

THE REAL CAPTAIN

5th in a Series on Ephesians called, “Messages to the Misfits”
Ephesians 1:20-23

Have you heard of Mars One? This is an organization that has set as a goal to establish a colony on Mars by the year 2027, only eight years from now. Their plan is to first send unmanned missions to deliver the equipment necessary to create a livable habitat, then to send an initial team of four astronauts as colonists. This will be followed up by further teams of four to be sent every other year. Volunteers for these missions must be skilled and resourceful for they will have to be the colony’s doctors, farmers, engineers and chefs. According to the organization the technology already exists to accomplish their goal. What makes this feasible is that one of the most challenging parts of a mission to Mars has to do with the return trip. We have sent a number of unmanned missions that have accomplished safe landings on Mars, so we know that technology is available. If we can land a robot up there we can land people there, too. The hard part is getting people back up off the planet and returning them home. But the Mars One plan has a solution for that challenge. The plan is to simply eliminate it. There will be no return trip. Those who go to Mars are going permanently. They are not going to come home. It is a one-way trip, a sort of “burn the ships” mission. The plan is for the colony to be permanently self-sustaining. So anyone who volunteers for this mission must commit to living out the rest of their lives on Mars. They will no longer be citizens of Earth; they will be permanent residents of Mars. They must be prepared for the fact that they will eventually die there. This is a total commitment.

Who would be crazy enough to sign up for that? Apparently a lot of people. The organization has received more than 200,000 applications from people aspiring to be Martian colonists! They have been going through a rigorous selection process. They whittled the 200,000 down to just over 1000, then down to 660, and now they have their final 100 candidates. Personally, I’ll believe it when I see it.

However, it turns out that God is also looking for some volunteers for a challenging, total commitment kind of mission. He is looking for pioneers who are willing to go all in. It is a mission to explore new territory. But I warn you right up front that this is not a quest for the faint of heart. Half-hearted efforts are not welcome, for they cannot do what needs to be done. We will be challenged to sign up for this mission, to make the commitment, in Ephesians 1:20-23.

JESUS RULES OVER EVERYTHING

God used phenomenal power when he raised Jesus from the dead. That is an inconceivable event, unique in human history. It is humanly impossible and some consider it not credible.

But remember the point was to prove that Jesus was divine, so that required that he do something humanly impossible. If he did something that was impressive but humanly possible, it would only prove he was an impressive human being. But how can a dead man come back to life? If God actually exists, and he was able to create life where there had been none, to create it from nothing, then to reanimate a dead body would not be an insurmountable problem for him. But God didn't just restore Jesus to life so he could keep living on earth as he had before. Verses 20-21 tell us God used his infinite power to restore Jesus to his rightful position. He is living this minute in the heavenly realm and ruling over all that exists.

It is weird to conceive of Jesus having a body at this moment. If he does, where is it? Is he on some other planet? Acts 1 tells us he bodily transitioned into the heavenly realm. 1 Corinthians 15:42-44 says, "So it will be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body."

Isn't a "spiritual body" an oxymoron? A spirit, by definition, doesn't have a body. But Paul is not using "spiritual" there to mean "non-physical." Rather it is his way of describing a new, improved kind of body. It is one that is restored to the original design of humans without the effects of the fall, but with some added properties and abilities. It is no longer perishable or mortal, subject to decay and death. It is a powerful, glorious body. That is what we will one day receive, and it is what Jesus has right this minute.

While it is spiritual, it is a very real, quite physical body. Okay, fine, but where is it existing right now? It is in the heavenly realm. Fine, but where is that? We tend to envision it as some ephemeral place in the clouds, but that's not correct. It is not in another location somewhere off in the universe. There is not some idyllic, heavenly planet in some other solar system in the far reaches of the galaxy. The best way to think of this is to envision another dimension. We know of 3 dimensions plus time. The problem for us is we cannot conceive of what another dimension would be like. We can't envision it. If there were another dimension and there was a person that could move into that dimension, since we don't perceive that 4th dimension, that person would seem to us to simply disappear when he stepped into that unknown dimension. And that's what Jesus has done. He exists physically in that other dimension that the Bible calls the heavenly realm. That means he could be physically right next to us in this room and we would not perceive him. So think of Jesus existing right here, but in a dimension that we are incapable of perceiving.

