

Triumphant in the Spirit World

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One of the most frequent challenges people make to restorers is that on hearing of God's purpose to ultimately bring everything under Christ's headship, people often say, 'You don't expect that to happen *before* he comes, do you?' And when you confidently assert that you do, the usual rejoinder is, 'Get real! Look around you.' They then proceed to highlight what you already know full well – that the world is filled with violence, corruption, dishonesty, and greed, with much of it structurally undergirded by governments and political powers allied with demonic spirits. This presents the following challenge: do you believe the word of God or such voices highlighting visible circumstances? The Lordship of Christ must be asserted over *all* things, *including our thinking*. The natural tendency to unbelief and negative thinking must be brought into submission to his Lordship. Restorers remain radically committed to the triumph of his rule over *all* things – both internal and external to ourselves.

Two thousand years ago Jesus demonstrated his Lordship in every sphere:

- **Over nature** by walking on the water and stilling the storm (Mt 14:22-33; Mk 6:45-51; Jn 8:22-25);
- **Over demonic spirits** by liberating many such as the man of Gadara (Mt 8:28-34; Mk 5:1-17; Lk 8:26-37)
- **Over sickness** by healing multitudes (Mt. 12:15)
- **Over the composition of the elements** that make up physical matter, by changing water into wine (Jn 2:1-11).
- **Over the devious hearts of men**, by refuting the accusations and questions of Pharisees and leaving them tongue-tied (Mt 22:41-46; Mk 12:35-37; Lk 20:27-40; Jn 8:3-11).
- **And ultimately over death itself**, by raising the widow's son and in his own resurrection (Lk 7:11-15; Col 2:15).

God's ultimate purpose is to establish Christ's Lordship over the total cosmos through the church (Col.1:18).

A Cosmic View

To truly grasp the scope of God's work in achieving this requires a cosmic perspective. Paul unfolds the mystery of Christ in such a way that our thinking expands well beyond individual redemption, even going beyond the redeemed community. God wants us to see the incredible length, breadth, depth and height of the working of his Spirit in securing the inheritance for Christ the Son, 'in whom', 'through whom', and 'for whom' it all exists (Ro 11:36). Everything that has been created to serve the purpose of God as part of God's inheritance for the Son will be restored; that is, brought back from evil domination, from serving evil ends,

enacting unjust laws, and supporting unfair practices in its oppression of mankind. Everything will be restored to serving God's purpose of expressing his love for man, to looking after man's welfare, and serving righteous ends and justice for all in society.

At the heart of God's cosmic plan is the church. Paul presented us with a revelation of our place and purpose before the cosmic watchers of the visible and invisible worlds in his letter to the Ephesians:

*His intent was that **now, through the church**, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms. Eph 3:10*

The unveiling of this mystery implies that invisible angelic beings are being taught by what they see of the effect of the working of His Spirit in and through the church. They stand enthralled by the ways and wisdom of God at work in and through the church to advance the cosmic restoration of all things to Christ.

But none of this can succeed without overcoming challenges from the enemy. The cosmic struggle evident throughout the life and ministry of Christ continues in our present day as the risen Lord strides forth in his earthly body – the church – and strikes the forces of darkness with the two-edged sword of truth. The end of this conflict will see the deliverance of the nations from destructive powers and their readiness to learn the ways of God (Is. 2:3). Throughout the new age and ages to come the ever increasing rule of God over all things will continue to move everything forward to a fullness as yet unimagined. (Is. 9:6)

The Triumph in the Cross

The empty cross and tomb straddle the boundary line between this age and the one to come – into which Christ the pioneer/trailblazer has already gone. Every time we triumph in any circumstance or situation opposed to us – every time we heal the sick, cast out devils, lead people to faith in Christ, receive answers to our prayers, experience the divine presence and fellowship amongst his people, and share his life in the everyday world of our existence – we are tasting of the powers of the age to come. It is in this context that Paul introduces the church to the necessity of its engagement in spiritual warfare. He envisages the church in powerful assault upon the kingdom of darkness.

At the Cross, religion stood naked in its rejection of the Son of God. Rome – the greatest political power of the day – stood condemned for its complicity in the death of Christ. Increasingly troubled by the controversial and radical prophet whose words and works transcended the physical realm in which their political structures were rooted, the religious and political leaders agreed: Jesus had to be silenced; he had to be killed. Walter Wink says, '...the just man is killed. The embodiment of God's will is executed by God's servants. The incarnation of the orderly principles of the universe is crucified by the guardians of order. The very nucleus of spiritual power in the universe is destroyed by the spiritual powers.'

Both the religious and the political worlds were revealed for what they had become in reality – wicked, ugly, alien, and opposed to God. This is why allegiance to Christ must supersede religion and politics, whatever the consequence at any point in history. The martyrdom suffered by members of the early church in Rome’s arenas serves as a powerful demonstration of overriding allegiance to the Lordship of Christ. In more recent times, the hundreds of thousands of Christians who have suffered and continue to suffer for their faith in prisons around the world serve as a poignant reminder that the cosmic battle visibly establishing the Lordship of Christ over all else is far from over.

To understand the triumph of Christ in the Cross throughout the cosmos, it is important we understand the peoples’ worldview at the time. The people had no demarcation line in their minds between spirits and systems, or demons and despots. The visible and invisible worlds interlocked in their thinking and flowed easily from one to the other. This fluidity of thought allowed Jesus, Paul and others to speak of authorities, powers, rulers, principalities, thrones and dominions without the need to define these terms. As part of the prevailing worldview, the meaning of these terms was understood from the context of the dialogue in which they were used.

