

# An Exalted Christ, An Empowered Church

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Acts 2:33

*Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear.*

I am firmly persuaded that we read our Bibles wrongly and we have taught our children to read their Bibles wrongly. This is one of the great ills that plague many Christians today. They simply look at the Bible and read it in a matter of a fact way, without curiosity, inquiry or exchange. There's no give and take, analyzing or asking questions. Most importantly there is no listening for the Spirit's interpretation and understanding so we just come to the Scriptures as a book of facts—historical though they may be—a collection of stories. The problem is, when you look at it as simply a true, historical book—dead history not alive for the day—we read the Scriptures without experiencing the chief end for which they were written. And what is that end? To encounter the One who wrote it.

In the next couple of weeks, in my absence from my wife and from you, I do not doubt that I'll receive some texts and emails from her. Will I read those texts and emails with a matter-of-fact attitude? Will I read them as statistics or words, as black ink on white screen? No. I'll read them with enthusiasm, with anticipation. This is my beloved; I will read them as if to hear her very heart.

My friend, do you wake up excited every morning to get up and open up your Bible to hear from your Beloved, so that you may read with enthusiasm and anticipation from His heart to yours? But if you read it as a matter of facts and knowledge, your spiritual life will seem very dry and shallow. You are missing out on one of the greatest opportunities afforded the Christian—to take the Word of God and sit down with the Author Himself. It is there with Him you can discuss what He's written and experience the transforming power His message has. You see, God has written us a book in order to help us be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. Let me show you by example through our text what I'm talking about.

Here our text says that Jesus was exalted to the right hand of God. Well then, when you read that, do you not ask yourself certain questions? In the very least you should ask yourself, *What*

*has this got to do with me? What does Jesus, being exalted at the right hand of God, got to do with me here in the twenty first century? What does it mean for Christ to be exalted? What are the implications of His exaltation? Do you read your Bibles in that manner? I suggest heartily that this is the way you ought to read, not just to gain a collection of information.*

This is the way we teach children to learn, is it not? We send them to school or we teach them at home and try to pour into their brains information. That is good and necessary for learning. There has to be the foundational principles upon which theories work and education is grown and advanced. But in the end we don't teach our children that they might just be computers and so if we push the right button they regurgitate the information. I don't want a computer for a child. I want a living, thinking person that can reason and take problems and solve them through the wisdom and knowledge they've acquired. You teach them facts in order for them interact with the environment in which they are. We call this the Information Age and we've brought that into the church and into our own personal devotions.

As I read Jesus was "exalted to the right hand of God" why would I not want to experience this resurrected and exalted Lord? My heart should be thrilled that my God has been exalted above every principality and power. This is the One I serve—He who has all authority. That ought to have some practical implications in my life and help me have a different outlook. I'm not defeated I'm victorious. Why? Because He is exalted. This is the way you read your Bible.

Look at the last part of our text. If the Spirit has been given as it says He has, then why do we not experience Him? We read the text as merely informational and thereby we develop a statement of faith—Jesus ascended to the right hand of God and all Christians now have the Holy Spirit. Period. We've got our doctrine down, we've got our knowledge and we can spit it out and teach others the same information. But the Spirit being given to us is more than just doctrinal information; it is to be the source of your everyday life. Your life is not constructed of your anatomy, your brains, your lungs, your heart and the blood that it pumps. Your life is more than this. This life that you live in the flesh you ought to live by the faith of the Son of God. These are the life-transforming facts that ought to have impact and working in us. If we never ask if this is true, why is the Holy Spirit not more real and active in my life, we'll never experience Him.

I pray that in our brief time together God will make this text alive and that you will see the radical and life-changing principles by which you can live in communion with your God, the One

who has been exalted to the right hand of God.

## I. CHRIST JESUS GIVES THE HOLY SPIRIT

We've got to have the facts and this fact doesn't sound so glamorous. It's a matter of fact statement. Christ Jesus gives the Holy Spirit. But within that truth is abundant wealth with practical implication to our everyday.

*Acts 2:33 —“Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear.”*

What was Peter referring to here? This is one verse out of several, giving us the synopsis of what Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost. *This which you now see and hear* is his reference to the giving of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost to the 120 assembled in the Upper Room. You remember the account? Tongues of fire rested on each one of them and they all began to speak in languages they had not learned and they declared in those languages the wonderful works of God. Which, I would say, would be the works of God through Jesus Christ—the death, the resurrection, the Gospel.