In that dimension he is back where he belongs. He is where he was before he took on a human body in our world. In that world Jesus is ruling. Paul says he is over all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age, but also in the one to come. Paul used every word available to him to explain what he meant by all. Rule,

authority, power, dominion, name that is invoked. All of them. In case we are still having trouble getting the scope of his rule, Paul said in verse 22, “God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything. Notice “all things” and “everything.” Jesus is ruling over all of it and everyone in it.

This week the Major League Baseball season will begin. The 30 teams that make up the Major Leagues will all compete. Each of them will play 162 games, a grueling marathon that is double what any other sports league does. At the end of that long season ten teams will have earned the right to play in the postseason. One by one they will be eliminated until there are only two. Those two teams will play in the World Series. The winner will be the champion. There will only be one. Those teams that have made the postseason will have played extremely well, and those two World Series teams will each be a league champion, with something to boast about. But in the end, there will only be 1 team left standing. There can only be one champion. There is *one* champion over all of the teams. That is a bit like the Ruler of All. There can only be *one*. There cannot be two Rulers of All, for then they would not, in fact, rule all. To be the ruler over everything there can be no other. And that is what Jesus is. He is the *One* who rules over everyone and everything.

Jesus rules over other powerful beings that exist in the spiritual realm, beings with much more knowledge and power than we have, he rules over the forces of nature, and he rules over all people, even the most powerful. He rules over the President, the most powerful man on earth. He rules over Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping, the President of China. He rules over Nancy Pelosi and every member of Congress. He rules over Gavin Newsom, the governor of our state.

Though we might resist him and rebel against him, we are still part of everything, which means he even rules over us. His rule is amazing. Somehow he is able to allow people to make choices that are a challenge to his rule, to try to exercise their freedom totally out of his control, and yet when they do they end up accomplishing what he wanted all along. Joseph’s brothers totally rebelled against him and treated their brother wretchedly, selling him to human traffickers, and in the end he wound up right where God wanted him. Jesus’ opponents did everything they could do destroy him, and they ended up putting him right where he had aimed at being and doing his entire life.

Philippians 2:9-11 says, “God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God, the Father.” This is what will happen in the end. Right now people can rebel and scoff at Jesus, but eventually they will have to bow to him and they will admit that he is the Lord, the rightful Ruler of everything.

I went to a small college that had zero claim to athletic fame. Generally great athletes do not go to schools that play sports at the small college level. Every year the baseball team had an alumni game just before it started playing regular season games. My senior year, after my playing days were over, a unique thing happened at the alumni game. At that time the Los Angeles Dodgers had a slick fielding, athletic first baseman named Wes Parker. A year earlier he had his best season in the major leagues, batting .319 and getting over 100 RBI's. He played in 2 World Series. He also happened to have attended my college. And that year he came to play in the alumni game. Small college baseball does not draw large crowds. An alumni pre-season game is typically played in almost total privacy. But not that day. Wes Parker played in that game, and a whole lot of people showed up to see him play. I knew the guys on our baseball team, and I can tell you there was a lot of wide-eyed respect being shown by them that day. They were in awe of Wes Parker. I can assure you that at the end of all things everyone, with no exceptions, will be in infinitely greater awe of the Lord Jesus. Every knee will bow before him. Every tongue will proclaim that he is the rightful Ruler of all.

JESUS HAS POWER OVER EVERYTHING

Verse 21 says Jesus is above “every name that is invoked” both on earth and in heaven. Literally he is above every name that is named. This is a present tense. He is above every name that ever has been named or is being named even to this day. That sounds like he is saying the same thing he has already said. But there is a slightly different twist to this statement.

In that day it was believed that names had power. Proverbs 18:10 gives us a glimpse of this. It says, “The name of the Lord is a fortified tower; the righteous run to it and are safe.” Psalm 20:7 says, “Some trust in chariots, and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.” Today some trust in nuclear weapons, some trust in dominant air power, some trust in a powerful navy, some trust in unimaginable wealth, but David put his trust in the name of the Lord. Trusting in God's name meant trusting in his great power.

To many this name thing became something of a superstition. They thought you could use the names of beings with power to your advantage. They believed that if you could discover the secret names of powerful spirits you could invoke those names and thus bend those spirits to use their power to your benefit. This kind of thing was prevalent in Ephesus and the surrounding area. In fact, Acts gives us a glimpse of it.

