

Written Copy: Ephesians 1:18-23 “Who’s in Charge Here?”

Ascension Day-Celebrated (Mother’s Day)

Sunday, May 12th, 2024

Text: Ephesians 1:18-23

¹⁸ having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might ²⁰ that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. ²² And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

The text’s intent

Jesus came to win adoption for all those chosen by the Father before the foundation of the world through His life, suffering and death, and resurrection, by paying the ransom price with His body and blood. He ascended to the right hand of the Father, not a temporal place, but the supernatural spiritual presence of God where He rules over all things in a very hands-on manner. He does this in our lives through His gift of the Holy Spirit who pours into our heart and mind all the gifts of grace Christ won for those who were chosen before the foundations of the world and were called by His work in the Gospel, making Christ the atoning sacrifice “for me”. His presence is the assurance of Christ ruling and protecting me now and that I will live with Him forever. The Spirit works through the words of Scripture to enlighten our hearts and minds concerning His work keeping us in repentant faith through all the problems and trials that the world and the devil hurl at us. But they cannot win and are never in control. Christ is ruling over all human powers, institutions, and the devil and his demons so that God’s will for His children is always accomplished. And that will is that we live in steadfast faith toward Christ now and in His real presence in the eternity to come.

Focus Statement:

Jesus Christ is the Almighty creating and ruling God who came down and set aside His glory, meaning not that He no longer had it, but He didn’t always make use of it, only when it served the Father’s plans and purposes. And the Father’s plan from the foundation of the world is that Christ live our life and die in our place to be our atoning sacrifice, and thus win us back to Him from sin, death, and the devil. He proved that he rose again showing Himself to His chosen witnesses, who pass that witness on to us through the Words of Scripture, which all explain that everything that happened was in keeping with the Fathers will. He ascended but sent His Spirit to bring the saving knowledge and wisdom of God to us and make Jesus’ atoning sacrifice for me. Christ rules now over all human rulers, institutions, and devil and his demons so all those chosen from the foundation of the world live with Him now and unto eternity.

Function Statement:

Why it’s important to know:

We know that when Christ walked the earth, He was able to heal sickness and defeat evil in the lives of those around Him. But now after His Ascension, the state of the world and our own lives witness to things being out of control, almost as if He no longer is a hands-on God watching over us. This doubt is caused by our not knowing and understanding why He allows things to happen as He does. Perhaps He is not in control as we want Him to be, that He is no longer really “for us”.

What the hearer should do as a result:

Work with the Holy Spirit through the good and difficult times to remain in faith toward Christ who rules over all things for us for all He has chosen to come to faith by the work of the Church in the Gospel.

Subject Sentence: The Ascended Christ rules over all things for you

Who Was in Charge Growing Up?

Happy Mother's Day! While not all of you are mothers, all of you had one. Most of you probably remember your mom from when you were growing up. So, let me ask you, who was large and in charge around the house? For me it was my mom. She was the mover and shaker. She worked a full-time job as a Supervisor of the Social Security Office in Pontiac. She did the laundry. Made dinner. Did most of the cleaning (with reluctant help from dad and me and my brother). Later on, when I was a teenager, she went back to school and earned a BA in Business Administration. She was always busy doing something. Looking back now, I realize I never really appreciated her for all the hard work she put in.

Things didn't always go smoothly, not with two boys in the house. And when we misbehaved, tracked dirt into the house, got in trouble for not doing our homework, who was large and in charge? Mom was. I remember when I was young, she always gave me the "buzzcut". But then when I hit pre-teen years, she let me grow it longer. I thought she was letting me have a hair style like other boys had, the longer hair of the 60's and 70's. But the real reason was so that when I misbehaved, she could come up from behind, grab a handful, and shake some sense into me. And if that didn't solve my problem, I heard that famous line "Just wait until your father gets home!"

Who's In Charge of Our Nation, Our World?

God gave us moms and dads to be large and in charge during our formative years. But let's expand the horizon. Now that we are grown up who do we look to as being large and in charge? Who do we look to provide solutions for the problems that plague our country today such as: the border crisis, rising violence and crime, the unrest at the college campuses forcing graduating seniors to miss the pomp and circumstances they already missed their High School graduation because of COVID. Who should be large and in charge? Who's responsible for the mess we are in?

