

J. KYLE PAISLEY MEMORIAL FREE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Lord's Day Morning Sermon Notes

5th February 2006

Read: Ephesians 1: 15-23

The Exalted Christ

The first verses of the passage just read introduce a new section in this epistle, a section that continues on into the second chapter of this epistle. In the previous main section that ends at v.14 Paul unfolds the nature of the blessings of which the Lord's people have already become partakers. However, he then proceeds to inform the saints that he is praying constantly that they will be given a deeper and richer understanding of the things of the Lord, the Gospel they had espoused. His words indicate that it is by the illuminating power of the Holy Spirit that an increased understanding of spiritual matters is given. Thus, the thrust of Paul's prayer is that the Lord would give His people, by the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, a fresh & clearer insight into their position in Christ.

However, Paul's words show that there was one truth in particular that he wished the Lord's people to grasp, and he spells it out at the beginning of v.19 – "*And what is the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe.*" The sense of these words is very clear: the ability to believe the Gospel or to rest by faith in Christ is given to a sinner by the Lord. Furthermore, that enablement to believe on Christ and be saved comes by the operation of "the exceeding greatness of His power..." words which actually refer to the omnipotence of God. God's omnipotence means that He is all-powerful – His power is unlimited and infinite; and that is the power that enables a sinner to trust in Christ for salvation.

It is clear from the flow of this text that the Apostle truly desired to get the truth home to the hearts of his readers. Therefore, he sets out to illustrate his teaching by drawing a parallel between the power that enables a sinner to believe and the power that raised Christ from the dead and exalted Him to heaven, v.v.19, 20. The truth presented by Paul here is truly astounding. He is essentially revealing salvation to be a *spiritual resurrection*, a truth that he proceeds to develop in chapter 2. But resurrection from the dead can only be effected by divine power alone, not by human power at all. It is omnipotence; it is the working of God's mighty power that raises anyone from the dead, thus it is that same power alone that brings a sinner from being dead in his sins to the point where he savingly believes on Christ. However, that divine power that brings a sinner out of the grave of his spiritual death is the same mighty power that God "*wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places.*"

Here then, is the reason why we have this reference to Christ's exalted state in this passage – it is for the purpose of having us understand the nature of the power that enables a sinner to believe. However, while in a sense the reference here to Christ's exalted state is incidental as far as the structure of the passage is concerned, yet it does present to us one of the most magnificent statements in all of the New Testament on the matter of Christ's exalted position, which is in itself a most blessed and important subject for our consideration.

I firmly believe that the truth of Christ's exaltation is vital to the spiritual well-being of the Church. It is a truth that is designed to encourage the Lord's people in the midst of their earthly pilgrimage with all of its difficulties and trials. The old writers always referred to the Church in this world as "the Church militant." The description is accurate and appropriate in that it is a reminder of the fact that the Church is on the battle-field while in this world, in combat with a relentless foe and in the midst of great spiritual dangers. But the truth that will encourage the believer in such circumstances is this blessed revelation of Christ in His exaltation – especially since Paul goes on in chapter 2 to reveal that the Church is in union with the exalted Christ, v.v. 5 & 6.

Here then is the truth – the Church is in union with the exalted Christ in all of the victory that He possesses in that position. Note with me a number of details concerning this great truth of the exaltation of Christ.

I. NOTICE FIRST, THE SEAT OF HIS EXALTATION

Note the words in v.20 – "*He raised Him from the dead and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places.*" God the Father raised Christ from the dead & exalted Him to His own right hand – this is the seat of exaltation. The action described refers to the prerogative of a king in placing another person in such a seat or position of regal authority. Kings place at their right hand those whom they design to honour; or those whom they wish to join with themselves in rule and dominion. God the Father is "*the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God...*" 1 Tim 1: 17. Therefore, no mere creature can be associated in honour & authority with Almighty God; such as an angel, Heb 1: 13.

Thus, the fact that Scripture states on a number of occasions that Christ has been exalted to God's right hand signifies that our blessed Redeemer is co-equal with the Father in essence or being & on majesty & authority. See now 1 Tim 6: 15, 16 – the person spoken of is again God the Father; but note once more how He is described in terms of His absolute majesty & glory. Note especially the title "the King of kings and Lord of lords." Now see Rev 17: 14 & 19: 16 where this particular title is ascribed to Christ, indicating again that He is co-equal with the Father. Note – this title signifies one who is an absolute monarch, subservient & answerable to no other; see Dan 2: 36-38 where this title's significance is illustrated. Nebuchadnezzar is called "a king of kings" – in the human realm only of course. But he was thus titled in that he was an absolute monarch in the kingdom of Babylon: he was subservient to no one, ruling as an autocrat. So bringing all these details together it is clear that the seat of Christ's exaltation is the seat of absolute dominion & authority.

