

## **Citizens of an Invisible Kingdom** An Ascension Day Meditation

**Eph. 1:15** Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, **16** Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; **17** That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: **18** The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, **19** And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, **20** Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, **21** Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: **22** And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, **23** Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.

**Eph. 4:4** There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; **5** One Lord, one faith, one baptism, **6** One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. **7** But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. **8** Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. **9** (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? 10 He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.) **11** And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; **12** For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: **13** Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ...

You will notice from the bulletin that the Gospel, Epistle, and Old Testament readings chosen for today are actually those appointed for Ascension Day itself, which was this past Thursday. Since that day is called a “feast of the first class”, it has a very high rank in the church calendar. It is an event of utmost significance to the Church.

For preaching texts, however, I have chosen two from St. Paul’s epistle to the Ephesians, because I think they will assist us in taking hold of this concept of the invisible rule of Christ which began immediately after His return to the right hand of the Father.

His first administrative act will be the sending forth of the Holy Ghost to give birth to His Church, His Body upon earth. Next Sunday will mark our celebration of that historic occasion. These occurrences that are of such vital importance to us seem to occur in rapid fire succession, but they deserve our closest attention. Our commemoration of them each year is meant to greatly increase our faith, to instill new life into the Church, and to assure us of the place and function Christ has given His people in this world, in spite of the indifference and even opposition which meet us continually. We must cling to them with all of our strength.

It is safe to say that a great bulk of the New Testament writings are designed specifically to educate us as to what the duties, laws, expectations, and deportment of a people under the reign of their invisible King should be. Had Christ merely tarried upon earth to establish His

throne in Jerusalem, His reign here would have resembled that of other monarchs who are visible and present, whose throne can be pinpointed, whose court is physically and directly accessible. Indeed, this will one grand day be the very case, when Christ returns to earth in glory, a time that is foretold especially in a host of Old Testament prophecies dealing with the Kingdom of God.

But divinely ordered circumstances, foreordained thus before the foundation of the world, have caused things to work out very differently. Although Jerusalem devoted at least one very meagre day of celebration in receiving Jesus as their King, in the end they thoroughly rejected Him, except for a believing remnant. *Crucify Him! We have no king but Caesar!* they cried (St. John 19:15). There was no place for Jesus to reign in their midst, and for this reason, says the Scripture, they themselves were in part *cut off* from God, removed from their privileged position (Romans 11:1). But the joyous consequence of that, says St. Paul, has been *riches of the world*, the salvation of the Gentiles, and ultimately the salvation of *all Israel* (11:26). *O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!*, cried the Apostle concerning these great and wonderful mysteries (11:33).

The nature of Christ's exaltation as presented in Ephesians 1 is expressed in extraordinary terms. They are directed first toward His position over the entire cosmos, the universe, and everything in it, including our world:

*[God] raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet...*

In his Epistle to the Colossians, Paul says that Christ is *the head of all principality and power* (2:10). It's as if the inspired writer can't find words sufficient to express the ascended majesty of the Lord. We look around us for evidence of this, however, and struggle to find it. The world is filled with disorder, and the wills of men appear to reign supreme. Knowing the goodness and holiness of this King, we cannot fathom the depths of the evil and darkness that are the common state of things. How can this be? With eyes of faith, we behold the answer: there is a provisional sense to this current divinely run government. Christ waits while God the Father *puts all his enemies under his feet* (1 Cor. 15:25). Although the affairs of men move onward, oblivious and utterly unconcerned about God's involvement in temporal affairs, He nevertheless is working all things toward His own specific ends, the consummation of which will be *that in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him...* (Eph. 1:10).

But Christ also reigns in the Church, and here His rulership should be entirely manifest: *[God] gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.* Within our own confines, the orderliness of His good government should be generously demonstrated and witnessed. In the other Ephesians passage quoted above, this King-

dom discipline and rectitude should be seen both in our unity, and in the proper carrying out of the divinely inspired administration that God has established for the Church:

*There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.*

If the unbelieving world rejoices in its individualism, its independence, and even in its atheism, the Church cannot afford for even a moment to follow suit. Oneness is not a luxury for the Church, as if it were something we can cavalierly take or leave. It is a component of our definition, and without it we are partakers of the same relativism and complete uncertainty that defines so much else in this age. This oneness is to be shown both locally, within our four walls, and universally, throughout the larger Church. How great a part of our unanswered questions about *the whole state of Christ's Church* (Book of Common Prayer, p. 74) is based upon this very thing!

It is also true that no organization functions without the acceptance by its members of their given roles:

*And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ...*

When Christ ascended and accepted His place as Prime Minister, if you will, of His dominion, He assigned subordinate roles to that great host which would constitute His Church. This particular passage points to specific offices with governmental duties that are essential to the smooth function of things. Their purpose is not to bring glory and honor to the functionaries. No, they have a set and determined end with the very highest of goals: maturing God's people in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the basic task of every Deacon, Priest, Bishop, minister, pastor, and lay leader. Every other activity, if not directly or indirectly intended to this end, is a waste of time.

The Ascension, then, comes with a price for God's people. It is literally to constitute successfully an invisible Kingdom, to the glory of the King. The unbelieving world certainly isn't going to do it. The key is obedience to His mandates, because it is disobedience that always holds up the works. Anyone can disobey. It comes easily to our natures. But obedience requires being in complete agreement with the principles of the Kingdom, and the methods the King has chosen to administer it.

Each new day, each new week, each new period of time is an offering to us to do our best to make ourselves available to Christ, that these very things might come to pass.

*"Lord, though none other make Thy Kingdom priorities his own, grant that I —that we— may always choose to do so."*

*In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.*