

Look Who Is On The Throne!

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[0 : 00] Spirit of the living God, we believe that you got a hold of the Apostle Paul and enabled him to think and then write these magnificent words.

Will you now, in your mercy and grace, help us not only understand these words, but actually live our lives in light of them.

This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. As I said last Sunday, I'd love to hear the Apostle Paul preach.

But I also love to hear the Apostle Paul pray. One of the leading scholars of our day, N.T. Wright of England, is on the mark when he says that Paul is the greatest interpreter of the mind of Jesus who ever lived.

I'd love to listen to Paul preach the mind and message of Jesus. But I'd also love to hear Paul pray the mind and message of Jesus.

[1 : 08] Or to put it in terms of the title that I have chosen for our journey through Paul's letter to the Ephesians, I'd love to listen to Paul preach the alternative reading of reality, shaped by the life, death, resurrection, ascension, and coming again of Jesus.

But I especially love to listen to Paul pray us into this alternative reality. In his letter to the believers in the first century city of Ephesus, Ephesus was the third most influential city in the empire behind Athens and Rome.

In this letter, Paul prays two times. In the second half of chapter one and in the second half of chapter three. I invite you this morning to focus on just one section of his first prayer.

I invite you to focus on Ephesians 1, verses 20 to 22. A number of biblical scholars have identified these verses as the thesis statement of the whole letter.

I want to focus on Paul's amazing and audacious claim that the crucified and resurrected Jesus now sits on the throne of the universe.

[2 : 37] Before we do, I would like to take some time and just make some observations about the letter as a whole. If you've been following the suggested readings that are in the worship folder each week, you have now read the letter to the Ephesians seven times.

You have read Ephesians 1 on Monday, Ephesians 2 on Tuesday, Ephesians 3 on Wednesday, 4 on Thursday, 5 on Friday, and Ephesians 6 on Saturday.

And I trust that you have come to see that the letter is written in two halves, chapters 1 to 3 and chapters 4 to 6. The turning point being the first verse of chapter 4.

Therefore, I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, a note by the way, he does not say the prisoner of Caesar. I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you've been called.

In chapters 1 to 3, Paul preaches and prays God's call upon our lives. And then in chapters 4 to 6, Paul shows us how to live God's call on our lives in the world.

[3 : 55] Or to put it more simply, in chapters 1 to 3, Paul gives us the indicative of the gospel. The is. The now is.

And then in chapters 4 to 6, he gives us the imperative of the gospel. The do. The now do. In chapters 1 to 3, Paul develops the expansive scope of the gospel.

And then in chapters 4 to 6, he spells out the behavioral implications of the scope of the gospel. The implications for every sector of life. Or to put it even more simply, in chapters 1 to 3, we have the good news.

In chapters 4 to 6, we have the good advice. Now that's typical of Paul. Good news before good advice.

And in this, he's simply following the Lord Jesus. Jesus always gives us the news before he gives us the advice. Before giving us any good advice of how we are to live as disciples of Jesus in the world, Paul lays out the good news.

[5 : 10] For the simple reason that the good advice is impossible to live without the good news. A number of you have observed that lately, in my sermons, I have not been telling anyone to do anything.

Except listen to the text and trust the Lord of the text. I am being very intentional. I'm following the apostle Paul's lead.

Before he gives us any good advice, he makes sure that we understand and live in the good news. Many thoughtful Christian leaders in our time are lamenting the fact that for all of the preaching that goes on in North America right now, North America is moving further and further away from the gospel.

May I be so bold as to suggest why that is happening? Most of the preaching in North America today is good advice, but not good news.

[6 : 26] And good advice without the good news changes no one. Only a heavy dose of good news changes us.

Now, Paul will go on to give us a lot of good advice in the rest of his letter. Beginning with verse 1 of chapter 4, I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord.

The apostle Paul is going to develop all kinds of good advice. Therefore, walk worthy of the calling to which you've been called. Therefore, walk no longer as the Gentiles do in the futility of their mind. Therefore, laying aside falsehoods, speak truth to one another. Be angry, but do not sin, and do not grieve the Holy Spirit. Therefore, be imitators of God. Oh, holy moly.

Walk in love. Therefore, walk as children of the light. Therefore, be careful how you walk. Not as unwise, but as wise. Be filled with the Holy Spirit. And then, finally, chapter 6, verse 11.