This huge crowd had assembled outside the Upper Room about nine in the morning when Peter, full of the Holy Spirit—not a denier, not a traitor—stands up in the power of God and preaches. He says, “What you now see and hear, God has done it. Jesus has given us the Holy Spirit, He has kept His promise.”

Peter knew it was specifically Jesus who gave the Holy Spirit, not the Father, but the Son because this is what Jesus had promised. Go back in your Bibles to John 15:26. Before Jesus is betrayed and arrested, He makes this promise,

*“But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me.”*

Here's what happened on the glorious Day of Pentecost. Jesus had ascended to the right hand of the Father and the Father granted the Son the authority to give the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, to the church and Jesus poured out the Holy Spirit on the church that day. It was Christ who did

it, this is extremely important. Why is it so important to denote that it was Jesus, not the Father? Aren't they one in the same? Why make the distinction? Peter does, that's why. The Bible does. Christ made the distinction. It is significant. I would say one of the most significant principles missing in much of modern Christianity is the exaltation of Jesus Christ.

### **A. Jesus' Departure Was Crucial to the Giving of the Spirit.**

This is one of the first things we understand about Christ giving us the Holy Spirit—He had to leave this earth in order to do that. Look at what He says in John 16. This is the same discourse as we read from earlier in John 15.

*John 16:7 —“Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you.”*

Jesus is clear that He could not give the Holy Spirit while He was still on this earth. Why couldn't He? Didn't He have the authority to do so?

Ask yourself secondly, what does He mean by *to your advantage*? The old Authorized Version says “it is expedient”, it's wise, and it's best that He goes because if He goes He can give the Holy Spirit. But why couldn't He just do it right here? Why wouldn't it be best for us that He remain on this earth and grant us the Holy Spirit? The most common answer—and I agree, although I don't think it's the total answer—is that He was subject or limited to time and space as a man. Jesus could only be in one place at one time.

Certainly that is true, but it's also untrue. He was a man with limitations, but He is also the eternal God. He was the Word, the Word was with God and the Word was God. In His humanity He was limited to time and space, in His deity He was omnipresent. That's the mystery of the incarnation. As the man, the One born of a virgin, He says it's wiser that He goes to His Father because only then can He give the Holy Spirit. It's not just because He's limited to time and space as a man, it's much more than that. The reason is because of His glorification.

*John 14:28 —“You have heard Me say to you, ‘I am going away and coming back to you.’ If you loved Me, you would rejoice because I said, ‘I am going to the Father,’ for My Father is greater than I.”*

Can you imagine why the disciples were saddened? Jesus was going to leave them and they wouldn't see Him for a long time. I can understand their sorrow. We often long to have the opportunity to be one of those men with Him for those three and a half years as He walked and taught on this earth. But Jesus is saying something there that we need not miss. He says if we really loved Him and were thrilled in His blessing, we would be happy. We would also be happy for Jesus because He's going to the Father and the Father is greater than Him.

Again, we're confused. If Jesus is the eternal Son of God, part of the Godhead, then how can Christ say that the Father is greater than Him? He's not speaking as the eternal deity but as a man and He speaks under the authority of God, not in His own authority. As a man, just like you and me, He recognizes His duty to submit to the authority of God. But Jesus is giving us a clue here—*I'm going back to the Father, but I'm not going as one who will be submissive to the Father, but equal to Him.* He's talking about His glorification. This is why it was important for Jesus to go back to heaven in order to give us the Holy Spirit. He first had to be vindicated as God's Son and exalted to that rightful position, because He also was a man.

So the resurrection, the ascension and the exaltation of Jesus Christ is a statement that God is making about Him that His work—all of His life, all of His obedience, all of His sufferings, all of His agony and His death—is finished, complete and good. He was vindicated and declared as God's Son. Even the Apostle Paul says in the first chapter to the Romans that He was declared to be the Son of God through the Spirit of the resurrection. Jesus is saying that when He ascends He will be exalted and recognized as who He has always been, the eternal, second person of the Godhead. He is the Godman.

Let's start putting this together. Peter concludes this message on the Day of Pentecost,

*Acts 2:36 —“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”*

Let the world know, Peter said, let Israel know that God has exalted Jesus, born of a virgin, made under the law, a man just like you and I, but He has been found perfect in the eyes of God. He has been found submissive to the entire will of God and is done it. Now God has declared the man of Nazareth both Lord and Christ. Why is this so important? So that you might be given the Holy Spirit.

God the Father brings the Son to His side and seats Him on a throne and as Jesus said, the Spirit proceeds from the Father, but He's given the Spirit to Me to pour out on you. This is extremely important.

