

**CHRIST ASCENDED TO FILL AND BE FILLED**  
**Sermon for Ascension Day 2019**  
**Ephesians 1:15-23**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon tonight is the Second Reading from before, Ephesians 1:15-23: <sup>15</sup> **For this reason, since I heard about the faith that you have in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's holy people,** <sup>16</sup> **I do not stop thanking God for you as I remember you in my prayers.** <sup>17</sup> **I ask the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, to give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, that you may know Him better.** <sup>18</sup> **I pray that the eyes of your minds will be enlightened, that you may know the hope to which He has called you, how rich His glorious inheritance is among His holy people,** <sup>19</sup> **and how incomparably great His power is for us, who believe according to the working of His mighty power.** <sup>20</sup> **He worked with that same power in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms,** <sup>21</sup> **far above all rule, authority, power, dominion and every other name that can be mentioned, not only in this age but also in the one to come.** <sup>22</sup> **He also put everything under His feet and appointed Him as the Head of everything, for the benefit of the church,** <sup>23</sup> **which is His body, filled completely by Him who fills everything in every way.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

We, who are so blessed by our ascended Lord, should be filled with confidence, joy, and hope. We, who are so blessed by our ascended Lord, should be filled with faith in Christ and love for our neighbour, especially our fellow saints. We, who are so blessed by our ascended Lord, should be filled with the knowledge of the power of God in Christ. So why is it then, that often, we are filled with other things - things like fear, discouragement, despair, and self-pity?

It was not so with the apostle Paul, even when writing from a Roman prison to the beleaguered Christians in Ephesus. Paul knew that even in the face of worldly disappointments he could confidently rely on the power and might of God that is revealed in the risen and ascended Lord - the One who fills everything in every way and who has His fullness in us, His church. He could rejoice in the face of adversity because He knew our Lord Jesus ascended to fill and be filled.

Because of His ascension, Christ fills all things, but, amazingly, the church is now the full expression of Christ. Paul says, **“how incomparably great His power is for us, who believe according to the working of His mighty power.** <sup>20</sup> **He worked with that same power in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms,** <sup>21</sup> **far above all rule, authority, power, dominion and every other name that can be mentioned, not only in this age but also in the one to come.** <sup>22</sup> **He also put everything under His feet and appointed Him as the Head of everything, for the benefit of the church,** <sup>23</sup> **which is His body, filled completely by Him who fills everything in every way.”**

God's might was at work in sending Jesus, *“God of God, light of light, very God of very God,”* into the flesh to make atonement for the sins of the world. Jesus died on the cross, but God showed His might and power by raising Jesus **“from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms.”**

Jesus' ascension to the Father means He is no longer bound by the limitations of His humiliation. Lifted beyond the confines of space and time, He now sits at the right hand of God. This is not a place where Christ is confined, but a symbolic picture of His saving power.<sup>1</sup> His *is* a position of power and honour. The ascended Lord Jesus holds the sceptre in His nail-scarred hands, ruling over all in heaven, earth, and hell. What a picture of greatness! Everything has been put under His feet: Christ's rule is absolute, and all His power is now used for one grand purpose, **for the benefit of the church**, which consists of the sum total of all believers. Christ's relationship with His church is a connection as close as the one the head shares with the members of the body.

<sup>1</sup> Exodus 15:6; Psalm 48:10; Isaiah 41:10

So that the Ephesians could continue to stand joyful and confident in their faith and not be disturbed by worldly distractions, disrupted by their sinful flesh, or disheartened by Satan's forces of evil, Paul unceasingly asks God to give them a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God. He says, **“<sup>16</sup> I do not stop thanking God for you as I remember you in my prayers. <sup>17</sup> I ask the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, to give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, that you may know Him better. <sup>18</sup> I pray that the eyes of your minds will be enlightened, that you may know the hope to which He has called you, how rich His glorious inheritance is among His holy people, <sup>19</sup> and how incomparably great His power is for us, who believe according to the working of His mighty power.”**

That knowledge of God; knowing **“Him better”** through a closer, more personal relationship with Him begins and ends with listening to Him speak through His Word. Getting to know God better through the Word, the Ephesians would soon realise and understand more about what great things He had done for them through His Son, Jesus, and would make all their earthly woes fade in comparison. Furthermore, when Paul spoke to them of **“the hope to which He has called you,”** he didn't mean this word in the way it is usually used, such as, *“I hope it doesn't rain tomorrow and ruin our plans for a picnic.”* No, the hope of which Paul spoke was not a fond wish, but sure and certain confidence. Paul reminded the Ephesians that from eternity, God chose them, in time He redeemed them, and now He had sealed them by giving them **the Spirit of wisdom and revelation**, that is, His Holy Spirit.

