

Jesus Christ: Set Apart as Lord

One of the biggest obstacles, one of the biggest threats, facing the church today does not come from an increasing encroachment by governmental authorities on the right of free speech and freedom of religion for those professing Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, although these are things of concern. Neither is it the threat coming from encroaching Islamic fundamentalism in which violence, hatred and murder are spread through the fanatical adherents of this so-called “religion of peace” although, once again, this is a realistic source of concern. But the greatest threat to the Lord’s church today does not originate from somewhere outside. Sadly, unfortunately, and to the shame of its members, it comes from within. We have met our enemy, and our enemy is our self. It is our own members who are the greatest threat to the church as they choose to follow a pathway of apathy and they choose to remain willfully ignorant of God’s holy word. This is the exact attitude that people have when their Bibles just sit, gathering dust, and maybe get dusted off on Sunday mornings and then taken to church. The only wear and tear these Bibles receive comes from being carried and dusted rather than falling apart from being opened diligently and studied. I cannot for the life of me discover how to encourage those in the church to wear out their Bibles by looking for God on every single line. These are where the blessings are found that Peter writes about, calling them the very great and precious promises. It is in God’s word where one gets to know those great and precious promises and to have the confident faith that Abraham had when he staggered not at the promise of God. It is only in God’s word that one finds why it is that Jeremiah was called the weeping prophet, and why he wept so hard and suffered so much over the spiritual state of his nation as the sin of the people before his eyes was so awfully hard for him to bear. It is hard for us not to weep ourselves over the moral decay our own nation as we watch its own demise. It is only within God’s holy word that one learns why it is that Isaiah is called the Messianic prophet and why Isaiah 53 is called the fifth Gospel.

The older I get, the more I enjoy studying parts of the Bible that most people, quite frankly, find boring. Some people do not enjoy studying the Old Testament, which is really quite a shame, for they are forgetting they are, in fact, not enjoying immersing themselves in God’s own word. He is the author of the entire Bible, and that includes the Old Testament, too. The Holy Spirit inspired the writers who recorded God’s word for us. People who would just as soon never study the Old Testament also seem to forget that the entire focus of the Bible is Jesus Christ, and once again, that includes the Old Testament. They also seem to forget what the Apostle Paul had to say about God’s word in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 [RSV]: **16. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17. that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.** So when Paul said, “**all Scripture is . . . profitable**” he meant **exactly** what he said: **All Scripture is profitable for us, and that includes all of the Old Testament, including the genealogies, for they point directly to Jesus Christ.** Personally, I find God’s word fascinating, even those allegedly “boring” genealogies. If I had not studied them, I would never have realized that Noah and Shem were living during the time of the events at Babel, *as was Abram*. This means they all lived at a time when there was only one language in the

world. I would never have learned that Shem actually outlived Abram by decades, and that there is a very strong likelihood that Shem is Melchizedek. I would never have learned how one evil man, Nimrod, brought false, pagan religion into the world, the effects of which are still felt to this very day.

If we did not study the entire Bible, which includes the Old Testament as well, then how would we know what Jesus meant when He said in John 5:39 [RSV], ***“You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to Me....”*** This was not the only time Jesus made such a comment, so it must be important, and it must be true that God wants us to study His entire word, for we are also told that as Jesus was walking along the road to Emmaus with two disciples following His glorious and triumphant resurrection. Jesus said to them, ***25. “O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26. Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into His glory?” 27. And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.*** (Luke 24:25-27 [RSV])

How would we ever know why David is called a man after God's own heart if we never read or studied 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles and the Psalms? How would we ever come to understand why Moses was called the meekest man in all of the Earth if we never read Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy? Could anyone explain why seven times a day David praised and thanked God? Who would know or understand why David arose at midnight to praise the Lord? Why? Why cannot we as a people whom God has redeemed covet to be men and women after God's own heart? Why cannot His word be more precious to us than gold, much more precious than much fine gold? Why cannot His word be like settings of silver on apples of gold, as it is described in that boring, Old Testament? Why do we not want to know that ***“Your love is sweeter than life”***?

Why do we not plead with the same gusto as we see in Scripture, ***“O, God, take not your Spirit from me!”*** Why do we have problems praising Him with our hearts and with our voices in songs of praise when the presence of God was so thick that it drove out the priests at the dedication of the Temple? Has He not promised to dwell within our hearts, and in our congregation, and not simply in a Temple made with hands? Why do we not want His presence like that in our own homes when we draw close to Him, to have Him as near and close to us as Moses had Him face to face on the mountain?

God is no respecter of persons. It seems as though He is so close at times that if one more dot of an ounce of God were present here that I would die. I feel that way right now as I speak these wonderful things that God has put into my heart. And yet I hear, “Well, I'm not like you, David. You are the preacher. Those things just don't interest me.”

