

JESUS' EXALTATION IS COMPLETE**ROMANS 1:1-4; EPHESIANS 1:15-23**

How do you picture Jesus? When I say "Jesus," what image comes into your mind? Do you see Him as a baby in a manger? Do you see Him with long hair and a beard wearing an off white robe? Do you see Him teaching a great crowd of people, or stooping down to speak gently to a small child, or healing a blind man? Do you see Him nailed to a cross covered with blood? None of those images of Jesus are wrong. They're biblically and historically accurate. But they're all in the past. None of them are remotely accurate in terms of who Jesus is today, this very moment, right now. If we want to get a picture of who Jesus is right now this very minute, let's go to the book of Revelation 1:12-18 and 19:11-16. Do you picture Jesus like that?

While Jesus was on the Earth physically, the fullness of His glory was hidden. He was incognito. But now Jesus is reigning in majesty. His glory is on full display. What caused the change? One event: the resurrection. On these Sundays leading up to Easter Day, we're reflecting on the fact that Jesus rising from the dead physically, bodily, and literally is the great essential. Without that event, there would be no Christianity. Without the resurrection, our faith would be useless. Without the resurrection, your sins and mine could not be forgiven, a relationship with God would be impossible, and any kind of eternal life in Heaven after we die would be just an amusing fable. So, we're considering several important accomplishments caused by the resurrection. Two weeks ago, we said because of the resurrection our faith is built on fact. Last week, we saw that because of the resurrection prophecy was fulfilled. Next week, we'll think about the fact that because of the resurrection, you and I are made right with God. Today, however, I want you to understand that because of the resurrection, Jesus' exaltation is complete. And that means something very special and important for you and me. Let's ask and try to answer three questions today.

WHAT DID THE RESURRECTION MEAN FOR JESUS?

That question is partially answered in the Bible in two places. First, the resurrection meant the complete recognition of who Jesus is. "He was shown to be the Son of God when he was raised from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit. He is Jesus Christ our Lord." (Rom 1:4 NLT) The Jewish people knew from the Old Testament that God was going to send them a very special person. They called this person the Messiah or the Christ, but they didn't know specifically who this person was going to be. After His resurrection, the very first followers of Jesus put two and two together. The Messiah was none other than a young man in his early 30s, a carpenter turned rabbi, Jesus of Nazareth. They discovered he was a physical descendant of King David which was an important fulfillment of prophecy. But the clincher was what happened after He died on the cross. The Holy Spirit raised Him from the dead after three days. Over 500 of His followers actually saw Jesus alive again. He was no ghost. They'd touched Him, eaten and drunk with Him, listened to His words, and seen Him ascend back to Heaven. Now they realized Jesus was and is the Son of God.

Now, let's be careful to understand what is being said and not being said here. The Son of God – the second Person of what we call the Trinity (God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit) – always existed and was always co-equal with the Father and the Spirit. But the Son of God did go through an incredible transformation. Without forfeiting His “God-ness” in any way, He started to become a human being at a specific moment in time. It's also true Jesus did not become God as a result of His resurrection. You can't make someone God. You can't convey deity on someone. No, Jesus always was the Son of God. They are one and the same. He was the Son of God before He became a human being. But when He came into this world as a baby in Bethlehem, He didn't come in power. He came disguised and hidden. Incognito. But the resurrection revealed, manifested, made known, or declared forever His specific, human identity: Jesus of Nazareth was and is the Son of God.

Here's an imperfect analogy, but it might help. One of Prince Charles' many titles is the Prince of Wales. That title acknowledges he is the heir apparent to the throne of the United Kingdom. When Queen Elizabeth passes away, he will likely become King Charles III. Now, Charles officially assumed the title of the Prince of Wales back in 1969 in an elaborate event, but you could say he was born the Prince of Wales because of his position in the royal family as the first born son of the queen. Likewise, Jesus always was and is the Son of God, but His resurrection – that specific event - attached the title, Son of God, specifically to Jesus and no one else.

