

The One On The Throne

Working within us

Summary: The One now on the throne, ascended 40 days after his resurrection, provided for and gave purpose to the disciples, so as to prepare them for their work of ministry, which was to herald the coming Kingdom in word and action, addressing those areas and instances of human life not yet reflecting the Kingdom.

Scripture: Acts 9:1–20; John 21:1–19¹

Date: Sunday, 1 May 2022 (NCCC)

Introduction

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Mosque Declared Christ's Reign

I am sad to report that just a few centuries after our story of Saul, whom we know as Paul, was in Damascus, a Muslim army took control of the city, destroyed a Christian church in the city centre and built a mosque on the location. For twelve centuries afterward, that mosque has ranked among the holiest of Islamic sanctuaries.

It is not all bad news though for, apparently, stones from that Christian church were used in its construction, such that, over an arch in the second story, tourists will find inscribed these words: “Thy kingdom, O Christ! is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endureth throughout all generations.”

Though the name of Christ had been regularly blasphemed in that place, and the disciples of Christ regularly cursed, for twelve hundred years that inscription within it remained unimpaired by time, and undisturbed.

The inscription was not discovered during the long reign of Islamic intolerance and oppression, but when religious liberty was finally partially restored, and Christian missionaries were enabled to establish a church in the city, the inscription was brought to light.²

We read in *The Gospel of John*, “[The light of life] shines in the darkness, and yet the darkness did not overcome it.” (Jn 1:5)

The existence of this inscription is proof the light of Jesus is shining in the dark places of this world! Those with eyes to see will catch glimpses all around, for Jesus is bringing his kingdom to earth. It may, at times, appear as if the Kingdom is losing ground, yet it will prove victorious in the end.

What & Why?

The One now on the throne, whose ascension 40 days after his resurrection we now celebrate, on this side of Easter, he is not now, nor has he ever been, resting easy. Instead, he continues to work to bring his Kingdom to earth.

In the scriptures read for us, we find stories of Jesus providing for and giving purpose to his disciples. He did this so as to prepare them for the work of ministry, which was to herald the

coming Kingdom in word and in action, addressing those areas and instances of human life not yet reflecting the Kingdom.

It is so easy for us to miss, yet is brought out by these stories, that the coming of the Kingdom started with these disciples, within them not just with what they would do. And it continues with you and I, within us before anything we will do.

Let me explain...

Explanation

Not Resting Easy

Instead he emptied himself by assuming the form of a servant, taking on the likeness of humanity. And when he had come as a man, *(Philippians 2:7)*

The apostle Paul wrote, as he was himself taught, that Jesus set aside his divine glory to take the form of a servant (Php 2:5-11). He became like one of us.

“God has raised this Jesus; we are all witnesses of this. Therefore, since he has been exalted to the right hand of God and has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit, he has poured out what you both see and hear.”
(Acts 2:32-33)

When he ascended back into heaven, 40 days after his resurrection, Jesus took his position at the right hand of the Father (Acts 2:32-36), where he is now seated on his throne (Php 2:9-11).

Yet it would be our mistake to assume he is sitting there all comfortable and resting easy, binging Netflix. No, he continues to work and to prepare his Kingdom! The scriptures read for us provide two examples.

The Provision of Food and Restoration

Simon Peter, Thomas (called “Twin”), Nathanael from Cana of Galilee, Zebedee’s sons, and two others of his disciples were together. “I’m going fishing,” Simon Peter said to them. “We’re coming with you,” they told him... *(John 21:2-3)*

In our reading from *The Gospel of John*, we find a group of disciples hanging out together. Not knowing what else to do, Peter declared, “I’m going fishing”, and you can almost hear the resignation in his voice.

Peter had thrice disowned Jesus in the lead up to his crucifixion and, even though Jesus had appeared to different groups of disciples already, with Peter himself being present for one such appearance, I imagine he was still grieving, still processing what he had done, which was now made even worse with Jesus’ resurrection. Peter was probably overjoyed at Jesus being miraculously alive, yet each time he saw Jesus made Peter relive his pain.