[7 : 30] Be strong in the Lord. Put on the full armor of God. But before we can do any of that good advice, we have to be gripped by. We have to be changed by.

We have to be captured by. The good news. And the heart of that good news, that Paul preaches and prays, in the letter to the Ephesians, is in his first prayer, in chapter 1, verses 20 to 22.

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened to know the surpassing greatness of God's power towards us who believe. Power in accordance with the working of the strength of his might. And now here's the text. Which he brought about in Christ when he raised him from the dead, and when he seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule, authority, power, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but in the age to come.

And he put all things in subjection to Jesus' feet. All the therefores in the rest of the letter only make sense in light of this good news. Indeed, the therefores of chapter 4 to 6 are impossible to live unless we know and believe the good news.

[8 : 53] Now, notice again how Paul addresses God in his prayer. Paul prays to the God of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Those are explosive words, especially for a lifelong Jew and a lifelong citizen of the Roman Empire. Had Paul prayed to the God of our Lord Jesus Christ at a civic event, he would have been in big trouble.

Lord. Lord Jesus. Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah. Our Lord. Here, we simply have to remind ourselves of the historical context.

The Roman Empire revolved around this word, Lord. It's the term, kurios. Kurios means sovereign one.

Final authority. Last word. Caesar is kurios. Caesar is Lord. The words were the glue that held the empire together.

[10 : 04] God of our Lord Jesus Christ. Lord Jesus. Lord Jesus Messiah. Our Lord.

Having huge implications for every sphere of life. For the political, the economic, the relational, the spiritual, the sexual. You could get crucified for praying the words, the crucified is Lord.

Now, in the first prayer of his letter to the Ephesians, the apostle of the Lord Jesus prays that we might know. That's the burden of this prayer.

That we might know. That we might know the God of our Lord Jesus Christ. That we might know this God who has come to the world as Jesus and in Jesus. That we might know the one who has been installed as the emperor above all cosmos.

doing so in fulfillment of two psalms that are the most quoted psalms in the New Testament.

[11:10] Psalm 2 and Psalm 110. Psalm 2. To the nations and their kings who want to run the world their way, God says, as for me, I have installed my king on Zion, my holy mountain.

And then Psalm 110. King David says, the Lord says to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

The God of Moses and David and Isaiah and Jeremiah has installed the Nazarene on the throne above all thrones. It is the heart of the gospel.

This was the drumbeat of the gospel that spread into the Roman Empire. Now interestingly enough, the word church preaches this good news.

Church comes from the Scottish word kerké. Kerké comes from the Greek word kourikos, meaning of the kourios, of the Lord.

[12:12] To be the church in the world is to be the people in the world who belong to, who swear allegiance to, who love and obey Jesus as the new kourios of the universe.

So Paul prays that we might know this Lord and that we might know and experience the benefits of knowing this Lord. I pray that the eyes of your heart, the eyes of the control center of your very being may be open to know what is the hope of his calling, what are the riches of his, the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of his power toward us who believe.

Paul especially prays that we know this power toward us who believe. It's the power we need to live the gospel in the world. It's the power that raised Jesus from the dead. It's the power that seated Jesus on the throne.

It's the power that puts everything under Jesus' feet. And it's the power that gives Jesus the head of the cosmos as the head of the church, the kerké. Now, focus on the phrase seated above.

It's in verse 21. seated him at his right hand far above all rule and authority. This is the news.

[13:31] This is the news that makes the advice possible to live. Up and coming New Testament scholar Timothy Kumbus in his new book called The Drama of Ephesians puts it this way.

Listen. The basic thrust of Paul's story is that God has defeated the fallen powers and authorities in Christ Jesus and has installed Christ Jesus as cosmic ruler over all of reality.

Isn't that an amazing title? Jesus, friend of sinners, healer of broken minds and bodies, has been installed as cosmic ruler over all of reality.

It makes me want to dance. Timothy Kumbus goes on. God is manifesting his victory over the powers by creating the church in which he is overcoming the effects of evil powers in the world.

how about that for understanding what it means to be the church on the corner of Nelson and Berard? Now here's the amazing thing, at least it's amazing to me, is that Paul preaches and prays this news about Jesus and the church in circumstances that seem to call it all into question.

[14:56] Paul is in prison. He is waiting to stand trial before Caesar. Caesar is calling himself Dominus et Deus, God and Lord.

And Caesar is demanding that all the citizens of the empire call him Lord. In fact, Caesar is decreeing that all citizens of the empire must regularly go to worship.