Second, the resurrection meant the complete possession of all Jesus deserves. “This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly realms. Now he is far above any ruler or authority or power or leader or anything else—not only in this world but also in the world to come. God has put all things under the authority of Christ and has made him head over all things.” (Eph. 1:19-22 NLT) Yes, the Son of God already possessed everything described there, but, in another sense, it was conveyed or granted specifically to Jesus of Nazareth after His resurrection. No, God the Father doesn't literally have a right hand. But in the culture of that day, to sit at the right hand of a host was to be given the place of highest honor and respect. Jesus of Nazareth was given that place in Heaven. He now holds the position of greatest authority and power in the entire universe. Wasn't that always true of the Son of God? Yes, but it wasn't always true in exactly the same way for the Son of God as Jesus of Nazareth. Another Scripture puts it like this, “Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Ph. 2:9-11 NLT) What caused this new elevation, this new honor, this new recognition, and this new exaltation? The resurrection!

Third, the resurrection meant the complete accomplishment of Jesus' mission. We heard earlier, “God promised this Good News long ago through his prophets in the holy Scriptures. The Good News is about his Son.” (Rom. 1:2-3 NLT) God the Father established the mission for Jesus the Son. Yes, His mission included Jesus' mighty

miracles and His great teachings, but most of all, it meant His death on the cross for our sins. By paying the penalty for our sins and making it possible to transfer our guilt to Him, we now have the opportunity to enter into a personal and eternal relationship with God. But if Jesus hadn't risen from the dead, the cross would just be the greatest tragedy in history. The story would end there. But God's final verdict on Jesus wasn't at the cross, but in the resurrection. It was vindication in the best and highest sense of that word. It proved Jesus was the Messiah, God in human flesh, the fulfiller of all the prophecies, and that the work of the cross was successful and accomplished.

It's in Jesus' resurrection we see the greatest demonstration of God's immense power. Greater than the act of creation. Greater than Noah and the flood. Greater than the Exodus and the crossing of the Red Sea. Greater than how God holds the universe together and makes it work every second. Yes, all of those are incredible manifestations of God's power. But Jesus' resurrection was and still is the greatest manifestation of God's power this world has ever witnessed. So, what difference does all that information make to your life and mine today? A second question.

DO I CONSIDER IT A PRIVILEGE TO BE JESUS' SLAVE?

Paul, the man who wrote both passages of Scripture we read today, certainly did. "This letter is from Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus, chosen by God to be an apostle and sent out to preach his Good News." (Rom. 1:1 NLT) Paul was a type A, super high achiever. He could have introduced himself by a long list of accomplishments: his ancestral tree, his education, or his success in founding churches. But any and all of them just ended up looking completely insignificant when compared with the honor of simply being Jesus' slave. That's because Paul understood that because of His resurrection, Jesus was now to be recognized and acknowledged as God in human flesh. As such, He was absolutely worthy of Paul's worship, surrender, and service.

Calling someone a slave or being called a slave was perhaps as uncomfortable back then as it is for any of us today. To think of yourself or someone else as a slave - belonging to someone else like a piece of property - was and still is demeaning, to say the least. But for Paul, being Jesus' slave was a badge of honor. He couldn't think of a higher compliment. It meant Jesus deserved his total allegiance every moment of every day. Paul didn't belong to Paul anymore. Paul was owned by Jesus and he belonged to Jesus in every way you can be owned or belong to something or someone else.

Be honest. Do you think of your relationship with Jesus in the same way? Are you comfortable being Jesus' slave? By the way, whenever Jesus is called Lord as He was in the Scripture passages we read today and elsewhere, it underlines the fact Jesus is my Master and I am His slave. "Lord" wasn't Jesus' first name as in "Lord Jesus Christ." It wasn't His surname as in "Jesus Christ the Lord." "Lord" meant and means Jesus is our eternal Master and it's our greatest privilege to be His slave. Yes, Jesus is our Savior, our Friend, our good Shepherd. But is Jesus your Lord? If so, His Lordship

must impact every part of your life: your values, your behavior, your relationships, your work, how you think, and how you view the world. It means He owns you and me!

