

Congregation, in recent weeks I have spoken about how privileged we are as Christians knowing Christ as Saviour. We know that he suffered hell for us on the cross. He died to pay for our sin. He rose physical from the grave, the first fruit, guaranteeing that we will surely follow. But have you ever thought about how privileged we are to know that Jesus ascended and is seated at the right hand of God?

Just think about it. First, Jesus is before our Father in heaven pleading our cause. Romans 8:34, "Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died – more than that, who was raised to life, is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us" Similarly, in 1 John 2:1, "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defence."

Second, Jesus being seated at the right hand of God in heaven guarantees our own glorification. In other words, we too will get to heaven. (Eph 2:6) "And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus".

Third, we now have his Holy Spirit within us, guaranteeing what is still to come. (Romans 8:16) "The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children."

Now I wonder whether you also noticed what our text says about our ascended Saviour, seated at the right hand of God the Father? Notice Eph 1:19 "His incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength." This whole verse bristles with the power of the ascended Christ. Then it goes on to say in v20, "which God exerted" or "which he worked out in Christ when He raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms!"

Yes, we see God's power all around, but it is seen most clearly in the resurrection and ascension of Christ, and particularly when God placed Jesus at his right hand in the heavenly realms for the benefit of the elect. God has placed our risen Lord far above any other earthly or heavenly authority. Whatever authority can be conceived, Jesus our risen and ascended Lord is above it. Our Saviour is absolutely supreme, placed there by the power of God! Again, for the benefit of the elect.

Fellow Christian, may that be of great encouragement and comfort to you! Our ascended Lord is not only King over the church which he bought with his precious 'blood', but the whole cosmos is under his rule. He is also King over America, England, France, Russia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Australia, New Zealand, indeed, over every nation!

And then please notice what verse 22 says, "God has placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church which is his body." We don't just need to be reminded of this. The leaders of the nations need to hear this. Obama needs to hear it! The new prime minister of England needs to hear it! Vladimir Putin, Malcolm Turnbull, John Keys, and many more need to hear this. Every terror network group needs to hear it! For there is only one ruler and King and He is already reigning and will be forever more and we add, for the sake of the church, for the elect.

Now some people have a misunderstanding about that last phrase. They think the church exists for the world. That's the wrong way around. Jesus rules the world for the benefit of the church! He rules the world so that all who are chosen for eternal life before the beginning of time will be drawn to the gospel and be saved! That process began before time and was fulfilled, became reality if you will, not that it was ever in doubt, when Jesus completed his earthly work of redemption and ascended. That is when he took the driver's seat.

The OT already prophesied about this. Psalm 110:1 refers to the kingship of Jesus. "The Lord says to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet!" That dear friend is a clear reference to the ascended Jesus. The writer to Hebrews sees Psalm 8:6 as having special relevance to Christ. "We see Jesus, who was also made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honour" (Heb 2:7). This theme of Jesus' exaltation is a result of Him completing the Father's mission by tasting death for everyone (cf Heb 2:9).

Christ, by tasting and defeating death frees all those who were held in slavery by their fear of death. Death is no longer to be feared! That great ending to Romans 8 comes to mind – nothing in all creation can separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus! To be with Christ is going to be better by far!

In the NT, this theme of Jesus as the exalted King, who under God, rules in utter freedom is laid out time and time again. In fact, Psalm 8 & 110 are quoted more in the NT than any other Psalms. Christians often speak about Jesus' coming to earth to be a slave and a servant and how he died a cruel death and rose from the grave etc. Sometimes as a result we seem spend too much time on his death and resurrection, and rejoice too little in the fact that Jesus ascended and is seated at God's right hand. Sometimes we make too much of Christmas and Easter, and not nearly enough of the ascension and his position of authority. And when we do that we are somewhat out of step with the NT.

In the NT, the emphasis is on Jesus kingship, not only King over this present age, but will continue so until the last anti-God power has been removed. The Apostle Luke wrote one volume about the earthly ministry of Jesus, his gospel. His second volume, the book of Acts, begins with the ascension and continues to describe what Jesus does in his church through the work of his Holy Spirit.

The mode of the work is different than the first book but the worker is the same. We must not reduce the work of Jesus to the gospels only, nor to the book of Acts, for He continues to work from heaven. And his heavenly ministry will end with the destruction of death, the destroyer. 1 Cor 15:28: "When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all." At that time, all things will again belong to God. That's when the Father's will is done on earth as it is in heaven. At that time God will be our One and all.

Then God will look at his renewed creation and say for a second time, "It is good, it is very good". Congregation may this comfort and encourage you. You know, sometimes we become easily despondent. We look at the world and the mess it is in. Syria, Iraq, terrorism, Isis, leave alone the moral decay we see all around us.

