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Ascension Lutheran Church, Batavia IL  
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## **Who is Seated at God's Right Hand with Power**

Ephesians 1:15-23

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Grace and peace to you in the kingdom of our God and in the power of our Lord's resurrection, ascension, and return for your salvation. Amen.

We look at the world around us and might wonder who's in charge. We look at our personal lives and see a parent's world turned upside down by sickness of a child. Death seems to be a power so far beyond our control. Who's in charge?

Again, we look at society and see a world turned upside down by things like: corrupt leadership, unexpected natural disasters, morally confused citizens. There are earthly and spiritual powers at work that seem so far beyond our control. Who's in charge?

Again, we look at the church and see things turned upside down by various questions and problems that seem to have no answer or solution. There are corruptions to the truth and to the fellowship of God's people that seems beyond our power to fix. Who's in charge?

It proves how limited we are. Whether as a parent, in the government, or in the church – we are many times virtually powerless in our ability to overthrow evil. So who's in charge?

Scripture describes the almighty power of God with the idea of His right hand. God is a spirit – meaning the phrase “right hand of God” is a metaphor. It is a human term designed to describe a heavenly reality. Scripture uses the idea of God's “right hand” to describe His heavenly power.

In Biblical times, it was thought that the “right hand” was the favored hand. It was stronger, it was more useful. It became known as an expression of blessedness – a privileged status to be given. To sit at the right hand of the king would be the highest privilege in the kingdom with all the power of the king himself. The “right hand” expresses strength and honor and privileged power.

And when applied to God it expresses unlimited power and highest honor within His heavenly kingdom. For Christ to be seated at the right hand of God is for Him to be granted unlimited power over all of God's Creation. His ascension to God's right hand is when our Lord entered into His exalted activity as Lord of all Creation. Our Lord's ascension is not so much about where He went, but about what He became. As true God He always held such status and power – but now for Him as true Man to take His position of honor and power – this is something new for Him, for the creation, and for mankind. It meant as true Man and intercessor between God and His creation, all things would be placed under His feet.

It is a power over death, over all spiritual and earthly powers, and over the church. The right question is not just “who's in charge” – but more properly, who is seated at the right hand of God?

### ***Ephesians 1:15–23***

*<sup>15</sup> Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, <sup>16</sup> do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: <sup>17</sup> that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, <sup>18</sup> the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, <sup>19</sup> and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power <sup>20</sup> which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, <sup>21</sup> far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.*

*<sup>22</sup> And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, <sup>23</sup> which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.*

This is the Word of the Lord.

We pray,

Oh Holy Spirit who comes from the Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ, answer the prayer of the Apostle Paul and open the eyes of our heart that we may be enlightened in the hope of our calling, in the riches of our inheritance, and in the greatness of Your power toward us. Amen.

## **1. Over Death**

Who's in charge? First we take a look at death. As we look into the sicknesses that plague our personal lives and callings, we might begin to wonder: who's in charge?

A daughter looks up to her parents to provide and protect. She thinks dad is the strongest person in the world. There is nothing he can't do. That is until sickness strikes. A grievous work of death attacks his daughter's immune system and suddenly there is nothing dad can do. Death seems to be in charge now.

He looks at her in the hospital with all those tubes and machines and wonders what he could have done differently. What more precautions could he have used? He wonders if the doctors are really doing all they can. Do we have the best health care money can buy? He wonders if he is doing all he can to save her, to bring her home again. But the truth is – he is powerless when it comes to death.

A Christian friend visits the hospital and sits down with the father to talk. He tells him how he has been praying for him and his daughter; not only that his daughter would get well, but also that her father would not lose hope. He does not cease to make mention of them in his prayers – that God would give them a spirit of wisdom; that they would know the hope of their calling, the riches of God's inheritance; and the exceeding greatness of His power toward those who believe.

He describes this as a power which cannot be seen on that hospital bed, but which is seen with the eyes of the heart. It is the almighty power of God which does the unseen work of giving us faith: to believe that God raised Jesus Christ from the dead and has seated Him at the right hand of God the Father and that because of this, nothing can separate us from His forgiveness and love. They share a Scripture from Romans chapter 8,

*Romans 8:34ff Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. ... Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

This dad – so limited, so weak, so fearful – now calls upon a power and love that is unlimited. The powers we see in the world – the precautions we take; the doctors we hire; the health care we employ – these are all limited and temporal and in the end cannot overcome death; but what we do not see is unlimited. We don't know whether our Lord will restore this daughter to good health right now or not – but what we do

know is this: the Lord of life has risen and is seated at God's right hand with power over death itself and He will save his daughter. He will restore her to perfected health in the last day – when He raises us all the dead and gives unto all who believe eternal life.

A troubled father finds confess what He can't see: "I believe in Jesus Christ our Lord, who ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God."

Sing TLH 221:1-2

## **2. Over All Spiritual and Earthly Powers**

Who's in charge? Now we take a look at society; we look at society and our government and we find ourselves again wondering – who's in charge?

We normally rely on our government to provide us with the best – cutting edge technology, superior medical care, the strongest military in the world. But what happens when forces beyond our control render a government virtually powerless. Terrorists find a weakness. The great towers which symbolize the power and success of the American way are left in rubble. Or a hurricane drowns a city in destruction and chaos ensues. FEMA tries to respond, but no one seems to know who's in charge. There are forces beyond their control at work.