That is, they must regularly go to a temple dedicated to Caesar take a pinch of incense, throw it on the altar fire and say the word Caesar is Lord.

You could believe anything else you wanted to believe as long as you said Caesar is Lord. The disciples of Jesus could not obey the edict. Respect?

Caesar, yes. Work with Caesar? Yes. Pray for Caesar? Of course. Treat Caesar with dignity? Of course. Even if Caesar treats you badly, treat him with dignity.

[16:00] But confess him as Lord? No. Because it's not true. Caesar is only emperor. He is not Lord.

Only Jesus is Lord. Exalted, says Paul, far above all rule, authority, power, and dominion and every name that is named.

To what is Paul referring here? Well, the terms were used in reference to human beings, to human rulers, human authorities, human powers, human dominions.

But they were also used in reference to extra human or super human rulers, authorities, powers, and dominions. At the end of his letter, Paul is going to use these words in that way.

At the end of the letter, he speaks of our struggle in the world, saying, our struggle is not against flesh and blood. It's not against humans. But it is against the rulers, against the powers, against the

world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.
[17 : 08] French sociologist, Jacques Ellul, names some of these superhuman powers that work in the world. They include Mammon, the prince of the world, the prince of lies, Satan, the devil, and death.

And then Ellul points out that each of these names can be characterized by their functions in the world. Money, power, deception, accusation, division, and destruction.

And we all experience those powers that work in our parts of the world. Now the person who has helped me most understand this alternative reading of reality is a man named Walter Wink. He is famous for books entitled Naming the Powers, Unmasking the Powers, Challenging the Powers, or actually Engaging the Powers. I don't agree with everything that Walter Wink is arguing for, but he helps me begin to understand how the human and superhuman powers go together in the world.

And he does this through a little equation. P equals O plus I. P equals O plus I.

[18 : 24] Let me read his own words. P equals O plus I. Remember that simple formula and you can avoid the confusion of the centuries about the principalities and powers. The powers P are not spiritual spooks inhabiting the air and leaping on us unwary.

That was an earlier way of putting it. Nor are the powers merely institutions, political or economic systems, ideologies or social structures. That's a modern way of putting it.

Neither is inadequate as adequate, though both contain some truth. The powers it consists turn out to be of the outer manifestation O and the inner spirituality.

P equals O plus I. Dr. Wigg continues. As the inner aspect of material reality, the spiritual powers are everywhere around us.

Their presence is real and inescapable. The issue is not whether we believe in them, but whether we can learn to identify our actual everyday encounter with them, what Paul calls discerning the spirits. The powers, whether benign or satanic, always consist of an outer visible form.

[19 : 34] constitutions, judges, armies, leaders, buildings, and an inner invisible spirit that provides the power, its legitimacy, credibility, and clout.

Now, this makes sense, does it not? This outer form and this inner spirituality. And then, Walter Wink speaks a word to us in the West. We in the West are so individualistic that we have ceased to regard corporate entities as anything more than the mere aggregate of their parts.

But an institution is more than the sum of its parts. Our incapacity to recognize the spirituality of institutions has left us tinkering with their parts while ignoring their essence.

I'll read that again. Our incapacity to recognize the spirituality of institutions has left us tinkering with their parts while ignoring their essence.

I'm suggesting in short that the spiritual and material aspects of the powers are the inseparable but indistinguishable components of a single thing. P equals O plus I.

[20 : 48] So take, for example, something that we all know and that we all have to deal with every day. Take money. Mammon, as Jesus calls it.

No one can serve two masters, Jesus says. You will either hate the one and love the other or you will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

Now, of course, many of us don't agree with that and are out to show him he's wrong but that's another story. Money. Mammon.

Toonies. Mere mevon. Dollar bills. Mere paper, right? Debit cards. Visa cards. Mere plastic.

Right? Banks. Buildings. Vaults. Employees. Just trying to make a living. Advertisements. Monetary policies. Board of directors.

[21 : 45] The O. The outer visible form of mammon. And then, the I. The inner spiritual dynamics at work.

A real force. A real power. A God, if you will, who wants to be Lord of our lives, who wants us to trust him, and who seeks to hold us captive.

This, by the way, is why Jesus spoke about money so much. If you eliminate all references in Jesus' teaching of money, you've got one-third of the Gospels. Mammon is not a neutral player in our lives or in the world.

