

“Look Who Else Is On the Throne Now”
Ephesians 2:4-7
(Ephesians: Navigating an Alternative Reading of Reality)
March 20/11

Made alive! Raised up! Seated!
But God made us alive! But God raised us up! But God seated us!

“But God”.

As I said last Sunday, the little phrase takes us into the heart of the Gospel. We were dead in our trespasses and sins. “But God”. We were floating along with everyone else in the river of “human society organizing itself without God”. “But God”.

We were inadvertently cooperating with spiritual powers that work in opposition to the Kingdom of God. “But God”. We were living in the flesh, in human nature turned in on itself, indulging the desires of the flesh and mind. “But God”. We were, justly, along with all of humanity, deserving of the wrath of God. But God made us alive together with Christ! But God raised us up with Christ! But God seated us with Christ in the heavenly places, in Christ!

Let us pray.

Living God: We believe that You got a hold of the apostle Paul...while he was imprisoned in Rome, chained day and night to a soldier...and You enabled Paul to think these thoughts and write these words. Will You now help us understand what the words mean. And even if we cannot fully understand them, as is the case with me, will You help us nevertheless live in the reality the words are describing. Please dear God. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

I want to begin with a little grammar lesson. The letters of Paul are not an easy read. Partly because nearly every word and phrase is jam-packed with rich theology. And partly because Paul uses long, complex sentences. As in the text before us today.

We are going to focus on verses 4, 6 and 7, on the verbs “made alive”, “raised up”, “seated”. In most English translations it appears that the verses are a new and separate sentence. But in the original, in the Greek in which Paul wrote, they are part of one long sentence that begins at verse 1. Verses 1-7 are one sentence - a 124-word sentence. One of many long sentences in the letter to the Ephesians. Typical of Paul!

So, whenever I read Paul, I first take time to try to understand how his long sentences go together, how each part relates to the other parts. And the first thing I try to do is get down to the one basic affirmation that holds it all together.

So, a little grammar lesson.

The language in which Paul wrote his letter, Koine Greek, works a lot like English (more historically accurate to say English works a lot like Koine Greek). The building blocks of an English sentence are:

[p.p. no.1] subject, verb, object.

Usually in that order: subject, verb, object (direct or indirect).

Sometimes the verb precedes the subject: “Down came the rain.” Instead of “The rain came down.” But, for the most part, it is simply

subject, verb, object:

[p.p. no.2] “Canucks win the Stanley Cup.” We trust that will be the headline in June. With many exclamation points! Canucks win the Stanley Cup!!!

When I was learning to read Paul in Greek, my mentor was Daniel Fuller, son of Charles E. Fuller of “The Old Fashioned Revival Hour” radio program and founder of Fuller Theological Seminary. He taught us to do sentence diagramming. I am so grateful! For the discipline has helped me again and again to make my way through complex sentences to the basic, fundamental Gospel affirmation.

The basic structure of an English or Greek sentence is diagrammed like this:

[p.p. no.3] Subject/verb/object

Take as an example the sentence “God loves us.”

[p.p. no.4]

Subject – God/

(By the way. All the great sentences of history have God as the subject. Indeed, we will never finally understand history unless we use sentences with God as the subject. So, too our own lives: all the significant sentences of our lives have God as the subject; “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”, as Paul calls Him. When I pass on to the other side, I want the first and last sentence spoken at my memorial service to begin with “God...” not “Darrell”. God. A good discipline is to periodically take out a piece of paper and write 10 sentences with God as the subject.)

“God loves us.”

Subject – God Verb – loves

[p.p. no.5] God/loves/

[p.p. no.6] Object – us

God/loves/us

“Because by the great love with which He loved us”, as Paul puts it. (2:4)

Now, to this simple “God loves us” can be added all kinds of elaborations, qualifications, implications.

“God...who made heaven and earth...who holds all things together...”

“God loves because...” or “loves although”.

“God loves us...who were not even looking for God,” or “who did nothing to deserve it.”

But it will all still come down to the basic: God...loves...us.

Ephesians 2, verses 1 to 7: one long, complex sentence with many elaborations. Yet coming down to:

[p.p. no.7] subject/verb/object

(Actually) three verbs:

[p.p. no.8] subject/three verbs/object

Same subject and object for all three verbs.

[p.p. no.9] Each verb complemented by the same phrase, “with Christ”.

[p.p. no.10]

	made alive/us
	/with Christ
God /	raised up /us
	/with Christ
	seated /us
	/with Christ

The fact is, the preposition “with” is actually built into the verbs. Each verb begins with the letters s-u-n, “sun”, meaning “with”. Paul takes existing verbs: make alive, raise up, seat, and attaches “sun” to each one. This too is typical of Paul! He likes to make up new words to convey the new thing God has done for the world in Jesus.

To the verb “make alive” he adds “sun”, so that the new verb is literally, “with-made-alive”.

To the verb “raise up” he adds “sun”, so that the new verb is literally “with-raised-up”.

To the verb “seat” he adds “sun,” so that the new verb is literally “with-seated”.