Well, folks, I ask the question, “Why not? Why are these things not being taught? Why are these things unimportant? Why are the examples of men and women like this not

being brought out and alive in this world? The Apostle Paul wrote, **“And you, who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our trespasses”** (Colossians 2:13 [RSV]). If we are alive with Christ, then why is it such a secret? To try to talk to anyone at church about his or her Jesus is the quickest way of getting someone to say, “I've really got to go now. We can discuss this at another time.” Almost anyone will discuss their doctrines, but to share Gods grace and love put into our hearts by His Holy Spirit, AHHHH, the joy of the Lord overflows! If God and His word is a fountain of life, then it **should** overflow like a fountain, visible to all. Jesus proclaimed in John 7:37-38 [RSV], **37. “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. 38. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.’”** So drink deeply from the well of the water of life which is Christ the Lord. He that has been forgiven much loves much. Well, we all are forgiven much.

Sometimes I feel so absolutely helpless. I know God has given me so much of Himself, but I want more. I know a little of His word, but I want to know more. I know some great and precious promises but I want to know more of them. I have several scriptures that I absolutely love but a few stand out like giants to me, and one of them is Romans 15:13 [RSV]. **“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.”**

This one sentence blessing is one of the richest blessings in the Scriptures and to me, the very climax to the greatest book ever written, the *Epistle to the Romans*. Right now the Laker fans and the Celtic fans are overflowing with hope. The two best teams this year in the National Hockey League, the Chicago Black Hawks and the Philadelphia Flyers are playing the Stanley Cup. Their fans, especially those in Chicago, are literally overflowing with hope. This God of ours does not excite us like sports do and it is no one's fault but our own. This Scripture in Romans is the most exciting Scripture of Paul's writings to me. If we could just apply this to our lives, and allow the blessings into our lives the apostle says are ours for the asking. God honors this blessing and it is there if we want it. To covet this with all our being, to overflow literally with hope, can be ours if we truly want it. If you promise a 9-year-old you will give him the opportunity to pitch, you better believe he will hang onto that hope until he gets it. If you promise a college graduate a new Honda Accord for graduation during his junior year he will overflow with hope for a whole year. God cannot lie and He honors His promises and His blessings. **“The blessings of your father are mighty beyond the blessings of the eternal mountains, the bounties of the everlasting hills; may they be on the head of Joseph, and on the brow of him who was separate from his brothers”** (Genesis 49:26 [RSV]).

If we consider the riches of the hills where all the gold and silver and minerals and wild game and fish in the streams that come down and water the land in the spring, why, the hills are rich with all kinds of blessings. And yet God says a father's blessings are richer than this. Paul is our father in the faith in many ways and this is a rich blessing. If the whole congregation were to be overflowing with hope, then we would not ever have to worry about evangelism. Neighbors would see the joy and peace we have in believing

as we literally overflow with hope. What a wonderful blessing that will be when it happens, and I believe it will! But it is up to us to be what God intended for us to be. A church without spot or blemish, one that is filled with the Spirit and the power of God at work in our lives to will and to do of His own good pleasure and overflowing with the hope that Jesus our Messiah is going to return some day!

Although I did not grow up during the heyday of Jack Benny and George Burns, I can remember them both fondly. I enjoyed watching them perform. As many of you probably remember, Jack Benny and George Burns became friends when both were young performers working their way up through the vaudeville circuit, and they remained friends during their lifetimes.

One day, they were lunching at a Hollywood restaurant, and Benny was wrestling with the problem of whether or not to butter his bread. "I like butter on my bread," he said, "but my diet strictly forbids butter. Maybe I should call Mary and ask her what to do."

"Jack," Burns said, with his trademark cigar in hand, "don't be ridiculous. You're a grown man. You should be able to decide, without your wife's help, whether or not to butter your own bread."

"You're right," Benny replied. "I'll just have the butter, that's all."

When the waiter arrived with the check, Burns pointed to Benny, known for being a cheapskate, and said, "He's paying."

"What?" Benny said. "Why should I have to pay the whole bill?"

"Because if you don't," Burns said, "I'll tell Mary about the butter!"

Well, it was obvious that Jack Benny had been caught by his friend, George Burns! Have you ever been caught? Have you ever been caught doing something that you knew was wrong, maybe even embarrassing, and it became pretty obvious to a lot of people? I am sure we have all committed some pretty embarrassing gaffes on occasion, but I doubt that any of us have got caught making as humiliating or even egregious mistake as took place just this past week.

