

“Lobet Gott in seinen Reichen” BWV 11 (*Ascension Oratorio*)

1. Lobet Gott in seinen Reichen,
Preiset ihn in seinen Ehren,
Rühmet ihn in seiner Pracht;
Sucht sein Lob recht zu vergleichen,
Wenn ihr mit gesamten Chören
Ihm ein Lied zu Ehren macht!

2. *Der Herr Jesus hub seine Hände auf und segnete seine Jünger, und es geschah, da er sie segnete, schied er von ihnen.*⁴

3. Ach, Jesu, ist dein Abschied schon so nah?
Ach, ist denn schon die Stunde da,
Da wir dich von uns lassen sollen?
Ach, siehe, wie die heissen Tränen
Von unsern blassen Wangen rollen,
Wie wir uns nach dir sehnen,
Wie uns fast aller Trost gebracht.
Ach, weiche doch noch nicht!

4. Ach, bleibe doch, mein liebstes Leben,
Ach, fliehe nicht so bald von mir!
Dein Abschied und dein frühes Scheiden
Bringt mir das allergrösste Leiden,
Ach ja, so bleibe doch noch hier;
Sonst werd ich ganz von Schmerz umgeben.

1. Praise God in his realms;¹
Extol him in his glories;
Vaunt him in his splendor;
Seek to rightly give his due praise²
When, with full choirs,³
You render a hymn of glory to him.

2. *The Lord Jesus raised his hands up⁵ and blessed his disciples; and it came to pass [that] as he blessed them he parted from them.*

3. Ah, Jesus, is your departure already so near?
Ah, is then the hour already here
When we should let you [go] from us?⁶
Ah, see how hot tears
Roll from our pale cheeks,
How we long for you,
How we lack almost all comfort.
Ah, indeed, do not leave yet.

4. Ah, do remain, my dearest life;
Ah, do not flee so soon from me.
Your departure and your early parting
Brings me the greatest suffering of all;
Ah, yes, so do remain yet here;
Otherwise I will be completely beset with agony.

GENERAL NOTE: The particular sequence of biblical passages in movements 2, 5, and 7 stems from the sixteenth-century gospel harmony by Johann Bugenhagen, which was reprinted in various Lutheran hymnbooks and liturgical books right up through the eighteenth century. At Bach’s movement 7c, however, Bugenhagen’s text reads in the sequence Luke 24:52 to Acts 1:12 (i.e., as opposed to the libretto’s reading, where Acts 1:12 is placed between Luke 24:52a and 24:52b), and Bugenhagen lacks the phrase “wandten um gen Jerusalem” (“went back to Jerusalem”) from Acts 1:12.

¹That is, God’s earthly temporal realm and heavenly eternal realm. “Reichen” here means “kingdoms” or “realms,” not “riches” or “splendor.”

²“Vergleichen” is most likely being used here in its archaic sense as a synonym for one of the meanings of “vergelden” (“to pay what is owed”). Curiously, at the second appearance of this phrase in his score (mm. 121–124), Bach did write “sein Lob recht zu vergleichen” (“to rightly give his due praise”) in the soprano line but then wrote “sein Lob recht auszubreiten” (“to rightly spread abroad his praise”) in the alto, tenor, and bass lines. In his performing materials, however, the “zu vergleichen” reading is given in the soprano and alto parts, and “auszubreiten” in the tenor and bass parts.

³Full choirs, as opposed, e.g., to those of Psalm 53, whose heading, in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day, calls for a divided assembly to sing antiphonally: “im Chor um einander vorzusingen” (literally, “in the [full] choir, [the subgroups are] to sing to-and-fro one another”).

⁴Luke 24:50-51, nearly verbatim.

⁵Jesus’s raising his hands up is probably meant to be compared to the priestly blessing of Aaron in Leviticus 9:22.

⁶The language of this line is derived from Genesis 32:26, the story of Jacob’s wrestling with God at Peniel. God says to Jacob, as rendered in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day, “Lass mich gehen” (“Let me go”), and Jacob answers, “Ich lasse dich nicht [gehen], du segnest mich denn” (“I will not let you [go], unless you bless me”).

5. Und ward aufgehaben⁷ zusehends,⁸ und fuhr auf gen Himmel,⁹ eine Wolke nahm ihn weg vor ihren Augen,¹⁰ und er sitzet zur rechten Hand Gottes.¹¹

6. Nun lieget alles unter dir,
Dich selbst nur ausgenommen;
Die Engel müssen für und für
Dir aufzuwarten kommen.
Die Fürsten stehn auch auf der Bahn
Und sind dir willig untertan;
Luft, Wasser, Feuer, Erden
Muss dir zu Dienste werden.¹⁴

7a. Und da sie ihm nachsahen gen Himmel fahren,
siehe, da stunden bei ihnen zwei Männer in weissen Kleidern, welche auch sagten: Ihr Männer von Galiläa, was stehet ihr und sehet gen Himmel? Dieser Jesus, welcher von euch ist aufgenommen gen Himmel, wird kommen, wie ihr ihn gesehen habt gen Himmel fahren.¹⁷

7b. Ach ja! so komme bald zurück:
Tilg einst mein trauriges Gebärden,

5. And [Jesus] was visibly raised up, and [he] ascended to heaven; a cloud¹² took him away before their [the apostles'] eyes, and he sits at the right hand of God.¹³

6. Now everything has its place under you [Jesus],
Except only you [God the father] yourself;¹⁵
The angels must forever
Come to attend you.
The [celestial] princes¹⁶ also stand along the way
And are willingly subject to you;
Air, water, fire, earth
Must come to be in service to you.

