

THE THRONE OF CHRIST

Ephes 1:15-23

When you think of Jesus – what do you picture? Do you think of him as the suffering servant? Savior and Redeemer? Do you picture a man who walked and taught, who loved and showed mercy, who healed and embraced? When you picture Jesus is he in service by his love as he heals and comforts? Is he hanging on a cross looking down, emerging from a tomb, or revealing himself to his disciples as he shows the wounds that were the result of the cross?

There are so many images and pictures we get in our head when we think of our Lord and Savior. And I think those pictures change as we go through our calendar year. Our picture of Christ during Advent and the Christmas season takes on a vastly different look than it does as we go through Lent and Easter. Even then going into Good Friday and Maundy Thursday – those look different than the few days before when we celebrated Palm Sunday. But how often do we picture and think about Christ and what it means to sit on his throne – how often is Christ as King the image we have? We talk about it, we give thanks for it, we declare that all things are placed under his feet and that it is upon his throne that he judges the living and the dead...but how often do we find ourselves reflecting on that image alone? Christ as King of kings, and Lord of lords.

And one question I wondered this week was if we are doing a disservice to Christ when we fail to take in this image of King – because that’s a major part of our understanding of Jesus Christ. I argue that it’s the MAIN part of our understanding of Jesus and yet most of our time is spent on what he did for those 33 years and not what he does for eternity. We focus on his acts and not as his role. Because there also is a huge implication for us in that as well – in our life now and our life to come.

Paul is sitting in a prison in Rome and he writes this letter as an encouragement to the church to understand and live into the fullness of life in Christ. He doesn’t want them to simply *see*, he doesn’t want them to simply *know*, he doesn’t want them to simply *understand*...but he wants them to live it out today. Right now. Know who Christ is, know what he did, know what God declares in his Son and what it means for you...but live into it today. Right now.

And as we begin this letter the first thing we should see is that Paul starts verse 15 with “*For this reason*”...which means he’s continuing on from the previous words, thoughts, and ideas. And while Paul most likely is speaking about all the things said up to this point – he really is focusing on verses 13 and 14. And while there is a lot there (predestination, will of God, salvation, faith and belief)...we can kind of smooch it all together and speak of salvation. Paul wants these Gentile readers, these Gentile Christians to know that they are given salvation in Jesus Christ by God’s work, God’s will, God’s plan.

And what is extremely interesting, and I'm not sure if you noticed it as we read those 9 verses, and actually if we were to continue reading through this whole letter, what we would notice...is that there is something HUGE missing. "Missing" in the sense that it's only mentioned a few times (implied more – but mentioned only a couple): The cross. We actually don't even read about the cross until **2:16**. It's *mentioned* in passing in **1:7**, then again in **5:2** and **5:25** but the cross just isn't a major theme in this letter. Maybe it's because Paul is writing to Gentiles who seek reconciliation instead of forgiveness of sins. Maybe their needing to know more about Christ's reign over all things rather than his dying for sins and reference to them dying with him. I don't know...but for whatever reason it is, for whatever reason Paul decided to focus in another way...it's what the people needed to hear.

One author writes (*Peter T. O'Brien*) that the Letter to the Ephesians has a "high Christology which appropriately has been described as a 'cosmic Christology.'" If you've never heard of the term "Christology", that's OK, it simply means the study of all that has to do with Christ (his person, his nature, his role, etc). *Cosmic* Christology...I think that will help you and I in our understanding of Christ's ultimate role.

To you and I...a "cosmic Christology" might sound a little odd. When we think of "cosmic" we think of "out of this world" and maybe even aliens or something strange like that. But the word "cosmic" simply means universe or cosmos. And so when we put them together we should understand that it speaks of the study of Christ in all, and above all, things. Of this world, out of this world, and all the worlds in-between. But it actually means even more than that.

The Ephesians...they were actually struggling with something we speak of but don't speak of. It's almost become taboo in our culture but very real in other parts of the world – like Haiti and even New Orleans: Evil spirits. Paul is writing to a group of people struggling with spiritual warfare, evil powers and presence – and the power they have on your life...right now. Paul writes to a group or people stuck in the fear of the unknown powers of this world and what they can, have, and will do to you.

Again, this is something you and I...maybe even gloss over because we rationalize it or ignore it – but it's very real. I know I've talked about it with a few people, but never dealt with it. And this week I actually was called, as the Chaplain, to come pray with a family whose son was dealing with this very thing. Evil spirits, satanic worship. We may not talk about it...but it's very real.

Paul's letter is a letter of encouragement in the midst of trials, warfare, uncertainty, and fear. His words of love and prayer for them becomes a peaceful reminder that what they have in Christ cannot be taken away. That what God has done, the "riches of God's grace that he lavished"

upon them (1:7-8), is within them – so no evil spirits will drive away or remove them from the peace and hope in Christ that they have and he gives. And while this is a peace that he offers up as a reminder for them he does so in a way that declares more than peace...this is a shout of declaration as to who Christ truly is. Again, Paul's not speaking to people who need to be affirmed of salvation, or affirmed of their forgiveness of sins, or that he died upon the cross and redeemed them...he understands and knows that these people need to be reminded of God's *power*. A power that was, a power that is, and a power that will come. A power that speaks of his ultimate role and not his acts.