With Christ's exaltation came all authority to give the Holy Spirit to whomever He chooses, the church. Look at Matthew 28:18, this is remarkable. It's hard to understand because we're dealing with one person who is both God and man. He's not two persons crammed into one body, just one person—Jesus, born of a virgin, and yet happens to be the unborn eternal One. But He does become a man, the Bible tells us and submits Himself to the Father and everything the Father tells Him He does. Therefore He operates under the Father's authority. But notice what He says before He ascends, before His exaltation takes place. After the resurrection, 40 days later, He says to His disciples:

*“And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.’”*

We read that and say, “So? Jesus had all authority.” No He didn't. When Jesus was on this earth, the man Christ Jesus did not have all authority in heaven and on earth. Shall I prove it to you? I can see I have to do so. Let me roll up my sleeves and to you naysayers and doubters let me give you Scripture. For example, in Luke 7 we read the story of the Centurion that sends messengers to Jesus to heal one of his sick servants and Jesus says, “I'll do it.” And He goes to the Centurion's home. The Centurion sees him coming and sends out another messenger. “Oh no,” he says. “I'm not worthy that you come to my house. Just speak the word. Just say it and I know my servant will be healed.” How did he know that? Here is his reasoning in Luke 7:8,

*“For I also am a man placed under authority and have soldiers under me. I say to one ‘Go,’ and he goes and to another ‘Come and do this,’ and he does it.”*

Who is the Centurion referring to when he says, “I am also,” who is the also? Jesus. The Centurion says, I speak the words to my servant and they do it because they know I've got the whole Roman Empire behind me. I serve under the emperor and have his authority so if you disrespect me and don't do it you are disobeying the emperor. So my authority is not really my own but the emperor's, the authority of Rome. That's how You operate, Jesus, I know that about You. You serve under a greater authority—God, and all You have to do is tell sickness to leave and it leaves because it has to obey the authority behind you.

Christ was under the authority of God. If that example is not enough for you then look at Jesus Himself. In John 14:10 Jesus is reasoning with these disciples because they still don't understand what some of you are perplexed about this morning. Some of you don't understand what this message has to do with you. Listen to me, rather, listen to the Lord as He reasons with the disciples.

*“Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me? The words that I speak to you I don't speak on My own authority.”*

Do you see that? Jesus didn't come in His own authority. He didn't come wielding His own power. Why? Because He didn't have that as a man. Rather He says,

*“But the Father who dwells in Me does the works.”*

*It's not My authority, it's the authority of the Father.*

Please listen to this. Brothers and sisters, Jesus is showing you how you serve God and how you serve Christ. He did it the same way we're supposed to do it. He submitted to the Lordship of the Father and did exactly what the Father told Him under the authority and the power of the Father and we're to do the same to Christ now.

One more proof. In Luke 4 Christ is in the wilderness tempted by the devil. In one of the temptations, Satan takes Him up to the mountain and shows Him all the kingdoms of the world. What does Satan say to Him?

*“All this authority I will give You and their glory, for this has been delivered to me and I will give it to whomever I wish.”*

Right there is an acknowledgement that Jesus didn't have all authority on earth. He only had the authority the Father granted to Him, the Father still exercised that authority and Jesus submitted to it. And as Jesus submitted to God, He did so in the same way you and I are to submit to Christ.

Jesus did not have all authority. But you say, *In the priestly prayer of John 17 doesn't He say to the Father, “God, You have given Me authority in the earth to give salvation to whomever I will”?*

Yes, He had certain authorities and one of them was to forgive sin. In the spiritual realm, God gave Him authority but it wasn't His own, it was the Father's and He was exercising it, just like a policeman would exercise the authority of a judge who has written a bench warrant. Does the policeman have the authority to write that bench warrant? No, but the judge does and the policeman simply executes it. Christ did not have authority as a man in Himself, He simply executed the will of the Father as the Father showed Him His will. But now He has died and He's been resurrected and He's about to be ascended and exalted and now what does He say?

*"I have all authority in heaven and earth."*

Who has all authority in heaven and earth? Only God. I tell you this morning that is why Jesus had to go back to heaven. He had to be crowned King of kings and Lord of lords. He had to be lifted up, and where was He lifted up to? He was not ushered into the throne room where He could stand beside the anointed cherubs. He's not seated on the steps looking up to the throne like the four living creatures. God the Father said, "Son, come up here. Climb the royal steps and take Your seat by My right hand." It's an illustration to show He is equal to the Father, having all authority in heaven and on earth. And what is the first thing this exalted Lord does having all authority? He pours out the Holy Spirit on us, the church. Because with that authority comes the right to dispense gifts as He pleases.