P equals O plus I. Take another example. Take pornographic magazines and films. Seemingly harmless in a free and enlightened society.

O. Photographers, editors, models, all trying to make a living. human bodies, elegant, appropriately praised for their beauty.

[22 : 55] Contributors, investors in all of this, like General Motors and AT&T.; I. The exploitation of women and children.

Engendering lust, giving this false sense of comfort and slowly capturing the human soul. or take another example.

Gaming. Casinos. You get the point. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened so that you might know that in Jesus Christ God has defeated those powers and he's setting captives free from those powers.

the powers that crucified Jesus. Yes, on one level the O. Caiaphas, the high priest, Pilate, the governor of Rome took Jesus down.

But on another level in this I, religion gone off the rails and politics gone off the rails took Jesus down. P equals O plus I and God is winning the victory over both the O and the I and winning by losing.

[24 : 13] At the cross it looked like Jesus was losing but he was not losing. He was winning and those who thought they were winning were losing. That is the good news Paul wants us to know.

It's not always obvious. It's not always the way we look at it. I know that and that's why he prays God of our Lord Jesus Christ enlighten the eyes of our hearts help us realize and live your victory over the powers.

So what do we do? We cooperate with the victory. That's what we do. How do we do that? Well for one thing we live in the book.

We live in the book that declares the victory. If we only read the newspaper or our MSN on Blackberry if we only read travel and decorating and fashion magazines if we only read the technological journals and the philosophical essays we will never know what is going on in our world.

We got to soak in the book that opens up the mystery of Jesus' lordship. And we need to live in community.

[25 : 37] We can't do this alone. We have to live in community with other believers who are also trying to live in light of the gospel. Sunday morning is not enough. We have to be part of a group of disciples who help us individually with the struggle to obey this good news.

If you're not in a group right now and you'd like to be take out the care card that's in the pew rack in front of you fill it out put your name on it put it in the basket when it goes by and someone will contact you this week and get you in a group.

We cooperate with God's victory in Jesus by treating people in light of the victory. We refuse to gossip. We refuse to accuse.

We refuse to speak ill of anyone for whom Jesus died. What stifles the gospel in our time is not the big sins like sexual and financial indiscretion.

What stifles the gospel in our time is gossip and accusation. Gossip and accusation is playing into the hands of the powers Jesus defeated.

[26 : 45] And we cooperate with the victory by sharing our money. Mammon wants to keep us to himself. Mammon wants us to keep our money.

In fact mammon wants us to think that our money is ours. It's not. It's the Lord's. Especially the first 10%.

That's unequivocally his. And giving the tithe the 10% breaks the spell of mammon on the human soul. Which is why the offering in the worship service is to be a highlight in worship.

We're giving thanks. Yes. But we're also now declaring that Jesus and not the money is Lord. You know even if you give through automatic withdrawal can I encourage you to at least bring a toonie and put it in the basket because this is the moment you get to declare again that the money is not Lord Jesus is Lord.

I'm told that in Africa when they take the offering the Africans put it on the floor and the Africans dance all over the money as a way of saying you aren't Lord. and we pray we follow the lead of the apostle Paul we pray Walter Wink who I cited earlier reminds us how the disciples living in the Roman Empire dealt with injustice and immorality and corruption in their time.

[28 : 19] He points out that unlike most of us they had no access to the power structure and they didn't have much money. But says Wink this seems to have done little to prevent the church from

impacting the Roman Empire with devastating force.

When the Roman magistrates ordered the Christians to worship the imperial spirit they refused kneeling instead and offering prayers on the emperor's behalf.

This seemingly innocuous act was far more exasperating and revolutionary than outright rebellion would have been. Now listen this is so contemporary. rebellion simply acknowledges the absolute and ultimate nature of the emperor's power and attempts to seize it.

Prayer denies the ultimate altogether by acknowledging a higher power. Rebellion focuses solely on the physical institution and its current incumbents and attempts to displace them by an act of superior force.

Prayer on the other hand challenges the very spirituality of the empire itself and calls the emperor's angel to be for the judgment seat of God. And we cooperate with God's victory in Jesus by eating the meal we call the Lord's Supper.

[29 : 36] The Lord's Supper a profoundly transforming act once again declaring that he who was crucified is alive he's coming again and even now is seated on the throne.

Oh I'd love to hear the apostle Paul preach the gospel but I especially love to hear him pray the gospel. Oh God open the eyes of their heart that they might know who is on the throne.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.