And what I find really comforting is actually Paul's approach to all of this. That while he writes to declare, he writes to sooth and ease as well. He requests that they receive the "spirit of wisdom and revelation." That is, he wants them to know and feel a spirit of peace. A glorious peace that would help you know him better. And not in some abstract or foreign way, but personally, and intimately. In a way that the very center of who you are, your heart, would be at peace.

Paul's letter is saying, *"Stay strong! May the peace of God, may the truth and power of what Christ has done and where he is now, may the hope of your future IN CHRIST rest upon your heart and give you peace to endure that which you cannot see but know is real.*

Stay strong because the power of Christ is at work."

I said earlier that I think we often times miss the overarching truth of who Christ is. I think the fact that he is the King of kings and Lord of lords gets muddled up in all the other things we tend to focus on – which means I think we lose the *power* of Christ in our focus *of* him. And not only his power but really WHO he is. The image of Christ shouldn't be of him hanging on the cross or an empty tomb – and it shouldn't be of him in a manger either. These are things he did – but not who he IS.

In Paul's letter to the Colossians, which is in a lot of ways very similar to this letter to the Ephesians, he writes that because of all that Christ did, because he was raised from the dead, we too have been raised from the dead. And because of that we must set our hearts on things above. And why? Because Christ is seated at the right hand of God (Col 3:1-12). And this isn't just a "seat" – this is the highest place there is. We read in **Phil 2:9** that this is the highest place that is above all other names. That because of Christ's position "*every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth...and every tongue will acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord.*" And these are the words Christ confessed in **Matthew 26:64; Mark 12:36** – and they were words that we read in **Psalms 110:1**: "Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool."

Christ, as King of all...that is who he is and THAT is what every tongue will confess. They may not acknowledge it, or want it...but it's what they will see.

The reality of this is that not all people will confess, in their time, that Jesus died for their sins. Not all people will confess that he left his throne and entered as a baby. Not all people will confess the virgin birth, the signs and wonders, the saving grace of Christ...but you know what they WILL confess? That he is Lord. And what Paul says, what brings the Gentiles hearing this letter peace and comfort...is that *that* spiritual warfare that is going on, those unseen evils that are swirling around...Jesus Christ, the one raised from the dead and who is seated at the right hand in the heavenly realms...the one who is far above all rule and authority power and dominion, the one who's name is invoked yesterday, today, and tomorrow...in the present age and the one to come...the one that the evil spirits are trying to pull you away from, convince you otherwise of...that guy, Jesus Christ is ABOVE ALL THINGS. So do...not...fear. Be at peace, and stay strong. Do not fear for he has you. Nothing will take you from him – because there is nothing greater than the one who sits on that heavenly throne.

That is what you and I need to declare and reflect on with our understanding of Jesus. And I say that because his death and resurrection declare something different than the exaltation of Christ (his ascension and place upon the throne of heaven). One author writes that “The resurrection proclaims ‘He lives forever’ but the Exaltation proclaims ‘He reigns forever.’” (O’Brien, 140).

ALL BELIEVERS find hope and peace in the saving *work* of Christ because of what he has done, hope in the fact that Christ atoned for our sins – which speaks of our past, present, and future, but even those don't hold water if there is no rule and reign of Christ over all things. Because if he is not in complete control, if he is not more powerful than the living, the dead, the seen and unseen, spiritual and physical...then he cannot do all those things that he has promised and that we find peace and comfort in. If we take away the fact that Christ sits on high...then what are we left with?

I actually don't know what we're left with. Because it's broken, fractured, and impossible. There is no hope of a New Heaven and New Earth, there is no hope in Christ's return and putting an end to evil, anger, hatred, famine, poverty, war and violence if there is no enthronement of Christ. Christ, essentially, becomes the cowardly lion from the Wizard of Oz. Paul's letter of comfort for a very real fear becomes nothing. There would be no hope, there would be no peace, there would be no wisdom and revelation about the work Christ has done and the fact that you and I are adopted as sons and daughters of the most high and are given a place of honor in his presence.

There are no glorious eternal riches given in his presence – and this is where Paul's words of reminder become the people's hope. Because the fear, may be real...but the hope of Christ is stronger because all those things are simply not true. Because Christ is who he is, because he chose you before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight (**Eph 1:4**),

because of his love, because of his predestination, and according to his pleasure and will...by his blood you have been redeemed. And not only that but because of his power and strength, because he is seated at the right hand of God the father to where he judges the living and the dead, you...me...we have been given the most glorious riches we could ever hope for. A richness that cannot be purchased, cannot be turned aside, and cannot be held. A richness that is not of money or gold or diamonds – and even all the money in the world would not compare...because those riches mean nothing. Those riches cannot even begin to give you the real value that you have been given: you...by what he has done and who he is, you have been given the riches of his glorious inheritance.

You cannot buy your sonship and daughtership. You cannot purchase God's adopting you into his family for eternity – because no money could ever be coined, made, or forged. You cannot buy what love has done, and his name evokes. It comes to you only by the Lord of lords, King of kings, most Holy of holy, the one who was and is and will ever be.

Let us never forget, neglect, or ignore the fact that Christ is King. Yes, remember Christ's work...but never forget WHO he is.