7a. And as they watched him go to heaven, see, two men in white robes¹⁸ stood next to them, who also said: You men of Galilee, why are you standing and looking to heaven? This Jesus,¹⁹ who has been taken from you up to heaven, will come [back] as you have seen him go to heaven.²⁰

7b. Ah, yes, so come back soon.
Blot out my sorrowful bearing one day;

⁷The Luther Bibles used this form (“aufgehaben,” with an “a”; i.e., not “aufgehoben,” with an “o”) in his New Testament to refer to Jesus’s exaltation into heaven.

⁸Adapted from Acts 1:9.

⁹Luke 24:51.

¹⁰Acts 1:9, nearly verbatim.

¹¹Mark 16:19, nearly verbatim.

¹²A cloud is a symbol of the divine presence (e.g., in Exodus 24:15 and Daniel 7:13).

¹³In heaven, according to Christian interpretation of Psalm 110:1 (e.g., in Hebrews 1:3).

¹⁴A stanza of “Du Lebensfürst, Herr Jesu Christ.”

¹⁵These lines make little or no sense unless one realizes that the first “you” refers to Jesus (“God, the son”), and the second “you” to “God, the father”; both “persons” are held in traditional Christian doctrine to be one and the same “being.” The hymn’s lines depend partly on 1 Corinthians 15:27, where, quoting Psalm 8, the apostle Paul says “Er hat ihm alles unter seine Füsse getan; ... ists offenbar, dass ausgenommen ist, der ihm alles untertan hat” (“he [God the father] has put all things under his [Jesus’s] feet ... [But] it is obvious that he [God the father] is excepted, who put all things under him [Jesus]”).

¹⁶These are not earthly princes but the heavenly archangels (e.g., Michael is a chief “prince” or angel in Daniel 10:13 and 12:1; “archangel” in Jude 1:9).

¹⁷Acts 1:10-11, nearly verbatim.

¹⁸“White robes” apparently signifies that they are heavenly visitors. Such men or angels are depicted in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day as being in white clothing also in Mark 16:5, Matthew 28:3, and John 20:12. The garments of the transfigured Jesus are said to be “sehr weiss” (“very white”) in Mark 9:3.

¹⁹As opposed to “this Moses” in Acts 7:35, who was held to prefigure Jesus in being appointed by God but rejected by his people.

²⁰That is, via cloud.

Sonst wird mir jeder Augenblick
Verhasst und Jahren ähnlich werden.

7c. Sie aber beteten ihn an,²¹ wandten um gen
Jerusalem von dem Berge, der da heisset der Ölberg,
welcher ist nahe bei Jerusalem und liegt einen
Sabbater-Weg davon,²² und sie kehreten wieder gen
Jerusalem mit grosser Freude.²³

8. Jesu, deine Gnadenblicke
Kann ich doch beständig sehn.
Deine Liebe bleibt zurücke,
Dass ich mich hier in der Zeit
An der künftgen Herrlichkeit
Schon voraus im Geist erquicke,
Wenn wir einst dort vor dir stehn.

9. Wenn soll es doch geschehen,
Wenn kommt die liebe Zeit,
Dass ich ihn werde sehen,
In seiner Herrlichkeit?
Du Tag, wenn wirst du sein,
Dass wir den Heiland grüssen,
Dass wir den Heiland küssen?
Komm, stelle dich doch ein!²⁶

Otherwise every moment will become
Hateful to me and become like years.

7c. But they [the apostles] worshipped him, went back to
Jerusalem from the mountain called the Mount of Olives,
which is nearby Jerusalem and lies a sabbath's journey
away,²⁴ and they returned to Jerusalem with great joy.

8. Jesus, your glances of mercy/grace
I can indeed constantly see.

Your love remains behind,
That here [on earth] in temporality
I may refresh myself in spirit beforehand
On the future glory [from eternity],²⁵
When one day we stand there [in heaven] before you.

9. When shall it indeed come to pass;
When will the dear time come,
That I will see him
In his glory?
You day, when will you be,
That we may greet the savior,
That we may kiss the savior?
Indeed, come, [you day,] appear!

(transl. Michael Marissen and Daniel R. Melamed)



Scan or go to www.bachcantatatexts.org/BWV11 for an annotated translation

²¹Luke 24:52.

²²Acts 1:12, nearly verbatim.

²³Luke 24:52.

²⁴The apostles of Jesus were observant Jews. A sabbath's permissible journey limits were about a half mile.

²⁵These lines are derived from Romans 5:2, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach's day reads "durch welchen wir auch einen Zugang haben im Glauben zu dieser Gnade, darinnen wir stehen, und rühmen uns der Hoffnung der zukünftigen Herrlichkeit, die Gott geben soll" ("[Jesus,] through whom [on earth] we [temporally] also have an access by faith to this mercy/grace in which we stand, and we boast of the hope of the future [eternal] glory that God shall grant [in heaven]").

²⁶A stanza of "Gott fähret auf gen Himmel."