Paul and other Christian leaders routinely referred to Jesus as Lord. That was a much bigger deal than it might appear to us today. Only the Roman Caesar was thought to be a son of God. Only he was ever referred to as “lord”. But the resurrection marked Jesus as the one and only Son of God and the one and only true Lord. The earliest Christians were suggesting Caesar was an imposter. Sometimes that cost them dearly. Have you ever heard of Polycarp? He was a Christian leader in the Greek city of Smyrna. He was arrested by the Roman authorities for his allegiance to Jesus. It was February 23, 156 – about 100 years after Paul wrote Romans and Ephesians. On the way to be executed in the town’s arena, two of the city officials tried to persuade Polycarp to comply with the demand to honor Caesar. “What harm is there in saying ‘Caesar is Lord,’ burning a little incense to honor him, and saving yourself?” Polycarp refused. Later in the arena before he was martyred, he said, “For 86 years I have been Christ’s slave, and He has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?” Polycarp refused to call Caesar “Lord,” because “Lord” meant “God” and there can only be one God. If Polycarp had called Caesar “Lord,” then Jesus could not have been “Lord” for Polycarp. Are you comfortable being Jesus’ slave? Do you consider it the greatest privilege of all? Here’s a third question to answer today.

AM I ACCESSING JESUS’ POWER EVERY DAY?

Did you hear the proximity of the words “resurrection” and “power” in the Scripture passages we’re considering today? “[Jesus) through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Rom. 1:4 NIV) In trying to communicate to us what he meant by God’s power, Paul used about every available Greek word in Ephesians. I like the Amplified Version of those verses which say, “And [so that you can know and understand] what is the immeasurable *and* unlimited *and* surpassing greatness of His power in *and* for us who believe, as demonstrated in the working of His mighty strength, which He exerted in Christ when He raised Him from the dead....” (Eph. 1:19-20 AV) What?

It’s as if Paul pulled a Greek thesaurus off the shelf in the prison library where he was being kept at this time and looked up every word associated with power so he could stick it in these verses. He used the word “dunamis” which is the power to accomplish something that’s just gotten started. He used “energia” which meant just sheer, brute strength or power. He used “kratos” which is the power to overcome any obstacle. He used “ischus” which refers to the actual use of power. Bible scholars are at a loss to explain exactly how Paul intended all those words about power to fit together.

But here’s what *is* very clear. God wants me to experience His power in my daily life. I already know more about God intellectually than I can ever put into practice. I’ve studied the Bible for years. I’ve read many books about God. I don’t really need more information about God. But I very much need to experience more of His power in my life today, tomorrow, and then the day after that! What about you? I need His strength

to defeat my sinful nature. I need His power in to get over my spiritual laziness and lethargy. I need His energy to give me an attitude adjustment several times a day. I need His perspective on my troubles and problems. I need His wisdom and enabling to share Jesus meaningfully with people who are far from God. More than anything else, I need God's power to live from His perspective every moment of every day. When you truly know God, you experience Him. And you experience God when for some reason you run into His power and you're forever changed by it and through it.

God longs for us to experience His power every day. It's the very same power God the Father used to raise Jesus from the dead. In other words, God wants to give you that kind of power to live out your life today. And the fact that the risen Jesus is now enthroned as the supreme authority in the universe is proof that God has that kind of power. When you truly know God, you experience God. And experiencing God means experiencing His power in your daily life. What kind of power does God have? Enough power to raise Jesus from the dead and put Him in charge of the entire universe. Now, that kind of power is available to you and me. The late pastor and author, A.W. Tozer, left us a memorable quote, "Anything God has ever done, he can do now. Anything God has ever done anywhere, he can do here. Anything God has ever done for anyone, he can do for you." Do you believe that? Really?

In what way? Well, here's one way. Painful experiences in our past have an incredible and lingering power over us in the present. We hear and read so much these days about dysfunctional families, for instance – families where parents were alcoholic, or where wives and kids suffered abuse of some kind – physical, sexual, emotional abuse. Or perhaps there was emotional deprivation of some kind or terrible domination/control issues. The wounds in your past and mine can involve other kinds of unresolved pain: divorce, the death of a child, infidelity in your marriage, a health scare, or some close brush with death yourself – just any kind of traumatic, overwhelming hurt, loss or defeat. We're discovering the incredible power of these negative events in our past to disrupt our lives today and tomorrow. Many of us here today could readily admit to the reality of these experience and events in our past and their continuing power in our lives today.

