold him.

And then job done he returns to the father - well not quite.

Jesus is welcomed as the divine Son - *but also as the perfect human.* God who is now Man. That is really important- because that means those that belong to him have that access to the heavenly VIP lounge, access to the best party ever, face to face access to the Father.

For those that used to (or still will when they can) go to night clubs: I can remember a time of dress code - no trainers - and those on the door would say 'no entrance' if you wore them.

Jesus is our dress code. He is welcomed in- and so no matter what we are like or have done - in belonging to him we have VIP access. We don't have the right party clothes on, the right dress code, the perfect ways of behaving but we know the One who gets us in.

Hebrews 9:24 talking about Christ says *'...He entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence*

That's really special - because The Ascension is not just about Jesus leaving this earth. It is also about Jesus opening heaven up to sinners.

Illustrating it with something that increasingly feels like old ways with money- think cheques. The cheque of salvation was written when Jesus died and rose again - but it's cashed in at The Ascension. The cheque doesn't bounce. Whether cheques are your thing or not rejoice in the truth. We are spiritually rich in Jesus.

Jesus's offering of His sacrifice of himself is accepted. He is royally welcomed in- and if we belong to him- we get in. VIP confidence. Jesus is our confidence. He is our currency. To get into the very presence of the father all one has to 'do' is belong to the Son. It is not what you do, it is who you know. And that's what the Father wants- a heavenly future full of people knowing His love by belonging to his Son. It's an open invite to all. It's about belonging to him.

Now is not the whole story, this life is not the whole story. Will it be happy ever after? Yes! In Jesus.

When we feel overwhelmed by this life, when we think 'is it all going to be ok' we must hold on to have a next life confidence. This life is not the whole story and heaven's doors are open wide for the Christian

For life now Jesus is so vital for peace and joy, but also to give us a joyful hope and confidence for the next life.

We look forward to lots of thing but the heavenly life in Jesus should hold the brightest joy, confident in Jesus of joyful acceptance into the wonderful presence of our heavenly Father.

AMEN