You might point to the current president, especially if you're a member of the opposing political party and say, "It's all his fault". Or you might sight the former president and things that he did or didn't do when he was in office and say, "It's all his fault." And perhaps to some extent, in both cases, you would be right. But keep in mind the president is not the king, and he must work with lawmakers from both sides of the aisle who cannot and will not work together. When we talk about who is in charge and who is responsible for dropping the ball there are plenty of others to blame.

Let's expand our view to the world stage: the war in Ukraine and the War in Gaza. Who's large and in charge enough to solve these problems? Certainly, the leaders of those countries involved have responsibility. But there is an undercurrent of distrust, animosity, and desire to dominate others that's been brewing for a long time. Do these world leaders really have the power to put an end to fighting and quarreling that's been going on for centuries?

Who's In Charge of Your Life?

Now let's step back down to a personal level. Who's large and in charge of your life? Who is running the show and calling the shots? Where is the first place you turn when a problem arises, when a decision needs to be made? When something breaks or is lost, where is the first place you turn? To yourself. You and I like running the show for our own lives. We look to ourselves and our knowledge, wisdom, and experience to fix the problem or decide on a solution. Oh sure, we might turn to the Lord in prayer, but what are we really asking Him? Many times, it's "Here's my plan Lord; bless it." That's a far cry from the "your will be done" that we pray every time we pray the Lord's Prayer. But how equipped are we to take on that much control of our lives when we don't really know for sure what the next year, day, or moment will bring? Truly there is someone far better equipped to handle our personal, family, national, and world problems. And that someone is Jesus

Jesus seated at the right hand of the Father

Ephesians 1:19-21 (So that you may know) what is the immeasurable greatness of (the Father's) power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might ²⁰ that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.

Jesus ascended to heaven-where is that? Can He really be involved intimately?

What should it mean to us that Jesus has ascended to the right hand of the Father? It can mean to some that it seems Jesus has abandoned us. Where is the right hand of the Father anyway? Well, you might say "heaven", and that is a biblical answer. But where is heaven? When we consider heaven, we see it as being a separation of God from us. Heaven is somewhere up there, so far beyond our solar system that we could never reach it. Or that it's like another dimension. Jesus is there, watching what is going on here, but its like on a security camera, He can see a general overview, but not the particulars. And because He is no longer here on this earth He is limited as to what He can do, and how quickly He can address problems that come up.

Heaven is not a temporal place. It's not out at the edge of the universe, or a parallel dimension. Heaven is a spiritual reality that is beyond our comprehension. It is the presence of the Father and the Son, with the angels, as they reign and rule over all things. How close is heaven? Consider the fact that Scripture tells us God's angels are present and watching over us. It's the spiritual reality that exists all around us.

In our First Lesson from **Acts 1:9 ...as (the disciples) were looking on, (Jesus) was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.** It wasn't as if Jesus kept on going up and up and away. He was not longer visible with the human eye, but He is far from gone. Heaven is close, we just can't see it or have direct access to it during our time on this earth. It's a hard thing to conceive of because we always think of things having a physical location in relationship to us here on earth. But heaven is God's ruling presence that is beyond what we sinful human beings can understand.

What does it mean that He is seated at the "**right hand of the Father**"? In Jewish thought the right hand was the hand of power and authority. To sit at the right hand of a king you were given the power and authority to speak for the king and call all the shots. How extensive is this power and authority? Jesus reigns **far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named.** There is no human being on this earth who can countermand His authority. It doesn't matter if the president or ruler is a believer or not, Christ's will is accomplished in keeping with the Father's plan from the beginning. There is no human institution that can thwart His reign and rule. There is no demon, nor can the devil thwart His plans, as hard as he may try. The Triune God is always at work reigning and ruling over all things and all people.

That can be a hard thing to accept and believe in, especially when we see all the hate, war, violence, suffering, and injustice that humankind inflicts upon one another. Good things happen to good people, and yet good things also happen to bad people. Bad things happen to bad people, and yet bad things also happen to good people. We confess our Triune God to be a God of justice and fairness, but you may wonder where is His justice and fairness given the things that go on in this world?

We need to remember we have limited view and understanding of the total picture of all that is going on in the past, present and future. We need to remember that bad things, evil things do not originate with God. Evil in the world is the result of the sinful selfishness that inflicts every human heart. It comes from our inability to put anyone first other than ourselves. And present to encourage mankind to keep on perpetuating evil and injustice upon one another is the devil and his demons.