This knowledge of God's power in Christ, and what He has accomplished, is intended for us too. Often, we find ourselves distracted by worldly events, that lead us to take our eyes off Christ and stop trusting Him. We begin to lose heart and wonder just how much worse things can get. We forget that we belong to Him. Therefore, Paul reminds us too of how rich the Lord's **glorious inheritance is among His holy people**. It is our ascended Lord who comforts and gives confidence to us and His disciples of all ages by asking us not to dwell on the worries of the world but to trust Him, and to be reminded of our inheritance, of His Father's house with many rooms, to which He was going to prepare a place for those who love Him.<sup>2</sup> In His holy Word, we are encouraged and strengthened at the glimpses of heaven we receive, an inheritance we share with **all God's holy people** on earth and those now at the heavenly banquet. Therefore, called into Christ, who fills all and is filled by us, we have hope in the face of adversity.

Our calling is to be members of His Body, with all the church on earth and in heaven, which He fills and by which He is fulfilled. Through the power of the Gospel, the church is built up.<sup>3</sup> Christ is subjecting all things unto Himself, even the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places, and He is doing this **for the benefit of the church**, for us, for all who are His holy people. Despite what our physical eyes see around us, with the eyes of enlightened hearts, we see all that we have through our ascended Lord.

We do not lose heart, whatever we may see and experience in a fallen world. Because Christ has been lifted **far above all rule, authority, power, dominion and every other name that can be mentioned**, we, His Body, also His fulfilment, need not fear any rule or authority or power or dominion, whether on earth or beyond. This especially includes the warnings Paul would give later in his Letter to the Ephesians, warnings about the spiritual warfare with which we are involved.<sup>4</sup>

Because Jesus has ascended, we need not fear. We can be confident, even fearless, and say with Paul, <sup>38</sup> *“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor present circumstances nor future circumstances, nor powers, <sup>39</sup> nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord,”* (Rom. 8:38-39). We are more than conquerors in Christ, who has all things under His feet and who is head over all things to and for the church. His name is above every other name. Eventually, all powers, authorities, and every knee will bow to Him.<sup>5</sup>

Christ is in control, head over all! He has been given all rule, authority, power, and dominion. That is why He ascended on high. With the eyes of our hearts so enlightened, with that revelation and spirit of wisdom, we do not lose

<sup>2</sup> John 14:1-3

<sup>3</sup> Ephesians 3:10-12

<sup>4</sup> Ephesians 6:12

<sup>5</sup> Philippians 2:9-10

heart. Our ascended Lord rules and fills all things for us, His church. He continues to feed and care for us, and we, the members of His church, can rest in complete security. He is with us as true God and true man, exercising His rulership in the church through His Means of Grace. In His Word, in Holy Baptism, in the Lord's Supper, we mortals grasp the King of the universe and receive a foretaste of the feast to come. He, who fills all things, fills us, and we fulfil Him. What an amazing mystery! What a profound encouragement! With confidence, joy, and hope we celebrate, because our Lord ascended to fill and be filled. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

#### PRAYER FOR ASCENSION DAY

Lord God, heavenly Father, You are our strength and our song. We praise You that You have prepared salvation for us in Jesus, Your Son. We praise You for His life on earth as a human being like us, full of grace and truth. We praise You that You have revealed Yourself and Your love in Him. We thank You for Jesus' death and resurrection. We praise You that our Lord, who has offered Himself as a perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world, is now at Your right hand. Give us Your Spirit's power to believe all that He has taught us, and to do all that He has commanded us. Accept our thanks for His miracles and deeds of mercy.