And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. *(Matthew 16:18)*

Jesus had once declared faith such as Peter’s would form the foundation on which he built his Church (Mt 16:15-18). With that pronouncement ringing in Peter’s ear, he would likely

have felt he was a failure as he sat on that beach with Jesus, eating breakfast with the resurrected Christ.

Yet Peter was still called by Jesus to be a key leader in the early days of the Church, so he needed to be restored, he needed to regain his confidence in his faith.

He asked him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was grieved that he asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” “Feed my sheep,” Jesus said.
(John 21:17)

How did Jesus transform Peter from a reprehensible failure into a key leader in the Church? By absolving Peter of his mistake in disowning him, by acknowledging his acceptance of Peter’s love and renewing his commission to Peter.

When daybreak came, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not know it was Jesus. “Friends,” Jesus called to them, “you don’t have any fish, do you?” “No,” they answered.
(John 21:4–5)

Besides restoring Peter, notice Jesus also restored the other disciples with him. They too were wandering aimlessly. Peter, at least, was returning to his previous fishing business. These other disciples were not themselves fishermen previously, so they weren’t even returning to their previous lifestyles, but were riding on Peter’s resignation.

So we should not be surprised they caught no fish at all that night.

“Cast the net on the right side of the boat,” he told them, “and you’ll find some.” So they did, and they were unable to haul it in because of the large number of fish.
(John 21:6)

Knowing this, Jesus gave them an instruction that, I am sure, would have been rubbing salt into their wounds—even a non-fisherman understands a boat doesn’t have a left and right side, but a port and starboard. Sheesh! (to be honest, I had to look it up)

To their credit, they gave Jesus’ instruction a shot and caught an overwhelming load of fish.

With this miracle, Jesus was reasserting he is Lord of heaven and earth, and that he is the One who “gives good things to those who ask him” (Mt 7:11), for “every good and perfect gift is from above” (Jas 1:17).

No, the One now on the throne is not resting easy. He is preparing his Kingdom to come by providing food and purpose and forgiving and restoring his people, so that they might themselves be heralds of the coming Kingdom.

The Provision of Correction and Purpose

The next example comes from the life of Saul, who we know as Paul.

Now Saul was still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord.
(Acts 9:1a)

Paul turned the stoning of the first Christian martyr into a persecution of the Church. Thinking he was acting on behalf of God’s kingdom, he was, in fact, acting against it, not only in Jerusalem, but Paul even travelled to other cities nearby, like Damascus.

As he traveled and was nearing Damascus, a light from heaven suddenly flashed around him. Falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” *(Acts 9:3–4)*

Paul needed to have his understanding of God’s will and commands corrected. That correction came with his being physically blinded for three days, as an illustration of his intellectual and spiritual blindness.

There was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias, and the Lord said to him in a vision, “Ananias.” “Here I am, Lord,” he replied. *(Acts 9:10)*

Along with correcting Paul’s blindness, Jesus also needed to correct the blindness of Ananias.

“Lord,” Ananias answered, “I have heard from many people about this man, how much harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem.” *(Acts 9:13)*

Ananias needed to learn the Kingdom was not under threat even when it appeared to be losing ground. Ananias needed to learn God was protecting his people and his Purpose would be fulfilled.

But the Lord said to him, “Go, for this man is my chosen instrument to take my name to Gentiles, kings, and Israelites.” *(Acts 9:15)*

Ananias needed to learn God was doing a new thing and his people would not always understand how that Purpose was being fulfilled in any given circumstance. Ours is to trust and obey.

Saul was with the disciples in Damascus for some time. Immediately he began proclaiming Jesus in the synagogues: “He is the Son of God.” *(Acts 9:19b–20)*

Paul believed himself to be a faithful follower of God Almighty, but found himself on the side of the enemy by persecuting the first followers of Jesus, who was the promised Messiah Paul was himself hoping for. He needed to be corrected in such a way that even this man of great intelligence and wisdom could not deny.

