

The Ascended Christ Rules In The Interest Of His Church

Ephesians 1:20-23, Sunday after Ascension
May 28, 2006

Beloved of the Lord....After Jesus triumphed over death, victoriously rising from the grave, He visibly lived on this earth for forty more days; comforting, consoling, strengthening, and confirming His disciples in the one true faith. During these precious forty days, Jesus also appeared to over 500 believers at once (I Cor. 15). At the end of these forty days Jesus took His disciples to the top of the Mount of Olives, near Bethany and told them to preach the Gospel to all nations. He then ascended into heaven. He "was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven?" Jesus would return again in the same way.

Like the disciples, sometimes we find ourselves gazing up into heaven in wonder. Sometimes we look to the heavens because we are quite sick of this world and therefore anxious for Him to return. At other times we wonder why God has allowed one evil after another to befall us? Sometimes we question God's ways. Just think about Job in the Old Testament who lost all of his children in one day. Or consider Joseph who was sold by his own brothers into slavery. Consider Abraham who was commanded by God to sacrifice His own son. Certainly they all gazed up toward heaven and wondered why?

But today we will see that whatever evil might befall us or our loved ones in this world, it is never the case that God is no longer in control. Indeed, Jesus sits at the right hand of God, the Father has put everything under the feet of Jesus. Jesus ascended up into heaven, and the Father "set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places." Jesus "assumed the government at the Father's right hand, so that the devil and all powers must be subject to Him and lie at His feet, until finally, at the last day, He will completely part and separate us from the wicked world, the devil, death, sin." (Luther) Jesus sits at the right hand of God which is a position of all power and authority. Having all power, Jesus is the right hand of God as it says in Psalm 98:1, "His right hand, and His holy arm, hath gotten him the victory." The Lord Jesus is strong! He has the power to save! And He is far stronger than any power in this world or that to come! He is "far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come." Eph 1:21 What are the powers of this world compared to Christ who is far stronger? Even the powers of Satan, are infinitely small compared to the power of Christ! And though Satan barks, howls, and rages against God's children, what is his power compared to the ascended Christ, sitting at the right hand of God? Satan's head has already been crushed under the heel of Christ. That Old

Evil Foe is on his death bed! "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." Jms 4:7

And so our lesson here is not only that we have an infinitely strong ally in heaven, but even better, Christ rules the whole world around us, in the interest of the Church! Indeed He is the Church's Head! And as the Head of the Church, He rules and governs all things in the best interest of His children adopted by faith! You, the believer, are so precious to your Savior, that the very hairs of your head are numbered! Your names are written in the Book of Life and on the palms of His hands. So let Satan rage all he wants! He can harm us none! "If God be for us, who can be against us?" Let each day place all confidence in Him. For though He has ascended up into heaven, He rules and governs all things, in the interest of His Church.

I. The Church is made perfect through Christ. To understand the love which Christ has for His Church, let us begin with the Old Testament nation of Israel. Let us hear from the book of Hosea. "The LORD said to Hosea, Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms: for the land hath committed great whoredom, *departing* from the LORD." Hos. 1 Since Israel as a nation had been unfaithful to God, since they had committed their "whoredoms": in order to teach them a lesson, God had the prophet Hosea marry a harlot. This marriage of a godly man to an unfaithful woman would impress upon the nation of Israel their unfaithfulness to God. God in this way, in a very real and literal way, taught all of Israel that they had been unfaithful to Him by way of sin. And this lesson in the Old Testament applies to us even in today's world. So the Lord teaches us today that by way of our sin, we have been as harlots, namely unfaithful. Unfaithfulness and sin go hand in hand. We have slept with the false gods of this world. While indeed this is a repulsive picture, just imagine how repulsed our God is by our own sin? Therefore God wants us to repent of our sins and put them away. We are to confess rather than hide sin. I John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." I John 12:9