While evil does not originate with God it doesn't mean He is powerless against it. Christ in His reigning and ruling manages and controls the forces of evil in the world. If He was not, and as you think back in history you can see, if not for Christ's intervention we would've blown each other up in a nuclear war long ago. He is controlling not just the work of evil men, but the forces of nature that bring natural disasters upon us such as thunderstorms and tornados, hurricanes and wildfires, drought, famine, and disease. The reason why you and I are here today is because He protected us from being overwhelmed, inundated, and destroyed by these things. He allows these evil things to happen for His own purposes in order to bring to fulfillment the Father's plan that will reach its goal on the Last Day.

The End Goal of the Triune God

And what is the end goal of the Triune God? Not that we have trouble free and easy lives here on this earth, although in many ways we do. Not that we are successful in all the plans we make, because many times they would lead to trouble. Jesus Christ is ruling at the right hand of the Father to do all that is necessary to restore His real presence among His Creation just as it was back in the Garden of Eden. There the Lord would come and walk with man and woman and spend time in a loving relationship with them. But when the Fall into sin happened, because God is holy, and His precious children were no longer holy, no longer manifested His image, but were corrupted by sin, separation had to happen. Adam and Eve were kicked out of the Garden, no longer able to live in God's holy presence. Death entered into the lives of mankind who were created to live forever. Adam and Eve, and you and I with our sinful thoughts, words, and actions perpetuate this separation and curse of death. But that is not how God originally created things to be. And Christ at the right hand of the Father working to restore us to His presence.

He left the Father's presence and came down to become one of us to set us right with Himself once again. God the Son became man, setting aside His power and glory as God to live the kind of lives you and I live. In setting it aside He didn't rid Himself of it permanently. We can see Him make use of it in all the miracles He accomplished while on earth. But His greatest work was taking the sins of all mankind upon Himself, taking them to the cross, where He became the atoning sacrifice to make all mankind right with God once again.

He rose again so that we might be assured the Father accepted Him as that perfect sacrifice, and also to promise to each of us what the future has in store for us, our own resurrection. He wants you there when He restores and recreates Heaven and Earth, making it once again that perfect Garden of Eden that He originally created to be our eternal home. He chose you to be His before you were born, worked through your parents and a paster to bring you under the waters of baptism, and has been at work in you every day of your life to keep you in that repentant baptismal faith by which you have forgiveness even as you continue to sin. He is hands on at work every day of your life to make sure your future will be with Him forever.

When Jesus walked the earth, even though He controlled things far beyond His temporal location (as can be seen when He sent His twelve disciples out ahead of Him giving them His power and authority to heal the sick, preach the word, and cast out demons), He was still only visibly present in one place. But having now ascended to the Father and ruling over all things, He is present in all places, at all times, through His Spirit cloaked in the means of grace. He is here within you intimately by faith. And He is powerfully at work for you wherever you are, wherever you go, no matter how serious your situation is, or how much you've sinned and messed up. He is here with you to forgive and restore you.

And what about all those acts of injustice, violence, unfairness? What about all those acts of nature that hurt, destroy, and kill people. He is at work moderating them and using them in fulfillment of the Father's end time goal. He uses them to call people to faith, showing them that they don't have what it takes to run their lives solo. He uses them to open people's hearts and minds to the message we are to preach and confess as the Church: that God loves you, Jesus died for you, and wants you to turn and trust in Him, so that you will be ready for the glorious future to come in eternal life. And for those of us who believe, He uses these things to keep our heads and hearts turned toward Him. He uses them so that we would continue to trust in Him alone in all things, and to turn us back to Him when we start to slip away in self-confidence and try to make ourselves the ruler over our lives.

Conclusion

Who's large and in charge here? We may look to world leaders, national and local leaders, or even ourselves. But none have the power or ability to handle all that needs to be done to save us. None of us can see the big picture. None of us knows what will happen next year, next week, tomorrow, or an hour from now, let alone how to correctly deal with it. But our Risen and Ascended Savior Jesus Christ can and does. He is in the highest ruling position over all things. No person, power, or authority be they natural or supernatural, can thwart His plan and purpose for us now and unto eternal life. He came not to give us a good life now, but to allow whatever must happen to call the lost to faith and keep us in steadfast repentant faith. He is not at work making this place heaven on earth. He is at work bringing His reign and rule into the hearts and minds of all those He has chosen so that they can enjoy with us the perfection of eternal life to come. He is working in you, watching over you, every day of your life. All that He allows and works in your life serves to give you life now and eternal life to come. Come Lord Jesus. Amen.