Paul was in Ephesus and was having a big effect. He was winning many to faith in Jesus. In Acts 19:13-16 we see an example of the kind of thinking I mean. “Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon possessed. They would say, ‘In the name of Jesus whom Paul preaches, I command

you to come out.” These guys probably weren’t having as much success as they wished, and they saw Paul doing amazing things in the name of Jesus. So they operated out of that superstitious belief in the power of names. They figured the power came from just using the name of Jesus. But look at what happened.

Verse 14 says, “Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. One day the spirit answered them, ‘Jesus I know, and Paul I know about, but who are *you?*’ Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding.”

They thought the power was just in using the name. Of course, it turned out they were wrong. The result was hilarious, at least for me. Not so much for them. That one guy attacked the seven of them. That seems like a bad idea. One on seven is pretty bad odds. But Luke tells us he overcame them all and ripped their clothes off. All seven of them ran out of the house screaming, naked and bleeding. I’m guessing that was the last time they tried to appropriate the name of Jesus.

Paul’s point here is that Jesus has more power than any supposed power of any name, any power you can ever imagine. Even the supposed greatest occult power cannot stand up to Jesus. No one and nothing has the kind of power he has. No one. Nothing. Have you heard of a gamma ray burst? This is the most massive source of energy in the universe. It is what happens when a large star explodes. It releases a massive burst of energy that is of unimaginable size and power.

How much power in a gamma ray burst? Consider the power of a one megaton nuclear bomb. Such a bomb has the capacity to totally destroy an area of 80 square miles. The bomb dropped on Hiroshima in World War II was about a 15 kiloton bomb, a fraction of a megaton bomb, and it destroyed just under five square miles. So a one megaton bomb is massively powerful. Here’s an amazing fact: in one second, **our sun** emits the same amount of energy as not just a one megaton bomb, not just 100 such bombs, not merely 1,000, not merely a million, not merely a billion, but **a trillion one megaton bombs**. It does that every second of every day, 24 hours a day. Now here’s where it gets really wild. A **gamma ray burst** can emit as much energy as our sun will put out not in a year, or a century, or a millennium, but in its entire life! ***That’s one trillion one megaton bombs times 31 million seconds a year for as many years as the sun exists.*** That unimaginable amount of energy is released in one massive burst!

If one of those happened in our galaxy it would be a threat to the existence of life on earth. Yes, but these are rare events, right? In one sense yes, since out of the billions and billions of

stars out there few of them have such an event. But our satellites detect an average of one every day! And Jesus Christ has more power than all of them!

Colossians 1:16 says of Jesus Christ, “For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.” All things, including gamma ray bursts. Jesus created these terrifyingly powerful things, hundreds of thousands of them. Probably he has made millions of them. He has more power than all of them put together. This is the power that Jesus has. In Matthew 28:18 one of the last things Jesus said on this earth was, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” Jesus has power over all of it.

In Revelation 1:13-16 the apostle John recorded what he saw when he was given a glimpse of that other dimension where Jesus is ruling on his throne over everything and everyone. “Among the lampstands was someone like a son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.” John was using imagery. Jesus didn’t literally have a sword in his mouth. He meant God’s powerful word was coming out of his mouth. What he saw was Jesus glowing with brilliant white light like nothing John had ever seen and his voice was powerful. John could only compare the sound of it to something from nature, something like the powerful roar of a waterfall.

This is who Jesus is today. He is majestic. He is powerful beyond our ability to comprehend. And nothing presents any threat at all to his dominion over every single thing that exists. There is nothing in this world and no one in this world who is exempt from his rule. He is sovereign over all of it. And he is the very definition of awesome.

IMPLICATIONS

JESUS IS WORTHY OF OUR DEVOTION

I recently read a book that included a person’s recollections of his experiences during the battle of Fallujah in Iraq. What caught my attention was this person’s admiration for the colonel that commanded his division. He talked about how there are officers who mostly care about their career, and their troops are means to an end. These officers are typically found in a headquarters area safely removed from the actual combat. The officer that led his unit was a total contrast, because he cared deeply about those under his command. He spent a lot of time talking with them, getting to know them. And when the battle was raging, he did not shy from it, keeping himself safe. He went out and visited the troops, putting himself in harm’s way in

order to tour their positions. He insisted on leading from the front, and as a result he sustained a significant wound. The writer said that he and pretty much everyone else under that man's command loved him and would follow him into hell if necessary.

