

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.I.J.W.Oakley (3-12-1995 Guisborough Evangelical Church)

Ephesians 1:19-23

Additional bible reading: Philippians 2:2-16

Christ risen, ascended, ruling, filling His church

Introduction

Review – Paul’s prayer that his readers might have full knowledge of God, that they might have assurance of his calling at the beginning of Christian life, glory of inheritance at the end, and exceeding greatness of God’s power. This power we have already received and experienced, and it will ensure we are brought to that place where we shall see God and be with Him for ever. Then there is power we need to lay hold of if we would live triumphantly. These things are what we should be concerned with and put our mind on, and not on the passing hour with all its trifles and trivialities.

This power is the very power which raised Christ from the dead. The moment Paul mentions the resurrection, he continues the thought to what happened to the risen Christ, where He is now, what He is doing, and what is His position. So we are going to consider teaching of Paul about the exaltation of the risen and ascended Christ, and then think of what it implies for us.

Exaltation of risen, ascended and reigning Christ

When Old Testament writers wanted to give examples of the power of God, they always turned to His work in creating the universe (Isaiah 40:12ff), or delivering His people from slavery in Egypt (Jeremiah 16:14). But New Testament writers underline the resurrection of Christ. The reason is that only Divine power could deal with the one enemy we are totally powerless against - death. Comes to all one day, and we have no answer to it. Can postpone it, but it always catches up in the end. Then after death comes to process of decay and decomposition. We came from dust, and to dust we shall return.

But God has done what we cannot do. He did not just reverse the process and restore a dead Jesus to life. He transcended the process. He raised Jesus to an altogether new life. A body which is immortal, glorious, powerful, and with none of present weaknesses. Totally unique and unparalleled miracle. Evidence was the empty tomb, and resurrection appearances and failure of his enemies to produce His dead body. **Declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead** (Romans 1:4).

The resurrection is clearest, public and irrefutable proof of divine power there is. So the resurrection became central in the church’s proclamation. **This gospel.. that Christ died for our sins,.. was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures** (1 Corinthians 15:2-4). **He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification** (Romans 4:25). Without the resurrection there would be no Gospel, no Christians, no Church and no New Testament.

The theme of the resurrection also dominated the church's worship. They did not remember Jesus as the wonderful prophet of Nazareth, but they worshipped the living Son of God, their contemporary conqueror of sin and death who was alive for ever more. It came into every evangelistic sermon. **You put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him** (Acts 2:23-24).

Then, from resurrection to next step – ascension and universal dominion. **He raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given.... And God placed all things under his feet** (Ephesians 1:20-22). At God's right hand he is in the place of supreme honour and executive authority, enthroned in the highest place. He has all authority in heaven and on earth. That was His original position from the first. He was God's eternal Son. Then He left behind this exalted position when He took our humanity, became of no reputation, took on the form of a servant, and became obedient to death, even death on a cross (Philippians 2:7-8).

Then, having died, making perfect atonement for His people so that guilt and condemnation could be removed, He was raised up in triumph and exalted to the right hand of God. He resumed the position which was originally His. He - who one day lay in the arms of a peasant woman, worked at a carpenter's bench, slept in a boat and was crucified as a criminal – received the highest honour in the universe, carried to glory, passed through heaven and reached the throne. From the lowest depths to the supremest heights. Supreme over all ranks of angels, all evil spiritual powers, rulers of darkness of this world, supreme over natural world, the elements and the physical universe, and over all affairs of men, supreme over national rulers and international authorities, kings, princes, presidents and prime ministers.

And in case Paul has forgotten anything, he adds that He is above every name that is named, not only in this world, but in the age to come. Nothing is excluded from His sovereignty. In power and dignity and authority – the man of Calvary, still with nail prints in His hands and His feet – at the right hand of the majesty on high. **Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name** (Philippians 2:9). N.B. This has already happened – past tense – He already rules as King of Kings. At the second coming He will be visibly displayed to universe, and final subjection to Him willingly and unwillingly. Then, even death, already dethroned, will be finally destroyed.

This is His position now, not only saviour but sovereign. We must be careful that we do not spend so much time speaking of the second coming that we detract from what is already true of Him. Must not underestimate His present position of Lord. Must see Him now as crowned with glory and honour.

Then Paul goes on to emphasise that Christ is **head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way** (Ephesians 1:22-23). Not only head of the world and universe but head of the Church. Same ruler for both. Double rule and double honour. Rules the universe in the interests of His people. As head of the body, He directs the church, reveals His will, shows it the way to go. And also indwells His church and fills it with life and power, all His gifts and

graces. Ocean of fullness for all His people's needs. The very life of Christ flows into His church, as life in the vine flows into branches that they might bring forth fruit.

“Church” in relation to His headship and indwelling. Not talking about people who say they are Christians, or denominations, or ecclesiastical hierarchies, or all who have been through a ceremony of baptism or who observe religious ritual. But he speaks of the true church, whose actual number is known to God only, who are born of His Spirit, acknowledge Him in heart and life, truly saved.

So here is picture of exaltation of Christ – risen, alive, ascended, crowned with glory and honour, head of universe, head of the church, filling it with His life and energy, using its members for the furtherance of His eternal purposes. That is the doctrine and theology of this passage. This is the truth about Christ – His present position, power and activity.

All very well, but what have these things to do with us? What practical difference if we accept and believe these truths? Answer – if we take these truths seriously, should make an enormous difference.

