

Theme: The Ascended Lord Rules All For You
Text: **Ephesians 1:15-23**

¹⁵ For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, ¹⁶ I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. ¹⁷ I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. ¹⁸ I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, ²⁰ which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, ²¹ far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. ²² And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

God's Word for our consideration today comes from our second lesson – Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Let's begin with prayer: *Oh, grant, dear Lord, this grace to me, Recalling your ascension, That I may serve you faithfully, Adorning your redemption; And then, when all my days will cease, Let me depart in joy and peace In answer to my pleading. Amen.*

When I think about the ascension of Jesus into heaven a couple things come to my mind.

For one thing – what a great and well-deserved moment for Jesus! After all his years of toil and labor, all his sacrifice, his suffering, his death, all his persecution and humiliation... after all that he is finally getting the royal welcome he deserves. He is returning to heaven to dwell once again in the glory of the Father, to share again fully in that glory not only as God himself – but now as the God-man, our Savior Jesus. Yes, what a well-deserved moment for our Lord.

But there is another side to Jesus' ascension that leaves me thinking about myself. Why did Jesus have to go? Why couldn't he just stay here? Stay with me? Keep this world from going off the rails? Keep my life from going off the rails? Yes, sometimes the ascension of Jesus can feel like a good thing for Jesus but maybe not such a good thing for me.

Today God's Word reminds us that this is not the case, not even a little bit. Yes, Jesus' ascension was a day of great joy and acclamation as he ascended again to the Father's side. But it's not like the recent coronation of King Charles in England where all the people watched as the King received all kinds of praise and honor and good things but they were just spectators – no, we are not just idle spectators to the ascension of Jesus... we are so closely connected to Jesus that even as he returns to heaven we stay connected to him. Which means he is both here with us. And we are there with him!

Think about what St. Paul writes in our sermon text: **For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, ¹⁶ I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. ¹⁷ I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. ¹⁸ I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and his incomparably great power for us who believe.**

Paul tells the Ephesians that his prayer for them is that the Holy Spirit would help us to continually know God better and to open the eyes of our hearts to see what the eyes in our heads fail to see: that we have an amazing hope in Jesus. And what is that hope? Well, Paul says it is **the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.**

Notice he doesn't say that it is *your glorious inheritance in the saints*... it is *his*, that is *Christ's glorious inheritance in the saints*.

Paul is telling us that we are so closely connected to Jesus that when he ascended into heaven his inheritance, the thing he received from his Father, was you! It was his people. And Jesus not only saved you by his death and resurrection, but he now has united himself with you by your faith in him so that when God sees Jesus, he sees you. You are so closely tied together that where Jesus is, so are you. And where you are, so is Jesus.

This means your place in heaven is not up for debate. It's already yours. As Paul says in the next chapter of Ephesians: **God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus. Ephesians 2:6** That's how God sees you. From his perspective you already are in heaven, because Jesus is in heaven. This means that nothing in this present and temporary world can rob you of the certainty of heaven. It's yours already in Christ. And one day you will see what the eyes of your heart see now when you witness this reality fully and face to face.

This also means, that while you wait to see perfectly the reality of your heavenly home, Jesus is with you. He cannot be separated from you. When you are blessed, it is because of him. When you are sad or troubled by sin, he lifts your eyes of faith to his saving work and certain promises again and again so you remember the truth that you are struggling to see: you are God's redeemed child and you cannot be separated from Jesus.

And when the world around us gets really scary or confusing we see something else promised! In addition to this inseparable connection to Christ, we see his unbreakable promise that as our ascended Lord he is not just ruling for his own good and glory – but for ours! Paul assures us that the ascended Lord rules all things for you.

That power is like the working of his mighty strength,²⁰ which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms,²¹ far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.²² And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church,²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

What an astounding and comforting truth. Let me read it again: **God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church.** This means you. The church is all believers in Jesus from every time and place both in heaven and on earth. And here we are assured that God the Father has given Jesus the authority to rule as God over everything in the universe for those believers... for their good... for your good.

This means that as Paul says in Romans 8: **We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him. Romans 8:28** Yes, in ALL things God is at work, Jesus is ruling, for the good of his people... he is ruling all for you! This means he will give you what you need physically, emotionally, and spiritually to sustain your life and especially your trust in him until he brings you out of this life and into the reality of heaven that is yours right now by faith. And so even when we are tempted, we trust God has a plan for us to endure it... even when we sin, God has a plan to call us to repentance and trust in Jesus for forgiveness... even when we are sick, God has a plan to use it to benefit us or others in his church... even when evil people seem to succeed in their wickedness and their persecutions of God's people, yes even in this, God is at work to turn such evil plans to serve his holy purposes, to drive his people closer to him and his Word, to spread that Word to people who need to hear it, to remind us that this life if not the life we were made for.

What comfort we find on this day! The Lord Jesus is with you. You are with him. And he rules in all things to make sure that will always be the case. Yes, the Lord Jesus rules all for you, and his ascension proves it. Amen.