Because that guy had an exalted position, he didn't have to put himself at risk like that. But he did it because he cared for his men. Jesus has a position infinitely greater than that officer. He doesn't lead a division. He rules over every single thing that exists. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords, mighty, powerful, sovereign and awesome. If we could even see a glimpse into that other dimension and see him as he is this minute, see him as John saw him, our reaction would be the same as his. In Revelation 1:17 John says, "When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead." John says that Jesus reached out to him and said, "Do not be afraid," too which I'm pretty sure I'd say, "Too late. That train has left the station." We'd be overwhelmed.

In her book, *Teaching A Stone To Talk* (pp. 40-41), Annie Dillard says, "I do not find Christians...sufficiently sensible of the conditions. Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we blithely invoke? Or, as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it?...We should all be wearing crash helmets (in church). Ushers should issue life preservers and flares; they should lash us to our pews. For the sleeping God may wake some day and take offense, or the waking God may draw us out to where we can never return."

Jesus cared about his people. He led from the front. He toured the combat zone and showed his people how to fight the spiritual war by his own example. And he was killed in the process. He gave his life for us. Jesus said the greatest commandment, the most important thing in all of life, the one thing that should rule over everything else in our lives, is, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind." Jesus wants us to love him. He wants us to put him first in our affections, our emotions, our decisions, our commitments, our choices, our actions and our words. That is what Jesus wants from us. He wants to know that he is on our hearts. He wants us to love him and express our love and admiration for him, and he wants us to delight in being with him, no matter what we may be doing in life.

We often sing to him that he is "worthy of praise." He is, but that can be an awfully bloodless statement. As Annie Dillard said the truth is far more awesome than that. He is worthy of all of the passion, the praise and the love that we can give him and infinitely more. It's kind of unusual that we gather in church every week and sing songs together. That can be a very rote sort of exercise. But it shouldn't be. It is crucial. For in the singing, something deep within is reminded of how majestic and great and good our Lord is, and it calls us back to loving him with all of our heart, soul and mind.

JESUS IS WORTHY OF OUR SUBMISSION

Jesus is the Lord of all, but is he the Lord of our lives? The rational, reasonable response to the Lord of all is to bow before him. It is to commit ourselves to obey him in every part of our being.

In 1875 William Ernest Henley published a short poem that is now famous, entitled, *Invictus*. In it he says, “I thank whatever gods may be for my unconquerable soul.” He depicts himself as battered by the storms of life but, he says, his head is “bloody, but unbowed.” The last two lines of the poem are, “I am the master of my fate, the captain of my soul.” A lot of people love that. They see themselves as battered by life, but refusing to give in. They stand proudly, bloodied but unbowed. No matter what may happen, they are in charge, uncompromising, the master of their fate, the captain of their soul.

The biggest problem with that is it is simply not true. We are not the masters of our fate. We do not control what happens to us. In the end, neither are we the captains of our souls. If we are the captains of our souls we are displacing the true captain and putting ourselves in the same place that Eve landed in Eden, wanting to be God. In the conclusion to his final sermon the great preacher, Charles Spurgeon, pointed us to a much better captain for our lives. “Every (person) must serve someone, we have no choice as to that fact. Those who have no master are slaves to themselves. Depend upon it, you will either serve Satan or Christ. Either self or the Savior. You will find sin, self, Satan and the world to be hard masters. But if you wear the uniform of Christ, you will find him so meek and lowly of heart that you will find rest unto your souls...If you could see our Captain, you would go down on your knees and beg him to let you enter the ranks of those who follow him. It is heaven to serve Jesus.”

Jesus, our Captain, calls on us to totally commit, to go all the way, to be radical in making him Lord of our lives, to blaze a new trail in following him with unblinking dedication. We are to let him be Lord of every single thing in life.

Several years ago I got a phone call from the bank that we have our credit card with. I am now always alert to this because we have had a couple of instances where someone tried to commit fraud using our card number and the bank caught it. That was not what this call was about. The bank wanted to sell me a service I didn't want. I didn't realize that's what the call was about until the woman launched into her sales pitch and went on at considerable length. I wanted to stop her right away, but she went on for several minutes without even a momentary pause that I could exploit to stop her. I don't think she even took a breath. After an interminable period, she finally had to breathe and she paused. I immediately jumped in and politely told her no, thanks, but I wasn't interested. She launched off again, obviously reading from a script. Again, there was no chance for me to stop her without being rude and just