1. **The seat of exaltation is occupied by Christ in His humanity.** Christ is at the right hand of God as the Godman. At His first coming Christ took man's nature; He assumed our humanity and thus the Word was made flesh, hence, as the Godman He discharged His complete earthly life & ministry, culminating in His ascension to the right hand of the Father. Thus, when He returned to the Father He did so in that true humanity. This is the clear testimony of Scripture. See Acts 1: 9-11 – these verses teach: (a) Christ ascended and entered heaven in His true humanity; (b) He has retained that humanity for He will return in the same form as when He departed – “this same Jesus...” see also Dan 7: 9, 13, 14; (c) therefore, on His seat of exaltation He is the Godman – He is there in His real humanity. How encouraging & comforting to know that the one with whom we are in union is of our own nature, Acts 7: 56. As the Godman He is one with us & we with Him in that blessed union, Eph 2: 5 & 6.

2. **His occupation of the seat of exaltation signifies that His work is finished.** Note how v.20 states that the Father raised Christ from the dead & then set Him at His right hand. In view in these words are Christ's death, resurrection & ascension, with the throne inseparably linked. Hence, Christ was exalted upon being resurrected from the dead; but He was raised up from the dead because His work was finished & satisfying to divine justice. Christ went to the seat of exaltation because He had made satisfaction for sin. His being there is the evidence that He gave the perfect obedience that was required of Him, Heb 1: 3; Heb 10: 12. Thus, He is on the seat of exaltation to represent all those for whom He died & made the atonement; He is there as the priest-king, Zech 6: 12, 13.

3. **Thus, Christ the Godman occupies the seat of exaltation as the Mediatorial King.** The language employed here signifies that Christ has been seated by the Father at His own right hand not only because His work was done but as a reward of that work. Luke 22: 29 – Christ instructs His disciples about their own future and refers to the appointment of a kingdom for them as the Father had appointed for Him. This is the kingdom of glory, given to Christ because of His obedience. See Matt 28: 18 – note how Christ refers to “*all power (or authority)...*” having been given to Him; and He makes this statement as the One risen from the dead & about to ascend to heaven. Thus, it is an authority invested in Him as the triumphant redeemer of His people, about to take His seat at the Father's right hand & rule as Mediatorial King over all. Cf Phil 2: 8-11. For this reason His work on earth cannot fail, Matthew 28: 19, 20; and in that glorious triumph His people will share, Rev 3: 21.

II. NOTICE SECOND, THE SCOPE OF HIS EXALTATION

Just how wide and far-reaching the scope of Christ's exaltation is, is set forth in v.v. 21 & 22. These words reveal a number of important details about the scope of Christ's exaltation.

1. **It is universal in scope.** See v.21a – the words “*principality and power and might and dominion...*” refer to the angelic world. Moreover, the words indicate both good & evil angels. See Eph 3: 10 where the reference is to the holy angels. Then Eph 6: 10 where the fallen & evil angels are in view. They are given these names because of the exalted, supernatural beings that they are. But all are subservient to Christ: the holy angels to serve Him in the kingdom of grace, Heb 1: 14; and the evil angels to submit to His judgment, 2 Pet 2: 4; Jude v.6.

Note then the words “every name that is named.” The thought here is of those creatures that have a title or name of authority in the realm of men – all are subject to Christ. The inference is that since the rulers among men are subject to Christ in His exalted state *so are the ruled* – indeed all men are, Rev 6: 15-17.

But note v.22a – how universal is this statement! These words are quoted from Psalms 8: 6. In its original setting the reference is to mankind being in a place of rule & authority in this world, v.v. 4, 5. But these particular words “*And hath put all things under his feet...*” find their ultimate fulfilment in Christ. The point to note is that this prophecy is already fulfilled. Already all things are under Christ's feet in the sense that His exalted position & rule are universal in scope. The only point to note is that from our limited & human perspective we cannot see it clearly. See Paul's use of these words again; this time in Heb 2: 6-8. Note in v.8 Paul's assertion that God has left nothing that is not put under Christ. Then he comments – “*But now we see not yet all things put under Him.*” Thus, the fact that Christ's exaltation is universal is not fully seen yet. But it will be completely revealed when He comes again, see Psalms 110: 1, Heb 10: 13, & 1 Cor 15: 24-26. Note this – death will be ultimately destroyed when Christ comes; and that will be the full revelation of the scope of His exaltation.

2. **It is eternal in its scope.** Note the words in v.21 – “*Not only in this world but also in that which is to come.*” The meaning of the words is clear – there is no being here or hereafter, in this world or the next, over which Christ is not highly exalted. His exaltation transcends all time from the moment He took His place at the Father's right hand & extends right into eternity. Thus – included in this exaltation are all of the events that will wind up the affairs of this age & usher in the eternal world. Christ's coming, the resurrection, and the judgment, the eternal glory of the saints & the eternal damnation of the wicked – all is within the scope of His exalted state. Therefore sinner, do not think that you will escape that which is your due. Christ's exalted state has a bearing on you right into eternity.

III. NOTICE FINALLY, THE SCHEME OF HIS EXALTATION

See v.v. 22, 23 – as we have noted, Christ is universally & eternally reigning in His exaltation over all things. But we now see the scheme or purpose of this exaltation: it is for the benefit & blessing of His Church. He is the Head of the Church, ruling over her in all things. But this exalted state is especially designed to be for her benefit & blessing – note the words “*Head over all things to the Church.*” The words signify for the sake & benefit of the Church. All the rule that Christ exercises is ultimately for the benefit of His people.