The Apostle Paul sees more at work in this world than human beings. He writes in chapter 5: *Ephesians 6:11–12 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.*

The Apostle Paul sees not the world in power but spiritual powers in the world and spiritual beings at work through the world. This world is under the sway of more than just a few people at the top or the random events of "mother nature." When the Apostle Paul uses the terms "principality, power, might, and dominion" – he refers not only to earthly powers, but also to spiritual forces. These terms used are the Jewish way of speaking of angelic powers – as He says in chapter 3 "the principalities and powers in the heavenly realms. These are not just the good angels; but Paul sees also evil angels at work; evil angels are influencing the course of events in the world and all under the service of the chief of the fallen angels – Satan.

We should quickly realize how limited and small we really are. It should show us how limited our government is. But at the same time we should remember that these spiritual powers in the heavenly realms are also limited. These angels are created beings just like you and me – and whether good or bad, whether , they must bow to the rule of another.

*20 He raised Jesus Christ from the dead and seated Him at His 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 age but also in that which is to come. 22 And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, 23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.*

All creation bows to the risen Lord. He is above and beyond all earthly powers; He is above and beyond all spiritual powers. Both in this age and in the age to come. Luther expresses this in his *Large Catechism*: "The devil and all powers, therefore, must be subject to him and lie beneath his feet until finally, at the last day, he will completely divide and separate us from the wicked world, the devil, death, sin, etc."

Christ is at the right hand of God which means His power is unlimited; and for us who believe this is a marvelous comfort. For we know that, as our text says, His power is toward you who believe. "He rules for you." whether terrorists, hurricanes, or the spiritual forces that are at work behind the scenes – Jesus Christ is Lord of all and they are under merely His footstool. He works all things together for your good – for the good of His people and His kingdom. It is not about cutting edge technology, or superior medical care, or the strength of our military that will secure your interests and safety. Rather it is the One who is seated at the right hand with power. That you may know what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe.

Sing TLH 221:3-4

### **3. Over the Church, Filling the Church, and For the Church**

Who's in charge? We finally take a look now at the Church – the assembly and fellowship of believers. As we see Christians troubled; when no one seems to be getting along; when there are problems that seem to have no solution, we might wonder, who's in charge?

A church should be able to trust its pastor and members should be able to trust one another. As questions, problems, conflict arise – a member should be able to go to the

pastor for answers, for solutions, to resolve conflict. He should be someone you can trust; who has answers.

But what happens when there is a question that he can't seem to answer? What happens when there is a problem that he can't seem to solve? What happens when there is a conflict that just seems to keep getting worse? We begin to wonder just who is in charge?

Don't you see how limited a pastor's power really is. When it comes to overcoming sin and evil in the lives of his members, he is proven powerless. But that is because the pastor is not seated at the right hand of God. Who is it that rules the church; who is it that we look to for answers, for solutions, for reconciliation?

*22 And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, 23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.*

The ascension of our Lord should not be thought of as His departure. He does not leave us orphans. This is only a change in modes. No longer is He present visibly – instead, He is at the right hand of God now, which means His work in the church is through the word and sacrament as He comes to us in His Spirit.

In these words, in the water, in bread and wine, Christ brings His unlimited power into our midst. He joins us together as one body with Him as the head so that He might answer our questions, solve our problems, and resolve our conflicts.

But He does not do so in the ways we might expect. His answer, His solution, His resolution is not by force or coercion; it is not by telling us what to do or what they must do for us first. His power is the gospel and His persuasion is love. He fills us with Himself by proclaiming His death for us; by sacrificing all things in His humiliation and giving us all things in His exaltation.

His answer, His solution, His resolution – these are matters of faith. "...that you may know what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe." He is over the Church, He fills the Church, and He exercises His power for the Church.

"The Formula of Concord is clear when it expresses this: "We hold ... that in His Church and congregation on earth, He is present as Mediator, Head, King, and High Priest, not in part, or one half of Him only, but the entire Person of Christ is present ... Christ now is present and operates in His Church only according to His Godhead, i.e.,

justifies, quickens, and performs and executes the remainder of the blessings necessary to salvation.” (Christian Dogmatics II, 330).

Who is seated at the right hand of God? It is not the pastor. It is Christ. And yet where does Christ exercise His rule – through the Church, through the pastor, through your fellow believers; the right hand of God with its unlimited power now opens the eyes of our heart to see, to hear His word, to follow his commandments. Whether through the pastor speaking His Word or through the body of Christ sharing His love – He reigns over us, fills us with the fullness of His Spirit, and accomplishes what we could never accomplish. Christ is at the right hand of God, and the right hand of God is here reaching out to us, embracing us, and working through us.

So who’s in charge? Christ’s ascension to the right hand of God means this: He is set free from all limitations. But this power is only toward those who believe – it is a matter of faith. As we face death, as we consider the future of society, as we ponder our fellowship in the Church, we are right to confess: “I believe in God’s Son, Jesus Christ, who rose again the third day, who ascended into heaven, who is seated at the right hand of the Father. And He will come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead, whose kingdom will have no end.”

Amen.

Sing TLH 221:5-6