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Are You Going to Heaven?

Have you ever been approached in a public place by a well-meaning Christian who asked “If you died tonight are you sure you’d go to heaven?”

I believe the shocking answer from the gospel is that we can die with confidence because we know that, in Christ, we are already in heaven now! This is the glory of Jesus’ Ascension.

The Father always planned that humanity would be adopted as his children. He always intended that this plan would be fulfilled by the Son becoming human as the man Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:5). In order for us to live with and relate to the Father as his children, our human nature has to be transformed from a perishable body into a glorified and immortal body (1 Cor. 15:42-44). This happened when Jesus, the Son of God in the flesh, raised up our humanity in his resurrection.

For us to be children of the Father we must not only be glorified and immortal, we must also be where the Father is. So, the Father has created heaven as the place where humanity and the universe can be brought to their full potential and live together with the Trinity in the union of their life in Jesus Christ.

If all Jesus had done was die and rise again, the plan of the Father would not have been fulfilled. Jesus had to ascend into heaven, to the right hand of the Father, in order to prepare earth and humanity for its merging with heaven and the creation of the new world in which we can live forever as the Father’s children (Rev. 21:1-5).

That ascension has taken place and we celebrate it every Ascension Sunday. Jesus, fully God and fully human, has entered into the Most Holy Place – the center of the Triune Life – and has taken humanity with him into that place by permanently uniting himself to our flesh and blood human nature.

So, in Colossians 3:3, St. Paul tells us that our lives are now hidden with Christ in God. Where is Christ? In heaven. Where are you? In Christ. So, are you in heaven? Yes! Perhaps the better question about our eternal destiny is this: “Do you believe you are in Christ and are you happy about it?” Not believing or not being happy about being in heaven can turn it into an experience called hell.

And sometimes this life feels more like hell than heaven, doesn’t it? We don’t yet see or experience the fullness of where we are in Christ because we have not yet experienced our own death and resurrection. What we are waiting on is an unveiling (an “apocalypse” or “revelation”) which will reveal the truth of what is all around us but which we cannot see: that our lives are hidden in Christ in heaven.

So, St. Paul gives us tremendous hope to celebrate this Ascension Sunday when speaks these glorious words of prophecy: *When Christ appears, then you will also appear with him in glory (Col. 3:4).*

~ by Jonathan Stepp