We look at the church and recognise the struggle to make the church more holy and more relevant. We continue trying to win new converts through the preaching of God's word, new activities and programs, but it is an up hill battle. We look at the increase of other religions, particularly Islam who do not acknowledge Jesus as Saviour and King, and we think, "It's all hopeless – we are wasting our time."

Congregation, at those times, may we not forget that Jesus rules now from heaven for the Church. Jesus is the head of the church and He continues to work from his heavenly realm for the benefit of the church, for the benefit of the elect. That is a great encouragement and comfort for us. Without that assurance, we would have every reason to give up! And I would be leading the pack.

Congregation, I make no apology for it, if Jesus wasn't ruling now for the benefit of the church, I would step down from ministry for it would be utterly hopeless. "Ha" you ask, "How can we be sure that Jesus is the King and continues to be so? After all, not too many people acknowledge that today?"

No doubt, every Christian would love to see real, tangible, and unmistakable evidences of Christ's power. We pray and would love to see more converts, some from our own families! We would love to see the church grow! Well, we need to confess that we live by faith and not by sight. Yet, that doesn't mean that we never see Christ's power at work.

Sometimes He miraculously heals, and at other times He sets the prisoner free. Sometimes He causes dictators to be removed from power without blood-shed, and converts people to the Christian faith that we think were beyond hope. However, our faith does not rest on this type of evidence alone. We live by faith not by sight.

Romans 8:16, "The Spirit testifies to our Spirit that we are God's children," and as our text clearly says in verse 22, "And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be the head over everything for the church" Our faith rests on the Word of the Lord. I am reminded of the story of Sennacherib, the king of Assyria in 2 Kings 19 who taunted Israel's God and King Hezekiah!

"Look Hezekiah, look at all these countries with their kings and so called 'gods' I have already defeated. Give up. It's useless trying to hold out. Your God is also weak!" And when Hezekiah brought Sennacherib's taunt before the Lord in the temple, the Lord sent out his angel and killed 185,000 soldiers in one night. And when the people got up the next morning--there were all the dead bodies!

Now Jesus sitting at a place of authority and power highlight two other benefits that are important for us to realise. First, it allows him through his Holy Spirit to pour out gifts from heaven upon his members. Christ has all of heaven's resources at his disposal. We just need to ask!

Isn't that what James' complaint was about? "You do not have for you do not ask?" (Jm 4:2). Jesus supplies his church with the gifts and powers needed for endurance, growth and for victory. Similar to the OT people when they were supplied with daily manna until they reached the Promised Land, so also Jesus as the head of the church supplies daily strength to his people until the journey is completed and we reach the Promised Land.

What gifts? Gifts that are listed throughout the NT in Rom 12 and 1 Cor 12 and Eph 4. Teachers and those who serve, those who prophesy and encourage and those who show leadership and dispense mercy, just to name a few. Sometimes there are different gifts for different occasions. They belong to the church's heavenly equipment. We must never forget that the Lord gives these gifts for the sake of his body the church. These gifts are never given just to serve our own personal tastes or desires. These gifts are given for the benefit of Jesus' body the church, so that it may be built up.

Furthermore, the Christian faith is not just to be practised only in private. The gifts Jesus pours out on the church are not just for those who think like we do, or those who are spiritual giants or the heroes of faith in our eyes. The gifts are also given for ordinary every day people. Jesus saves people who sing out of tune, or who have boots that squeak, or have odd clothes and double chins, and He makes them saints. They belong to the body of Christ because he has caused them to trust in Jesus saving work on the cross!

A second benefit is that Jesus defends and keeps us safe from all enemies. Christ, from his position of authority controls history and restrains the enemies of the church so that they can do us no ultimate harm. Even the gates of hell will not prevail against her [Mat 16:18]. This doesn't mean that we will be spared the pain of persecution. Doesn't even mean that the Christian Reformed Churches will be saved. Yet, in our trials we will see the power of the Lord. Sometimes this power will be evident when He breaks the chains and opens the doors of the prison, like he did in Acts 12, and 16 and at other times he will keep his people safe when all human hope seems to be lost.

Sometimes his power will be seen when opens countries to the word of God. Sometimes the disciple of Jesus may even have to die a martyr's death. Yet, even then Christ is in control. Stephen while being stoned looked up and saw Jesus sitting where? At the right hand of God. A place of power!

Congregation world history does not run by its own laws. At the center of history is God and his covenant people, saved by Christ. The church is the reason why history continues. The task of the church and the goal of history coincide. History as we know it today will not finish until such time that the number of the elect is fulfilled. Then the church will be complete!

World history will ultimately serve church history, because the elect in the world must be saved through the church. Therefore, we need to be a light in this world. The world needs to see that we are disciples of Christ. By our love, by our giving, by our example. By feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the imprisoned, so that the elect, by God's grace may hear and see the gospel and respond.

Congregation rejoice that Jesus has been given all authority for the sake of the church. May that comfort and encourage you. Jesus reigns and so shall we! That's a good reason for thanksgiving and prayer. Amen.