I am sure most of you by now either have heard and/or seen how pitcher Armando Galarraga of the Detroit Tigers was deprived of achieving one of the rarest feats in baseball, pitching a perfect game. His walking a batter did not deprive him, and neither did the gem elude him by his hitting a batter or by his teammates committing an error. No, he lost his masterpiece (but not the game) this past Wednesday evening when first base umpire Jim Joyce ruled Jason Donald of the Cleveland Indians safe at first following 26 consecutive outs. It was, unfortunately, an erroneous call, a call even admitted to being wrong later by Joyce himself. I respect Mr. Joyce for being man enough to admit he made a mistake, which is rather unprecedented when it comes to Major League Baseball's umpires, and he has genuinely been very distraught over what

has transpired, even tearing up the very next day when Galarraga presented him with the lineup card at home plate and patting Joyce on the back. I do not know of any other umpire in Major League Baseball ever admitting immediately following a game that he had made a mistake. Former Major League Baseball umpire Don Denkinger knows he was mistaken about a call he made that went against the Cardinals back in the 1985 World Series, but he did not admit to it publicly until much later.

In a sport that has suffered much from its own self-inflicted wounds due to the stain of the steroid era hovering over it the past dozen years or so, there have been some very good stories coming out of all of this unfortunate incident. We have already mentioned the humility and honesty exhibited by Jim Joyce, both highly commendable qualities, but pitcher Armando Galarraga has been the epitome of a good sport about the whole thing. Even when the call went against him, all he did was smile without saying a word of protest. His pat of encouragement given to Joyce the following day was also very touching, no pun intended, as even the Detroit home crowd was giving Joyce applause when his name was announced, causing Joyce to break down as he fully expected to be greeted by merciless boos and catcalls. But does this not just prove once again how God's word proves to be true? What does the Bible tell us about those who show true humility? ***"Humble yourselves before the Lord and He will exalt you"*** (James 4:10 [RSV]).

I could be wrong, but I do not believe Jim Joyce will go down in history as the umpire who blew the perfect game. I do not believe Armando Galarraga will go down in history as the pitcher who had a perfect game taken away from him. No, I believe Joyce will be remembered for his "manning up" and taking responsibility immediately, and humbling himself before others. And I believe Galarraga will go down in history as being the man who showed such great class, sportsmanship and love to a fellow human being who was suffering, when the easy thing to do would have been for him to point the finger of blame at Joyce and kick him while he was down. I cannot help but think that somewhere Satan is disappointed greatly right about now.

You know, sometimes we can go a long time without being caught. But, at the same time, we also know that those things we have done or said that we wish would stay hidden, have a way of coming out after time has passed. But thank God that He has what it takes to get us back on track. 1 Peter 3:14-22 [ESV] says, ***14 But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, 15 but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, 16 having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. 17 For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.***

18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the Righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the Spirit, 19 in which He went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, 20 because

they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. 21 Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 Who has gone into Heaven and is at the right hand of God, with Angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to Him.

Set yourselves apart. It is a goal that athletes strive for every day. The high school athlete is constantly trying to set himself apart to get the best scholarship possible. The college athlete tries to set himself apart so they can be a top pick in the professional draft. Athletes are not the only ones who try to set themselves apart. People in the business world try to set themselves apart so they can get the big promotion. High school students try to set themselves apart so they can be part of the popular crowd. Everyone who tries to set himself or herself apart does so not only with their own actions, but also with the testimony of others. Yet, there is only One Who truly deserves to be set apart, and that is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In our text we just read we learn that **Jesus Christ is set apart as Lord!** He is set apart as Lord **through His saving work.** He is set apart as Lord **when we give an answer of a good answer towards God.**

Peter was writing to Gentile Christians whom he had probably never met. He was writing to many different churches scattered throughout Asia Minor, which was present day Turkey. These Christians were in a difficult situation living in the middle of a heathen culture. They were surrounded by temptations. They were tempted to live as the heathens did; to live as they **used** to live. The Christians of Asia Minor were tempted to be afraid of living their faith. Peter's audience had no doubt read Paul's letters and heard of his persecutions. They probably had heard of persecutions against other Christians throughout the Roman Empire. Peter makes it clear in the rest of the book that these Christians had even experienced persecution in their own lives.

Like the other New Testament epistles, Peter intended this letter to be read by all Christians. While we may not live in ancient Asia Minor, our lives are not so different than those Christians. We may not live in a culture that is as openly heathen as the culture of Peter's time, but we still live in a worldly culture. This worldly culture will present daily temptations against our faith. We may be tempted to conform our Christian living and to begin to live according to this world. We may be afraid of living our faith in a culture that does not admire such a lifestyle. But Peter's encouragement to **set Christ apart as Lord** hints at the problem. Setting Christ apart as Lord is not easy! That means that we must set Christ first in everything, just as Jesus said Himself. To set Christ apart as Lord means that He is first in our thoughts. It means that He shows Himself as Lord through our actions and words. Just as the Christians of Peter's day, we do not always set Christ apart as Lord in our lives. We do not always live our lives in a way that reflects Christ. Instead we set our own needs apart as a lord.