*Ephesians 4:8 — "Therefore He says: 'When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men.'"*

What a triumphant day that was. All we see is the picture of all these men looking up to the sky, watching our Lord descend into the clouds. We don't know what happened on the other side of the clouds, but I have an idea. I think that when Christ entered into boundaries of that Celestial City and entered the gates, He walked the main road leading to the throne room of heaven, where all of heaven's angels assembled on each side. There they bowed low before the triumphant King who had gone forth to do war against the enemy and conquered him. And there, dragging in the chains of His blood, were every enemy and imp in hell, drug in His victory procession to the throne room. Lord of lords, King of kings, God of gods, triumphant over all. That triumph of Christ is our triumph this hour! It's not that I have to go out and gain and secure the victory, oh no. Christ has already secured every victory I shall ever need or ever want. He's done it all. He's finished it all. He's the One seated on the throne. In that culture, to be seated on



the throne meant your work as the dictator was done. You had done all that was necessary and now you could take your rest and enjoy your spoils.

Listen to what the Father says to the Son, prophesied by David.

*“And the Lord said to my Lord, ‘Come and sit at My right hand until I make all of My enemies Your footstool.’”*

*Jesus, enjoy what You’ve done through the cross and the resurrection. Through Your life of obedience and submitting to My authority, now watch as Your authority destroys every enemy and causes every knee to bow and every tongue to confess. It’s happening now and it will be culminated one glorious day when the living and the dead shall stand before Him. It will not take place then, it’s already done. It will just be reality and seen and witnessed by all that day.*

## **B. Christ Jesus’ Granting the Gift of the Holy Spirit is His Lordship Manifested on the Earth.**

This is why this is so important. This is why it was necessary for Jesus to ascend and *then* the Spirit to be given. Not just because He was only at one place at one time. Let’s not be so content to accept the little facts we’ve gathered through our lives, let’s keep reading and hearing from the living God who teaches us all truth. His pouring out the Holy Spirit on us today and on the church on the Day of Pentecost was a manifestation of His glory. The issue of you being filled with the Spirit is not about your glory; it’s about the glory of Jesus Christ.

I want to make the application and you better be listening or you’ll miss it. We pray *Oh, Holy Spirit, fill us; empower us*, and these are right and good prayers, but they have no power unless they’re based upon the truth. The truth is we should pray that the spirit should be upon us in power not for our glory, not for our good, not for our service but *for His glory alone*. That’s the reason the Holy Spirit was given. He was given by the Son, not the Father, so the Father could demonstrate to all, “This is My Son in whom I am well pleased. He has all authority in heaven and earth and now He can grant the Holy Spirit because He is who He said He was.

If that’s the case then the most fundamentally important point for us this morning is this:

## **II. CHRIST JESUS HAS ALREADY GIVEN THE CHURCH THE HOLY SPIRIT**

He's already done it. It's already happened. And if you are a Christian you have the Spirit. You don't need to pray for the Spirit to come. He's already come because He's already been exalted and glorified.

### **A. The Basis of the Giving of the Spirit is the Exaltation of Christ.**

*Acts 2:33 — "Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear."*

Christians, this is so radically huge. I'm not being melodramatic. This truth, if the Spirit grants you understanding, will transform you. The basis of the Spirit's activity in your life is not your goodness. It's based upon Christ's goodness. Not your merit but His.

Why do I say this is so huge? Maybe it's not as huge for you as it is for me, because for many years I labored under the false idea that if I was to be filled with the Holy Spirit and make sure I did certain things. I had to make sure I was obedient at all times, I had to pray more, fast and be so holy. I had to do all of these things in order for the Spirit's power and influence to operate in my life. I'm here to tell you that is not Scriptural. That would mean the Spirit's work and activity in my life based on my merit and not on Christ. And the reason He has poured out His Spirit on His church is to glorify Him and what *He's* done, not us. All of this silliness in books about seven or 10 steps to being filled with the Spirit, how you get the Spirit, how you are filled and how the Spirit comes. You wait and you tarry, you fast and make sure you really want to be filled, because He's not going to fill you unless you want to be filled. I've got a great collection of these books, I'll sell them cheap after this service. All these books say is that you've got to overcome some reluctance in God and prove to Him that you're now worthy to be full of the Holy Spirit. Friends, that's not biblical.

The requirement for the Spirit to come upon me is that Christ ascended and was exalted.