And he adds the prepositional phrase “in Christ” to locate the new reality: with-made-alive in Christ; with-seated in Christ.

When we diagram the whole sentence, the Gospel leaps off the page!

When did God do the three verbs? “When we were dead...” – verse 1

Why did God do the three verbs? “Being rich in mercy” – verse 4

And “in order to show the surprising riches of His grace” – verse 7

Last week I called your attention to the cluster of words Paul uses in the long sentence; a cluster he uses in just about every one of his letters. The cluster: justice, mercy, grace.

Justice is God giving us what we deserve. Mercy is God not giving us what we deserve.

Grace is God giving us what we do not deserve. God does the three verbs of the Gospel because He is rich in mercy. Rich – *plutos*, as in plutocracy, the rule of the super rich.

God does the three verbs of the Gospel in order to show the “surpassing riches” of His grace. Surpassing – hyper, or hyperbolic. Riches – *plutos* again. God does the three verbs of the Gospel because of His Pluto-mercy, and to show the world His hyperbolic Pluto-grace!

So let us now focus on the three verbs: “made alive”, “raised up”, “seated”. Note: not, “will make alive”, “will raise up”, “will seat”. Paul is not here referring to the future. All three verbs are in the past tense: “made alive”, “raised up”, “seated”. Now.

Here is where I wish we all knew each other better; for I would invite you to turn to those around you and share what you think or feel about the verbs.

Made alive, raised up, seated.

We have met these verbs earlier in Paul's letter; at least the second and third: raised up and seated. Where? In Paul's first prayer, recorded in Ephesians 1. In Paul's first prayer, recorded in Ephesians 1. Listen: chapter one, verse 19 to 21. Paul prays that we know "the surpassing greatness of God's power...that He brought about in Christ."

Listen: "when He raised Christ from the dead, and seated Christ at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority, all power and dominion..."

Jesus of Nazareth...had been crucified. He was lying in a tomb. "But God". But God raised Him from the dead. And then God seated Him on the throne of the universe.

Do you see what Paul wants us to see? Do you hear the good news Paul wants us to grasp? What the Living God did for and with Jesus of Nazareth, He now does for and with all who believe in and belong to Jesus of Nazareth.

God raised up and seated Jesus on the throne to demonstrate His power. God raises up and seats those who belong to Jesus to demonstrate His grace.

Here then is the Gospel being proclaimed in the three verbs: when we enter into relationship with Jesus Christ we somehow begin to share in what is true about Jesus Christ right now. Remember, Paul is proclaiming this good news while imprisoned in the capital city of Ephesus, while chained day and night to a Roman soldier! Paul is telling us that no matter what our circumstances involve, we share in what happened to Jesus Christ. We share in what happened to Jesus Christ because we are now "in" Jesus Christ.

It seems to me, therefore, that in order for us to understand what it all means for us to be made alive, raised up, and seated...we need to understand what it means for Christ to be raised up and seated. When we understand more of what happened to Him, we can better understand what has happened to us in Him.

And the simplest way to know how to answer that question is to say: Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension, changed the way the universe goes together, changed the basic structure of the universe. Something real, objective, measurable...and revolutionary!... happened when Jesus died, rose from the grave, and ascended to the throne.

As Jesus died, the grasp sin had on the world was broken. "He who knew no sin, became sin for us." (2Cor.5:21) And took upon Himself all that sin deserved. And, therefore, broke sin's grip. And as Jesus died, the grip death had on the world was broken. Matthew tells us that as Jesus died, "the tombs were opened" (27:52). In the moment Jesus died, death lost its finality, and had to release its captives. And, therefore, evil lost its greatest weapon: the fear of death. Evil can no longer frighten people with death because death is no longer what it once was; it no longer has the last word.

When Jesus was raised from the grave, a new reality emerged in the midst of the old. Jesus' resurrection is not just one man returning to life after dying. It is not a returning to life; it is a going through death into a whole new order of life. When Jesus emerged from the grave, it was the emergence of a New Creation, a New Human, the second Adam, the last Adam. Easter morning is the first day of a whole new world!

When Jesus ascended to the throne, when God the Father seated His Son on the throne, all the powers that think they rule the world were placed under Him, under Jesus. The powers do not like it. The powers fight it. No matter: the universe goes together in a new way. Jesus of Nazareth is now on the throne above all thrones. And there is no force in all the universe that can remove Him.

And all of this – His death, resurrection, and ascension – removes all barriers between heaven and earth. At the moment Jesus died, the veil in the temple in Jerusalem was torn in two, signaling that all the walls have come down, and there is now free and full access into the heavenly realm of our existence. It is what Jesus announces in His Gospel: “The Kingdom of God has come near.”

