Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

In our previous considerations of Lord’s Day 18, we have looked at the Scriptural proof for **the physical ascension to heaven of Jesus**. We have looked at passages like the one in Acts 1 that we read earlier to see that Jesus physically lifted up from the earth and ascended into heaven. And so, if I ask even the youngest children here: Where is Jesus? I know exactly how they will answer. Boys and girls, where is Jesus? In heaven. That’s right! And if I asked them, “How do you know this?” They would say, “The Bible says so.” It really is that plain and simple.

Well, that’s the subject of Question and Answer 46. But we have also looked at **the benefits of Christ’s resurrection**, which are the subject of Question and Answer 49. And they are that “He pleads our cause (or prays for us) in the presence of His Father,” and that because He has a human nature and is heaven, we have a guarantee that He will receive us into heaven, and that from heaven He sends us the Holy Spirit. And I for one never get tired of meditating on these benefits of Christ’s ascension. They are a wonderful encouragement.

But we haven’t really spent much or any time thinking about the subject of Questions and Answers 47 and 48. And it is quite a narrow point of theology. It has to do with the person of Christ. And it was the core of a massive argument in the time of the Reformation, as I shall explain in a moment. But it is important. It safeguards some vital truthes about Christ and it explains a key promise that Christ made to us. And that promise is the one we read a moment ago: “*And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age*.”

And this doctrine has a Latin name. And I clearly remember being taught at seminary not to try and impress your congregation by using Latin, but if you Google this topic, you will see that it is always referred to by this Latin name – the ***Extra Calvinisticum***. And it really is a glorious doctrine with a rather silly name. And we will see why that is son in our first point as I explain the doctrine. Then we will consider the **importance** of the doctrine. And we will finish with how it helps us to understand how Christ is with us. And if you have heard the words ‘theological’ and ‘Extra Calvinisticum’ and you already crying inside and starting to think about your next Netflix episode, I promise you that I will keep this short :-)