Modern theologians and scholars invest considerable time defining each Biblical term, considering etymologies and the various root combinations used by the Biblical authors – all in the hope of understanding what is written and its significance. But the overlap in usage of various terms – combined with the observation that some words are used interchangeably – leads to the conclusion that a better understanding is gained if we view the studied passage as an integrated whole. For example, when the Scripture speaks of principalities and powers, or all rule and authority, or every rule, every authority and every power, the apostle is speaking of powers that are visible *and* invisible, heavenly *and* earthly, spiritual *and* human, demonic *and* political, ethereal *and* structural.

Today, the worldview of the western mind has largely discounted the spirit world as it has locked itself into a materialistic one. The nearest many people get to acknowledging powerful forces beyond the material is to psychoanalyse individuals in whom there appears to be abnormality or breakdown, and recommending psychiatric help or therapy. The whole approach sees individuals as victims of the pressures of society or the material world in which they live, while their diagnosis and treatment ignores any spiritual dimension. On the other hand, many charismatic Christians completely ignore the powerful influence of modern social structures and the oppression the socio-political world exerts upon individuals. They see all recurrent problems as the result of unseen spirits at work. This has led to widespread abuse in charismatic circles, as people already needing help are further disturbed by being subjected to forms of Biblically unfounded exorcism that amount to no more than physical and mental abuse. God is restoring clear understanding on ‘deliverance’ ministry that is valid and biblical. *Restorers* assert that wherever we are called upon to liberate men and women from their oppressions and bondage, we must do so while recognising the need to deal with the root of the problem in the visible *and* invisible worlds. The authority of

Christ is established over **both**. To fail to give adequate attention to both will be to leave the person vulnerable to further oppression and continuing to be a victim of a one dimensional deliverance ministry.

The Cross, master-minded by Satan in unholy conspiracy with religious and political leaders actually proved to be a catastrophic disaster for the enemy. The demonic spirits were totally routed, with Christ triumphant parading them as a spectacle across the heavens (Col 2:15). In doing this he displayed God's power as the greatest in the universe. In the resurrection and ascension God established his Son as cosmic Lord, seating him at his own right hand.

Living with the Paradox

Having said this, we still cannot escape the fact that we live in the dynamic tension of the *already* and the *not yet*. Christ *has* triumphed and *is yet to* triumph; he is already the mighty conqueror who has rendered the enemy powerless, and yet death is still seen as a last enemy to be overcome. We are located in the *already happened and yet to happen* paradox. It is a *completed* work and yet a work *to be completed*. In the interim period between the already accomplished triumph of Christ and the grand finale of its ultimate manifestation in his return, we find ourselves engaged in cosmic warfare. The nearer we get to the truth, the nearer we get to God's reality – and the dividing line between natural and supernatural, visible and invisible, and time and eternity begins to disappear. As the writer to Hebrews says,

*In putting everything under him, God left nothing that is not subject to him. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. **Hebrews 2:9***

In other words, despite our paradoxical experience, our hope lies in Christ – who is affirmed by the Father in the ascension and glorification at his right hand. He is the first of many Sons to glory because he is there we shall also be *In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering.* (Heb.2:10).

One of the church's greatest songs of triumph is the doxology in Romans 8:31-39, which hinges on the theme, 'if God is for us, who can be against us?' The rest of the song seems to rise as an anthem of praise from millions of voices saying, 'no one, nothing, nothing at all, nothing in heaven, earth or under the earth, nothing in our present experience, nothing in our future experience, nothing acting from within itself against us, nothing acting on behalf of others against us, no system, no threat, no intimidation, no law, no unjust judgement, no mass revolt, no peer pressure, no structural violence, no demon, no political or economic system, no socio-political pressure, nothing in the invisible or visible worlds either in our existing space galaxy or in unseen galaxies, in this age or the age to come, can separate us from

the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. The cosmic Christ is cosmic Lord, and he is *for* us. This being true, who can – indeed, who would dare – be against us?! Paul seems intent on making as broad a sweep of the spatial-temporal, terrestrial and extraterrestrial spheres as possible, to convince the church of her present triumph in Christ. *'Christ must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet'* (1 Cor. 15:24-25).

Paul preached what is now actual in Christ's resurrection – that he has completely defeated all powers and rendered impotent their ability to unrestrainedly and unquestionably exert dominion over God's people – will at some future time be cosmically demonstrated as the eternal state for all things. This is when he will put down the last enemy – death – and bring everything beneath his feet. Christ has already established his rule over the powers of darkness, and in his second coming he will subject them totally to himself. Before submitting everything to God that he might be all in all (1 Cor.15:27-28). By faith, we can bring that ultimate victory into every situation on a daily basis. Tomorrow becomes today as we learn to walk in the steps of Him who has already triumphed.

Understanding God's plan of restoration means we don't indulge in a shallow and unhealthy preoccupation with heaven, which has isolated the church from the experience of ordinary people for far too long. The church finds it difficult consequently to persuade society that it has a message that is relevant because its focus has been almost exclusively on the hereafter. To the uninitiated, the Christian message has all too often been 'heaven by and by – sweet pie in the sky'. This is not the gospel of the kingdom. The message of the rule of God in righteousness and justice is a radical one that cuts to the core of human existence. I am not saying there is no heaven. I firmly believe that redeemed humanity will ultimately enjoy the heaven of God's presence as much as the earth filled with his presence. But ours is not an escapist message – it is a redemptive message. Our triumphant testimony is that Christ has conquered the powers of darkness and that we – in Christ – can 'rule in life' **now**.