I like how New Testament scholar Andrew T. Lincoln sums it up for us:

“Christ’s death was a death to the old order, to the powers of this age, including sin, and His resurrection was a coming alive of a new order, in which He functions as Lord with the power of God. Christ’s death and resurrection changed the power structure in history.” (p.108)

And here is the Gospel in Paul’s three verbs. In relationship with the Crucified, Risen, and Ascended Jesus, we enter into the new order, the new configuration, the new structure, results from His crucifixion, resurrection, and enthronement. Right now! Even while we still live in these decaying bodies, even while still on a profoundly fragile planet, even while sin, evil, and death still hang around. Even now we share in Jesus’ new order, in Jesus’ victory, in Jesus’ dominion, and in the union of heaven and earth.

We know Paul is not saying that in relationship with Jesus we are freed from trouble. For one thing, as I have said, Paul is chained to a soldier awaiting trial before Caesar...who still thinks he rules the world. For another, in Chapter 6 of his letter, Paul will call us to stand firm against the powers that have not yet surrendered to the new configuration of the universe.

What Paul is saying is that in union with the Resurrected, Ascended Christ, death is not final, and need not be feared; sin is not final, and we therefore need not live in bondage and shame, evil is not final, and we therefore need not play the game on evil’s terms; the walls have come down between heaven and earth, and the resources of heaven are available on earth now.

Verb one:

“He made us alive with Christ”. He enlivened us (Ray Stedman). Only God can. Dead people cannot enliven themselves. But the God who made Jesus alive can. And does. Now. Jesus says in the fifth chapter of John: whoever “hears my word and believes in the One who sent me, has eternal life; and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life” (5:24) Before the grave. Now. God has made us alive in the life of Jesus who is alive.

And the “vital signs” are not hard to detect.

- Those made alive with Christ love Christ...and want to love Him more.
- Those made alive with Christ love His word...and want to understand and live it more.
- Those made alive with Christ love His friends, the church...with all our warts and blemishes and brokenness.
- Those made alive with Christ love the world for which He died...and want neighbours and co-workers to find Him too.
- Those made alive with Christ love His appearing...they long for His return...not only because He then heals the broken world...but because they finally see His face.

Verb two:

“He has raised us up with Christ”.

Not only alive...but entering into a qualitatively different quality of life. Now.

An indestructible life which the grave cannot destroy.

Again, Jesus says: “whoever believes...has eternal life”. Now.

“Eternal life” is not just long life. It is the life God has and is.

We have been transferred into the new order of life...even while still in the old. And the old cannot destroy the new.

I have been with a number of people as they were dying; some so physically frail, outwardly decaying. But at their core there was this different quality of life which clearly could not be taken away.

And **Verb 3:**

“Seated us with Christ in the heavenly place in Christ”. Christ is on the throne. And so are all who belong to Him. Now.

The prophet Daniel saw this centuries ago. In the 7th chapter of his book, he sees the Son of Man – Jesus’ favourite self-designation – on the throne (7:13-14). And he sees what he calls “the saints of the Most High” joining the Son of Man on the throne (7:18). In relationship with the One on the throne we too are on the throne! Mercy! Not given what we deserve. Grace! Not given what we deserve. Given what we do not deserve.

What does it all mean? I do not yet fully know. I know of no one who fully understands!

What is clear is that we need not fear other powers and dominions, which means we need not live by the values and agendas of other powers and dominions. Flex their muscles as they might, strut across the stage of history as they might, they are no match for the true Ruler of the Universe.

And this too is clear. The true Lord is a very different kind of Lord. The true King has a very different understanding of royalty. He is the Servant King, who washes the feet of His subjects! And He invites the world to join Him in the very different way He rules the world!

You see, it is the Jesus we meet in the pages of the Four Gospels who is seated on the throne. He did not become a different person when the Father raised Him up and seated

Him far above all rules and authority. He is the same Jesus: Friend of sinners and tax collectors, Healer of sick bodies and troubled minds. He is the same Jesus: gentle and compassionate, entering into the world's pain and sorrow, making it His own.

His dominion...which stretches from sea to sea, shore to shore...is all about servant-love. It is about choosing the way of costly servanthood. It is about entering into the brokenness of earth and being a channel of the resources of heaven. A very different kind of Kingdom led by a very different kind of King.

Who "rules" Japan right now? On the human level...who is "making the world go around" for Japan right now? Yes, those who are in high places, who are facing difficult decisions. But are not the true "rulers" those who are choosing to enter into the chaos? Who are laying aside their own comfort and getting their hands dirty? Especially those who are literally laying their lives down, entering the nuclear reactors, trying to stave off horrific disaster.

Ever since that day when God seated Jesus of Nazareth on the throne, it has been the servants who have "made the world go around" "Alternating readings of reality."! No society, no nation, no city, no corporation, no church, can make it without the servants. That is why the world's leaders were drawn like a magnet to Mother Teresa: in her they saw true royalty.

Made alive, raised up, seated. All because of the riches of God's mercy, in order to show the surpassing riches of God's grace.

Made alive, raised up, seated...to live in the riches of God's mercy and in the surpassing riches of God's grace.

Made alive, raised up, seated, to be part of God's program of extending the riches of mercy and the surpassing riches of grace to the world.

Please dear God, help us truly live in the reality of the three verbs: alive, raised up, and seated...with Jesus Christ who is alive, raised up, and seated. Amen!