If we are concerned with instant experience first and foremost, we will live a Christian life which is shallow and superficial. But if we realize truth of God, using our minds, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, we are on high road to rich experience and Christian maturity. These truths help us (1) understand who Christ is, leading to true worship and submission of lives to Him, (2) have true understanding of world around us and all that is happening to us, and (3) realize the resources which are available to us. It is because we neglect or do not realize these resources that our lives are weak and ineffective.

(1) Who is Christ and what should be our relationship to Him?

Who was Christ? Many know only that He was born in Bethlehem, a great teacher who taught people to love their neighbour as themselves, died on a Cross and rose again, but have no idea of His glory before the world was, and His present and future glory. In place of these woefully inadequate truths, we must preach Him as the Eternal Son, second person of the Trinity, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father, that He became man for our salvation, was the perfect and sufficient atonement for sin, gloriously raised, ascended, and now on the throne, living and ruling. He is coming again. He is exalted as head over all. Men need highest and glorious understanding of whom we mean when we talk of Christ, **that all may honour the Son just as they honour the Father** (John 5:23).

Adoration of heart, prostrating very beings in worship, crowning Him Lord of life, putting Him on the throne of the heart, yielding whole of life to be His bondservant.

*“Worthy O Lamb of God art thou  
That every knee to thee should bow”*

*“Praise the Saviour, ye who know Him,  
Who can tell how much we owe Him?  
Gladly let us render to Him*

*All we have and are.”*

(2) Key to understanding of world around us and all that happens to us

Risen, ascended, ruling universe and His church. Not a helpless spectator where men are running riot and do as they please. There is no danger of the cause of God being defeated or the kingdom of Christ being defeated. **All things under His feet** (Ephesians 1:22), **who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will** (Ephesians 1:11), **He changes times and seasons; He sets up kings and deposes them** (Daniel 2:21).

Even now His judgements are abroad in the earth. Some people comment on the terrible wickedness in the world, but that God does nothing. Does He not? Never read that God gives men up to their uncleanness, abandons them in their sins that they may know His just judgements in this life (Romans 1:24, 26, 28). **For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness** (2 Thessalonians 2:11-12).

We need not be too fearful of the newspaper headlines. To grasp these truths puts backbone into us, iron into our souls, and makes us strong when all around are in terror and despair. Yet we still sometimes wonder why our life is so full of calamities and difficulties, even though we are His and are walking His walk. May not understand it fully, but trials are part of our sanctification. **Whom the Lord loves, he chastens** (Hebrews 12:6). Not that He is unable to prevent these things. He knows what is best. There are times for sunshine, and times for the storm. Many a Christian looking back over life has thanked God for times of illness and set back, because they were important in nurturing the soul and spiritual development. God knows what is best. His heart is love, and we are in His hands. Always remember that nothing can happen to us apart from Him. Rest in His love and the power of His might. **God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear** (Psalm 46:1).

(3) Divine resources available to us

Risen and ascended reigning Lord fills church with all His fullness of life and power. Being a Christian is not just about being forgiven and having insurance policy right for eternity. If that is all, we have missed the glory and grandeur of being a Christian. It is knowing the power of God, raising us from death of sin into loving relationship with Himself. It should fill us with sense of wonder and amazement. God is at work in our soul still. **God works in you both to will and to work on behalf of His good pleasure** (Philippians 2:13). He creates a desire for His word and moves our will. **Able to do exceeding abundantly according to the power that works in us** (Ephesians 3:20). **Divine power has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness** (2 Peter 1:3).

Christian life is living life of union and dependence so that we are able to do what is otherwise beyond us. Hence the command: **Be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power** (Ephesians 6:10). Hence Paul's ambition: **That I may know Christ and the power of his resurrection** (Philippians 3:10).

If you feel you don't need this, doing alright on your own, it is clear you do not understand God's requirements for you. So compromised with the world and so blind to the dimensions of the Christian life and reality of enemies, that may not realize the urgent need of divine power. God would not make such a provision if He did not see the depth of our need.

The Christian life involves relentless warfare. **The Devil is a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour** (1 Peter 5:8). The pull of the world with all its lower standards is enticing us in every company we keep and in every newspaper we read. The lust of the flesh and the eyes, and pride of life. Constantly trying to drag us from the Lord. We need to open our Bibles and read the commandments with all their implications, and the Sermon on the Mount – we are soon made aware of how far we are from His requirements.

Take these things seriously – urgent need for the power of Christ's resurrection. We should be aware that as people of God, we no longer stand out in uniqueness as we once did. How easy to **have a form of godliness but denying its power** (2 Timothy 3:5). Need to know ourselves and our weaknesses – our urgent need to be sustained by power greater than ourselves. When we ignore the promptings and forget Him and His power, we may expect to be chastened to bring us back.

For all our need, there is Christ's fullness. **From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another** (John 1:16). Made complete in Him. **You have been given fullness in Christ** (Colossians 2:10). Problem is we can believe all these things in mind, and quote the texts word perfect, but know precious little in heart and experience. How much do we know it in practice? Need to live on this fullness else we shall be incomplete, dissatisfied and ineffective Christians. How we need to realize the greatness of salvation, the greatness of what has happened and what is happening to us.

### Conclusion

Christ risen, ascended, reigning, filling His church. Focus for worship, key to understanding the world, and His rich provision for our needs. Are these truths real to you? Do you live your life in the strength of these truths? If not, what does being a Christian really mean to you? Ever thought what a marvellous thing it is to be a Christian? Rejoice in the Lord. Think on these things and let them thrill your soul.