### **B. It is a Historical Reality.**

The Day of Pentecost is a historical fact. It's never going to be repeated again. It is finished and

complete. It is no more possible for the Day of Pentecost to be repeated as Calvary. They are both historical events. Does that mean He doesn't continue to pour out His Spirit on us? Not at all. It simply means the church has received the Spirit of the Living God. There is no need for Him to do that again, it's a historical reality.

Let me give you an example. Jesus died on the cross earning our redemption. This we all know. How do you get forgiveness of sins? By being good, praying and begging for the forgiveness of sin, turning over a new leaf, going to church, getting baptized? No. You're forgiven of your sin when you place your faith in the sacrifice for sin. When you put your confidence in what Jesus Christ alone has done for the removal of your sin and your guilt then you receive justification, pardon. Your justification or rightness with God is not based on anything you do but by grace through faith in what Christ has done. Those who battle with lack of assurance and struggle or condemnation, this is the crux of the matter—their faith has wandered away from the finished work of the cross and now they're looking unto themselves and what they do or don't do as if the work is not yet finished.

Our salvation is not merited by our goodness or works. The death of Christ gained our cleansing from sin. The resurrection of Christ gained our regeneration and justification. But there is one more thing. The ascension and exaltation of Christ has gained us the promise of the Holy Spirit.

### **C. The Giving of the Holy Spirit is For the Glory of Christ.**

*Acts 2:36 —“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”*

How do we know He is Lord and Christ? Could not the Father have seated Him at the right hand of the throne and say, “Son, You have all authority in heaven and earth.” Yes, but we wouldn't know that. How would those men gathered outside the upper room have known that Jesus was exalted and crowned in His glory? There is only one way they could know and that's through the pouring out of the Holy Spirit.

Peter was talking to the room that night: How do you know He's both Lord and Christ? Because you have heard and seen this experience today. He promised before He left and He's done it. That must mean that everything else He said was true. Those people were so convicted by that

message that they said, “What must we do to be saved?” This is why this is huge. The pouring out of the Spirit of God on His people is a fulfillment of the promise of God, which means that if He made and kept that promise that every other promise He’s made He will keep. He is who He said He is—Lord and God.

I fear we have made a grave mistake of making the Holy Spirit’s activity in our life dependent upon us. While it is true that I can quench the Holy Spirit and grieve Him and thereby reduce my sensitivity to His leadership, the granting of His influence and power is merited not by my efforts but on the work of Jesus Christ. I don’t have to overcome reluctance with God to be given the Holy Spirit’s influence in my life. I just have to believe that Jesus accomplished it all. I’m commanded to be filled, why should I then labor to be filled as if it were dependent upon my strength. I’m doomed if that’s the case. Doomed as much as if I was trying to overcome my sins on my own. I can’t do either one.

The reason God gives us the Holy Spirit is to glorify Jesus, not us.

*John 15:26 — “But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me.”*

*John 16:14 — “He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you.”*

Listen to me, this is not about you or me, it’s about the glory of Jesus Christ. Why do you not believe that God will grant you the Holy Spirit’s power, boldness, impact and influence in your life? Because you still think you have something to do with it, that’s why. The purpose of Pentecost is to prove the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Your inability is nothing to God. This is what this church needs.

We don’t need the power of preachers or the power of programs or teachers or deacons or musicians. What are these in comparison to the power of God? Except the Lord build the house those who labor, labor in vain. Have we not learned that over the years our best efforts are doomed to fail unless the Spirit of God is in them? It’s the Spirit that initiates the work of the church and when He does success is there.

When I look at myself today and complain, “Lord, there’s not much here,” my inability seems to

be the only thing I can focus on. “I can’t do this, I can’t do that, I don’t have the right personality, I don’t have enough education, I don’t have enough giftedness, I’m not charismatic, I don’t have this, I don’t have that.”

We go around all the time unbelieving, thinking God cannot use us because we lack something. I want to remind you of three women. Do you remember Sarah, Hannah, or Elizabeth? These three ladies had one thing in common—the inability to have children. They lacked the ability to produce offspring. But did that stop them? Not when God was in it. They had three important sons: Isaac, Samuel and John the Baptist. Their inability did not handicap God and neither does your inability. What we need today is not more ability but more submission to the Holy Spirit, who has already been given to us. The key is not in you having some crisis experience whereby He gives you more of His influence and activity and power. You already have the person of God within you. The question is how much of you does He have?

Jesus has already done everything necessary for me to have the Spirit who dwells in me already. He’s there because of Christ not me. Oh help us to believe this, oh Lord. Set us free from our theology of self-help and self-works and let us look to Christ and glorify Him as having finished and completed the entire work of redemption, even the granting of the Holy Spirit. Amen.