Ananias, a man of great faith and spirituality, doubted the Lord would prevail in the midst of persecution, doubted that his Church could survive, doubted that the Lord would protect and provide.

No, the One now on the throne is not resting easy. He is preparing his Kingdom to come by providing correction and purpose and protection to his people, so that they might themselves be heralds of the coming Kingdom.

Application

For Paul and for Peter, for the other disciples and for Ananias, the discipline of Jesus in these situations would have been painful for them. They needed to be corrected and given purpose, they needed to be restored and reminded the Lord provides. Despite their pride and pain, they yielded to the Lord and the work of the Holy Spirit.

We too have pride and pain. Are you resisting or yielding to the lessons the Holy Spirit provides.

The Work of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit, active in the created world, works to show the futility and sinfulness of life without God, and brings a conviction of the presence of God, his righteousness and coming judgment.

The Holy Spirit is present everywhere in the world...

Where can I go to escape your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?
(*Psalm 139:7*)

The unbelieving world will not recognise the Holy Spirit...

But the person without the Spirit does not receive what comes from God's Spirit, because it is foolishness to him; he is not able to understand it since it is evaluated spiritually.
(*1 Corinthians 2:14*)

The Holy Spirit testifies to the truth...

"When the Counsellor comes, the one I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father—he will testify about me.
(*John 15:26*)

The Holy Spirit convicts the world...

"It is for your benefit that I go away, because if I don't go away the Counsellor will not come to you. If I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will convict the world about sin, righteousness, and judgment: About sin, because they do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will no longer see me; and about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged."
(*John 16:7–11*)

The Holy Spirit gives us victory over sin...

because the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death.
(*Romans 8:2*)

And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you, then he who raised Christ from the dead will also bring your mortal bodies to life through his Spirit who lives in you.
(*Romans 8:11*)

The Holy Spirit empowers the church to serve the world in mission...

"When the Counsellor comes, the one I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father—he will testify about me. You also will testify, because you have been with me from the beginning.
(*John 15:26–27*)

The Holy Spirit is the power of God and of Christ active in the world and in believers. Jesus is not resting easy but is preparing his Kingdom to come and that begins with transforming and disciplining his people, his friends, into disciples who know they are forgiven, who know they have purpose, who know they are protected, who know they are provided for, who know when they need to be corrected, who know when they need to be restored, who recognise when their pride and pain is interfering with growing in the fruit of the Spirit.

Will you allow the Holy Spirit to do such a transforming work in you as we read about in Peter and Paul, Ananias and the other disciples? What has caused you pain and how does that experience interfere with your faith, hope and love? How does your pride show itself and interfere? Are you willing to have your beliefs corrected? Of what do you need to be forgiven?

No, the One now on the throne is not resting easy. Through the Holy Spirit, he is preparing his Kingdom to come by transforming his people, so that they might themselves be heralds of the coming Kingdom.

The work of the Holy Spirit is to convict, to teach, to help us gain victory over sin and to empower us in the mission of realising God's kingdom on earth. Only when we allow the Holy Spirit to do her work in us does the Kingdom become realised in our faith and in our lifestyle. And only then can we expect to be useful as a herald to the kingdom of God.

Conclusion

Every friend of Jesus should seek the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. Why? Because the Kingdom comes by transforming one person at a time, starting with you and I.

Let us, in faith, now pray together *The Lord's Prayer*, believing without hesitation his Kingdom will come, starting with us...

Endnotes

- 1 Unless otherwise noted, all scripture quotations are taken from *The Christian Standard Bible* (Nashville, TN, USA: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017).
- 2 Bate, "Mohammedan Worship Place Told Of Christ's Reign", *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times*, ed. Paul Lee Tan (Garland, TX, USA: Bible Communications, Inc., 1996), pg 800–801.