Here is where our precious Christ enters into the picture. For He is the Savior of the Church. He has the power to cleanse the harlot and make her whole. Here again let us consider the ascension of Christ. Jesus said, "No man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, *even* the Son of man which is in heaven." Jn. 3 Man in his own sin cannot make himself whole. We cannot ascend into heaven by our own power or good works, for we have none. No man can wash himself clean of sin! But God in His mercy came down from heaven in order to cleanse the Church from sin. By way of the cross Jesus turned the harlot into His faithful bride. She came before Him in filthy and unclean rags, but Jesus gave to her a perfect white wedding dress. She came to Him spotted and unclean and He washed her by the cleansing

water of the Gospel, so that she shined in perfect holiness before Him. By faith Isaiah knew this glorious truth and so He writes, "I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness." This robe of righteousness, this wedding dress of purity, Christ freely gives to all. We only need receive it by faith. If we know ourselves to be the unfaithful harlot standing before Him, and if we desire that the Lord Jesus cleanse us from sin, let us believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved! The Bible says, "To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." Rom. 4:5 God does not ask nor command us to work our way into heaven. Such is impossible. Rather God comes down from heaven and justifies all sinners by way of the cross. We receive His forgiveness simply by faith and not by works. Believing then we become a part of God's Church, the True Invisible Church. It is the perfect marriage. The Church is made perfect through Christ.

II. Christ is both the Head and Husband of the Church.

This marriage between Christ and the Church is a perfect marriage. Just as God and man are one in Christ Jesus, so Christ and the Church are one, for the Church is the body of Christ. As the Head of the Church Jesus leads by His Word. And just as ordained in marriage that the wife submit to the word of the husband, so the Church as the beloved bride of Christ, happily submits to His Word. Every word that falls from the blessed lips of our Savior are indeed treasures to us, pearls of wisdom and hope. Every word is profitable unto us. His Word unites us in the true faith. "*There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism.*" Eph. 4 It is for this reason, out of faithfulness to our beloved Redeemer, that we practice prayer fellowship only with those who confess the same truth, the same faith. We will not be spiritually united in any way with those who confess a different faith and confession from that of Scripture. Truth cannot walk hand in hand with falsehood. Truth does not nor will not tolerate darkness.

There is another glorious truth when we speak of Christ and the Church and the marriage of a husband and wife. Just as in this world a good husband loves and treasures his wife, taking good care of her, so Christ loves and treasures His Bride the Church. He loved it so much that He gave His own life for the Church, so that we could live through Him. Our Christ Jesus took the sins of the bride and made them His own. He took the sins of the unclean harlot, blotting out "the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross." And when Jesus ascended into heaven, He did not rid Himself of that human nature, but He retained and kept that human nature. Even today Jesus retains this human nature in heaven for our sake. He is our Husband and our Priest who mediates

before the Father on our behalf. The Bible says, "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous." Because of His righteousness, all believers are righteous in the Father's eyes.

III. You can be comforted, knowing that Christ rules the whole world in the interest of the Church.

And even now while we live upon this earth, and even now while Christ sits upon His heavenly throne as eternal God, Christ rules this very earth with a very distinct purpose! Yes, Christ rules and governs this earth in the best interest of His Church, His Bride, His Beloved. This by the way is why each sermon begins with the words, "Beloved of the Lord", because by faith you are the Lord's beloved, by faith you are His precious Bride! And since all power has been given unto Christ in both heaven and earth, since "all things are under his feet", we need not fear our enemies! True, the devil, world, and our flesh are indeed powerful enemies. We should not underestimate them. But by faith we know Christ has defeated them all! What can truly hurt us when the battle is won! And by His grace and forgiveness working in and through you by the Gospel, you have all the strength and comfort you need as you live your daily life! He blesses you with His goodness every day. But God does more than that. Even the evil that seeks to destroy us, God can use for good. So when we are afraid of the many evils of this world, we should still remember that Christ rules all things in our best interest. So you need not fear the bird flu in Asia, or the rise of terrorism. You need not the superpowers or rogue rulers of this world like China, North Korea, Iran and such. They are puppets on a string. God sets up and tears down nations at His own choosing. This is easily seen from the history of the Old Testament. And if God for His own reasons permits evil to befall us, so be it! For whatever God allows, it is for the glory of His Church, His Beloved, His Bride, His elect.

Therefore beloved of the Lord, do not forget that whatever happens in this world, God is very much at the helm, and He has not nor will He ever fall asleep. Therefore fear not. Your Lord Jesus Christ is very much alive and well, ruling all things in your best interest, for your salvation. His wisdom and Almighty power is best seen on the cross where at first it appeared that evil had triumphed over good! But who really triumphed at the cross? Indeed it was Christ, who by way of that cross brought heavenly salvation to the earthly souls of men. Therefore rejoice in the Lord and again I say rejoice! For Christ is the Head of the Church, and He will ever guide you by His good and gracious Gospel word. Indeed you are precious to Him, and you are His beloved. Therefore go in peace. Amen.