1. So, **what is this doctrine**? What is the ‘Extra Calvinisticum’ about?
   1. Well, you may have recognized the name Calvin in it. And that is because it is named after John Calvin, the 15th century Reformer. It really shouldn’t be, because it was the ordinary understanding of Scripture long before Calvin came along. It was taught by Augustine and Cyril and Athanasius, in the 300-400s, and it was taught throughout the Middle Ages. And even in Calvin’s day, it was taught more by people like Ullrich Zwingli and Peter Martyr Vermigli. But more importantly, it is the teaching of the Bible.
   2. But during the Reformation, it soon became clear that there was disagreement among the Reformers about the Lord’s Supper. Can anyone tell us the technical term for the Roman Catholic view of the relationship between the bread of the Lord’s Supper and the body of Christ? **Trans-substantiation**. Trans means change, so it is a change of substance. They believe that the bread *changes into* the physical body of Christ. Well, Martin Luther tweaked it a little bit and said that the bread does not change into the body of Christ, but that the body of Christ is *joined to* the bread. And does anyone know what that view is called? **Con-substantiation**. Con means with or joined to, so it is a joining of substances.
   3. Well, Calvin and Zwingli and Vermigli opened their Bibles and their theology books and read there that Jesus has a body just like ours and that His body is now in heaven. And even when He was on earth, instituting the Lord’s Supper, and pointing to the bread and saying, “*This is my body*,” the disciples could see His body in front of them. He didn’t make more of Himself and put it in the bread. So, the bread of the Supper cannot and does not turn into His body or be joined to His body. If that were possible, then His body or His human nature would be different than ours, and the Bible teaches us that it is the same as ours. And just in case you are remembering that after His resurrection He could pass through locked doors and just appear in a different place, that is true, of course, but even though His body could do this, it could still only be in one place at one time.
   4. And so, **a meeting was held** to try and thrash this out and seek agreement. It is called the Marburg Colloquy. And Calvin wasn’t even there! It was Zwingli who was there and who did the arguing. But to every argument that Zwingli put up, Luther’s reply was the words that Jesus spoke when He instituted the Supper and held up the bread: “*This is my body*.” Luther refused to budge from what he viewed were the plain words of Jesus.
   5. Well, Zwingli had to answer this objection of Luther. And his answer was what he and Calvin and Augustine and many other theologians had taught for many years, which is that Christ’s **human nature** **is like ours**, so His body can only be in one place at one time. And His body is in heaven. We saw this in the texts we cited above and also when we explored the need for our mediator to be fully human in earlier Lord’s Days. **But** **Christ also has a** **divine nature**. And although His divine nature is fully united to His human nature, in His person, because it is a divine nature, it is not limited to where His body is. Answer 48 puts it like this: “Christ’s divinity is surely beyond the bounds of the humanity He has taken on.” So, Christ, according to His divine nature is omnipresent, or everywhere present. And that means that Christ is not *physically* present in the Lord’s Supper, but *spiritually* present. When He said, “*This is my body*,” He meant us to understand that the bread *represents* His body.
      1. And I could illustrate this with a photo of myself. If I had that photo and said, ‘This is me,’ you would agree. But of course, the photo is not me. I am me. The photo is an image or representation of me. And similarly, the bread represents the body of Jesus.
      2. So, our union with Jesus is not by chewing bread but by faith and by the power of the Holy Spirit.
      3. The Lord’s Supper is not His body coming down to you but your spirit being lifted up to Him! Or to add a few words: It is not the body of Christ coming down into the bread, but your spirit, by faith, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, being lifted to heaven in an ever deepening union with your Saviour.
      4. The Belgic Confession of Faith puts it like this: “*Yet we do not go wrong when we say that what we eat and drink is the true, natural body and the true blood of Christ. However, the manner in which we eat it is not by mouth but in the spirit by faith. In that way Jesus Christ always remains seated at the right hand of God His Father in heaven*.”
   6. Well, Luther and those with him believed that the **human nature** of Christ is omnipresent, which is how His body could come down and be joined to the bread. And they viewed what is stated in Q/A 48 as a new teaching of Calvin, which is why they called it the ‘Extra Calvinisticum.’ But I trust you have seen that this was not a new view, and it certainly was not just the view of Calvin. But the name became a kind of put-down name that Lutherans called the Reformers, they are those ‘Extra-Calvinisticum’ blokes!
2. Well, we have already seen the importance of this doctrine for how we understand the Lord’s Supper, but it is **importanT** for some even more fundamental reasons also, as we see in our second point. And these reasons are that the so-called ‘Extra Calvinisticum’ safeguards the **integrity** of Christ’s divine nature and the **genuineness** of the human nature. And we will be very brief here.
   1. In terms of the **integrity of Jesus’ divine nature**, **Hebrews 1:3** says that the Lord Jesus “*upholds the universe by the word of His power*.” **Colossians 1:15-17** says of the Lord Jesus that “*For by Him all things were created … And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together*.” So, here is a question for you: **Was that true of the Lord Jesus when He was on earth?** Was He, even then, upholding the universe? And the answer of Scripture is that He was, according to His divine nature. He never stopped being true God. He never stopped possessing the fulness of God. He never stopped being in sovereign control of all things, according to His divine nature. And so, even as He ate and walked and healed and talked, He was, according to His divine nature, upholding the universe! And that’s pretty mind-bending to think about, isn’t it.
   2. But in terms of **the genuineness of His human nature**, as we have seen in recent Lord’s Days, He spent nine months in the womb of Mary, He needed to have His nappies changed, He got hungry and tired, He cried, and He had to learn to talk and He had to study the Scriptures. And eventually, He really died. And all this qualifies Him to be the Mediator that we humans need. But brothers and sisters, it also demonstrates that He freely and voluntarily, according to His human nature, chose, each time, not to sin and instead to obey the will of His Father in heaven. And He chose, freely and voluntarily, to go to the cross, knowing, from Scripture, what it would cost Him. He wasn’t just God, going through the motions, as it were, doing things that were easy for God to do. No, He was a man, and all of this was really hard work. It required all of His energy and will. But He did it, gladly, out of love for those the Father had given to Him.
   3. And this is your Saviour – fully human and true God. Torn and tired on the cross, but also, even then, according to His divine nature, upholding the universe!
3. And that brings us, thirdly and lastly, to the **benefit** of this doctrine, in terms of the promise before us today: “*And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age*.”
   1. You cannot walk up to Jesus and shake His hand. You cannot go and listen to Him preach on a hillside, as He did 2000 years ago. He will not appear to give you a hug or tell you which job offer to accept or to convince you that He is real. In other words, He is not with you, *physically*. He has ascended to heaven. That is where He is, physically.
   2. But as we have seen, according to His divine nature, He is omnipresent – everywhere present. So, the Lord Jesus Christ, is truly with you. And in **John 14:16-18**, Jesus said, “*And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows him. You know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you*.” And listen to these next words: “*I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you*.” By His Spirit, then, Jesus Christ is not absent from you for a single moment. So, even though His body is in heaven, He truly is with you!
   3. And as we said earlier in the sermon, when we eat the bread and drink the cup, the body of Christ does not come down to us, but we, by faith, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, are lifted up to heaven in an ever-deepening union. And in this way, He is preparing us to be with Him in glory.

So, does the ascension of Christ matter? It sure does. Does the Extra-Calvinisticum matter? It sure does. For it helps us to understand and take comfort from the promise of Christ: “*And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age*.” Amen.