talking over her. We've all been subjected to what she was doing. It is not helpful or kind. She would have been annoyed by someone if they did to her what she was doing to me. I was irritated, but I waited her out, and finally was able to say, "As I said, I am not interested, thank you. And goodbye." I hung up before she could start in again. That's not unusual. But there was an unusual aspect to this. The next day the same woman called me and started in on the exact same sales pitch! Again, I endured her initial onslaught before I said, "Do you realize that you called me yesterday and I told you twice I don't want this?" Her response was to plunge ahead as though I hadn't said a thing. At this point I really wanted to fire a double barreled verbal blast at her. This was beyond rude. But before I could say a thing I had the thought, "Is Jesus Lord of your response to this woman?" I first rationalized that it was time for me to follow his example when he drove the money changers out of the temple, but then admitted I was, in fact, rationalizing. I realized that while this woman was being inconsiderate and rude to me, Jesus told me to love at all times, regardless of whether people deserve it. So I calmly told her at the first opportunity, "I do not want this service. Please do not call me about it again." We are going to encounter many opportunities every day to let Jesus be Lord in our lives in ways both large and small.

There is a missions agency called Asian Access. They report that in one southern Asian nation the missionaries now ask those who want to be baptized in the name of Jesus a series of questions. Here are a few questions they ask: Are you willing to leave home and lose the blessing of your father? Are you willing to lose your job? Are you willing to go to those who persecute you, forgive them and share the love of Christ with them? Are you willing to be beaten rather than deny your faith? Are you willing to go to prison? Are you willing to die for Jesus?

Is Jesus Lord of your relationships, your career, your marriage, your family, your finances, your time, your words, and your priorities? The Lord of all is the Captain of our souls, and he wants every part of them.

JESUS IS WORTHY OF OUR TRUST

Recently I saw a few minutes of a news report on television in which yet another demagogue was saying things that started getting me truly upset. I was starting to become frustrated and angry. And then I remembered what this passage teaches. I realized that political martinet only continues to exist because the King of kings allows it. That person cannot do a single thing without the Lord of lords letting it happen. Those people in the halls of power can make all the plans they want, but Jesus directs their steps. Instead of picking up something to throw at the television in rage, I calmly picked up the remote and clicked to a different channel to watch something more edifying, a curling match.

A few years ago there was a football game on television that I had serious interest in. Unfortunately, Laurie and I had a social engagement at about the same time as the game, so I recorded it. Later that evening I was free to watch the recorded game. As I was watching, my son, Toby, called and asked, “Dad, did you watch the game?” I told him I was watching it right then, so he said, “I don’t want to ruin it for you, so I won’t tell you what happened.” Then we chatted about the contest we were having in family where we each picked who we thought would win games that weekend. At one point, referring to one of the teams in the game I was watching he said, “I can’t believe the one week I pick them to lose they go and pull off an upset.” He paused, then said, “Oh, shoot, I just gave away the ending of the game. I’m really sorry, Dad, I didn’t mean to do that.” I told him it was fine. We talked for a while longer. Even though I knew who would win, I continued to watch the game. I actually found myself relieved that Toby had given it away because the final quarter of that game was ridiculously tense. It looked for sure the team I wanted to win was going to lose. But instead of getting tense and uptight about it I just enjoyed it, because I knew how it was going to turn out. And that is how we can go through life. It may be confusing, chaotic, difficult and tense at times, but what we know is Jesus is Lord. We know how this is all going to turn out.

There will be things that happen in our lives that seem like the worst that could have happened. It is quite possible to turn away from the Lord when things like that happen. Will we continue to trust him? Laurie and I visited with Bill and Barbara Farrington the night before his surgery. We told them that we admired their courage and faith in their circumstances. Barbara has survived a malignant tumor that was diagnosed as melanoma, and Bill continues to deal with Parkinson’s and was facing his fourth major back surgery. They both said, “Well, we really didn’t have much choice.” I told them, “Yes, you did. You could have become angry at God; you could have lost faith in him. You could have become bitter about what has happened to you. But you haven’t done any of that. You’ve continued to trust God and seek to honor him despite a huge helping of hardship.”

They are trusting the Lord of lords, no matter what happens. That is what he deserves. Let’s trust him with all our hearts and our lives. Let’s boldly go where no one has gone before, blazing a new trail by trusting, obeying and worshiping the Lord of all like no one has ever done before.