By Your Spirit, help us to claim His sacrifice for our salvation, and to trust in Him for the gift of eternal life. As we now celebrate His ascension to Your right hand, give us constant joy. Enable us to centre our devotion on our living Lord on heaven's throne, ruling all things for the good of His Church and His children. Lift our minds to heaven where our Lord Jesus lives to pray for us. Give us confidence in His compassion, and in His power to bless.

Lord Jesus, continue to be present with us, as You have promised. Be present with us as You move us to witness to Your saving love to people everywhere, that Your Gospel may be proclaimed to all nations. Establish Your kingdom of grace in every land. Turn the hearts of people in every corner of the world to faith and obedience, so that every knee may bow and every tongue confess that You are both Christ and Lord.

Lord Jesus, with all things under Your feet, keep our land in righteousness and peace. Give us leaders who love and honour You. May Your Spirit hold sway in all schools, and in all institutions of learning and research. Bless all hospitals and places of mercy; and make Your healing touch evident in them. Protect us from war, disease, and every calamity; spare us from greed, rebellion, and lawlessness. Give all in our land a true love of piety and peace.

We pray for all who are suffering in any way, especially for those who are sick. Give them trust in Your love, and teach them to pray in patience and hope.

Lord Jesus, seated at God's right hand, preserve our faith and love during life's little day, and strengthen us to watch and pray for Your return. Make us glad that, when You come again, You will come to receive us to Yourself for ever. We offer these prayers, Christ our Lord, in Your name, which is far above every other name. Amen.

#### THE ASCENSION OF OUR LORD

Acts 1:1-11

<sup>1</sup> In my former book, Theophilus, I have written about everything that Jesus began to do and to teach <sup>2</sup> until the day when He was taken up to heaven, after He had given Instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom He had chosen.

<sup>3</sup> After His suffering, Jesus also showed these men, through many convincing proofs, that He was alive. He was seen by them during a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. <sup>4</sup> While He was eating with them, He ordered them not to leave Jerusalem but to wait for what the Father had promised. He said, "You have heard about this from

Me. <sup>5</sup> For John baptised with water, but not many days from now you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit."

<sup>6</sup> Therefore, when they met together, they asked Him, "Lord, are You at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

<sup>7</sup> He told them, "It is not for you to know the times or events that the Father has set by His own authority. <sup>8</sup> However, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria and to the farthest parts of the world."

<sup>9</sup> After He had said this and while they were watching Him, He was lifted up and a cloud took Him away from their sight. <sup>10</sup> While they were gazing into the sky

as He was going, suddenly two men in white clothes stood beside them. <sup>11</sup> They asked, “Men of Galilee, why are you standing and looking up into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come back in the same way as you have seen Him go into heaven.”

#### Ephesians 1:15-23

<sup>15</sup> For this reason, since I heard about the faith that you have in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God’s holy people, <sup>16</sup> I do not stop thanking God for you as I remember you in my prayers. <sup>17</sup> I ask the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, to give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, that you may know Him better. <sup>18</sup> I pray that the eyes of your minds will be enlightened, that you may know the hope to which He has called you, how rich His glorious inheritance is among His holy people, <sup>19</sup> and how incomparably great His power is for us, who believe according to the working of His mighty power. <sup>20</sup> He worked with that same power in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms, <sup>21</sup> far above all rule, authority, power, dominion and every other name that can be mentioned, not only in this age but also in the one to come. <sup>22</sup> He also put everything under His feet and appointed Him as the Head of everything, for the benefit of the church, <sup>23</sup> which is His body, filled completely by Him who fills everything in every way.

#### Luke 24:44-53

<sup>44</sup> He told them, “These are the very words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, namely, that everything written about Me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”

<sup>45</sup> Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. <sup>46</sup> He told them, “This is what Scripture has said: ‘The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, <sup>47</sup> and, based on His name, repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.’ <sup>48</sup> You will testify to these things.

<sup>49</sup> “I am sending you what My Father has promised. Wait here in the city until you are armed with power from above!”

<sup>50</sup> He led them out to where Bethany lay ahead of them. Then He raised His hands and blessed them. <sup>51</sup> While He was blessing them, He left them and was taken up to heaven.

<sup>52</sup> They knelt in worship of Him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. <sup>53</sup> They stayed continually at the Temple, praising God.