What helps? Godly counseling? Sure. Support groups and recovery groups? Yes, they can help, too. But, ultimately, it's experiencing the power of God that best heals the emotional and spiritual scars in your past and mine. How do I know that? The Bible tells me so! It says here, "Now he is far above any ruler or authority or power or leader or anything else—not only in this world but also in the world to come. God has put all things under the authority of Christ..." (Eph. 1:21-22 NLT) Yes, there are many things in this world that have great evil power and influence. There is a devil and he has great power. There is the pull and allure of what this world offers, values, and holds up as important. There is a sinful nature and you and I have one. But, those are nothing before the power of Almighty God. The Bible tells me that when Jesus died on the cross, I died with Him spiritually. When He was buried, I was buried with Him spiritually. And when He rose from the dead, I rose with Him spiritually. Therefore, there is nothing in this life – past, present, or future – that must control me, define me, or dominate me. I have died and risen again with Jesus and God's resurrection power is at my disposal.

If all things have been put under Jesus' feet and you are in Him, then all things have been placed under your feet: any addiction, any emotional wound from your past, the pain from any kind of loss, and the damage from any kind of defeat. Of course, we all have some work to do to see those evil powers completely defeated in our lives. Just remember where real power is found. God has put all things under Jesus' feet – under His control and authority. Because you're in Christ, everything has been put under your feet as well. That simply means you can get to the place where you live every day in confidence not fear, in joy not despair, and in peace not anxiety. You can acknowledge the wounds and scars in your life, but not be controlled and dominated by them.

When you receive Jesus as Savior and Lord, you gain access to the power of the Holy Spirit. It's the power of the resurrection—the same thing that raised Jesus from the dead. The Easter story tells us God's power also moved the stone that blocked the entrance into Jesus' tomb. What are the big stones in your life? Is it a bitterness you won't let go of, a resentment you refuse to resolve, an insecurity you tolerate, a fear you allow to dominate you, a self-doubt that has you by the throat, a loss that you allow to defeat you? Those things can be removed. The more you know and experience God through Jesus, the more you experience the power of the resurrection. Let's learn how to access and experience God's mighty power each and every day. God gives us access to the same kind of power that raised Jesus from the dead on Easter Day.

In 1939, George Dantzig was studying statistics under Dr. Jerzy Neyman. At the beginning of one class session, Dr. Neyman put up on the blackboard two examples of famous unsolvable problems. George happened to arrive late to class that day. By mistake, he thought the unsolvable problems were their homework assignment. He wrote them down in his notebook and went off to his job after the class. Eventually, George solved both problems. Weeks later, an ecstatic Dr. Neyman knocked on George's door to share the news. A bewildered George actually apologized to his professor, thinking the assignment was overdue. That's when Dr. Neyman informed George that he had solved two of statistics' unsolvable problems. George admitted, "The problems seemed to be a little harder than usual." George Dantzig went on to have a distinguished career and also received numerous awards including the National Medal of Science in 1975. His work has had a profound influence on many sectors of our society and economy. But looking back on all of his success, he made a startling admission about what happened way back in 1939, "If someone had told me they were two famous unsolved problems, I probably wouldn't have even tried to solve them."

OK, I admit it, few if any of us here today have George Dantzig's intellectual gifts. But here's the point. Do we limit God's power in our own lives because we've already decided what God cannot do? I've always been sobered by something that was said about Jesus' ministry to the people in his hometown of Nazareth. "And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith." (Mt. 13:58 NIV) I can refuse to believe in the immensity of God's power and I can refuse to access that power in my daily life by deciding what God can and cannot do. May God help you and me to grasp the immensity of God's resurrection power that's available to us every day. The resurrection is indeed the great essential.