

In the Year of our Lord 2019: How do things look for the Christian Church which our ascended Lord left behind? Not so good? Not so good!

In our congregation, it's a bigger struggle every year to get our people to church, and to help them stay close to Jesus and trust in him for eternal life and to live God-pleasing lives.

In our country, it's worse. Years ago, it seemed everybody went to church, and most churches had a sense of right and wrong, and what was right was Jesus Christ as Savior. Today, while 65% of Americans claim they are Christian, only 45% say they go to church, but less than 25% actually do. 40 years ago, 5% claimed no church affiliation at all. Today, over 30% claim no church affiliation at all.

In our world, it gets even worse. In the few places where Christianity still has a foothold, it's losing its influence as people water down the Bible's teachings. That means that you, the Bible-based, Christ-centered Christian is a very small minority in this world.

All of that disheartening news is exactly why we need to hear God's message today, because **CHRIST'S ASCENSION CHEERS US UP!** Let's never forget: 1) He sits at God's right hand, and from there, 2) He rules all things for his Church.

Things didn't appear to look much better for the Christian Church back at Paul's time, either. In 60 AD, 30 years after Christ's ascension, Paul was locked up in Rome. Those wonderful times of mission trips and starting new congregations across the Roman Empire were over. Paul would soon face a martyr's death.

While in chains, Paul writes to the congregation he started in Ephesus (which is in modern day Turkey) to encourage them! Paul's words were valued by that congregation then, and our congregation needs to value them and remember them now: **“God exerted his mighty strength in Christ when**

**he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.”** To summarize: Jesus rules!

We really need to go over these powerful words phrase by phrase. **God exerted his mighty strength in Christ when he raised him from the dead.**

- Nobody else except a group of true Christians has a living Lord.
- Nobody else has a powerful God who raises the dead.
- Nobody else has the promise that we'll live with Christ forever – even if they kill us now.

And there's more: **God seated Jesus at his right hand in the heavenly realms.** Our living Lord has ascended to heaven ...

- There, our best Friend is seated in a place of honor.
- There, our best Friend is God's right-hand man, through whom he guides and governs the universe.
- There, our best Friend is: **far above all rule and authority, power and dominion.** Not one earthly ruler can touch him or change what he's done for us.

Our salvation? Declared “Not guilty!” in God's courtroom. Settled in God's courtroom and there isn't a court in the world that can change that. The Christian Church is safe; no army is strong enough to destroy us. No earthly ruler can harm us. No demonic spirits can touch our Jesus, or change what he's done for us.

In fact, the next phrase tells us that our Best Friend, who loves us more than life itself, has ascended high above **every name that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.** No one will ever be more famous than Jesus: not Trump, not Obama, not Kim Kardashian, not Kim Jong-un, not Gandhi, not

Muhammed - because no one affected the world as deeply as Jesus has.

Jesus was born to die for all sinners. Jesus lived and rose to declare all sinners absolved. Jesus ascended to prepare a place for all who believe in him. Jesus will return to take all who confess his name home to heaven to live with him.

That's a message that's got to Cheer Us Up! That's why it's so important to remember that he sits at God's right hand, but there's even more: **And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.** To summarize: Jesus still rules!

Placing everything under Christ's feet, means everything and everyone serves to give him glory. Every other religion is only there to show how glorious the Christian faith is.

- Christianity offers lasting forgiveness in the battered body of God!
- Christianity offers real life in the risen body of the ascended Lord!
- Christianity offers an eye-witness report of the origin of all things!
- Christianity offers an excellent way to live your life along with a path to paradise for your soul!

And as if that weren't enough: **God appointed Jesus to be head over everything for the church.** The ascended Christ orchestrates every event for the benefit of ... us! Our community struggles ... so that we can offer Christ to it! Our nation sinks to new lows ... so that we can lift souls with the gospel of Jesus. Our world is confused religiously ... so that we can bring the clear and simple message of Jesus to it.

**The fullness of Jesus fills everything in every way.** If Jesus stepped aside for even a moment, we and everything around us would collapse into nothingness. And yet, he says here that the way he fills the world is through ... us!

We Christians, are his body, his representative. Not angels. We need to live, speak and act like Christians (little Christ's) – otherwise Jesus doesn't fill the world the way he wants to.

So, in the Year of our Lord 2019: How do things look for the Christian Church our ascended Lord left behind? - Amazing? Amazing!

In our congregation, every week in worship we get to sing together the victory song, and hear the victory message of our ascended Lord. And we can invite our brothers and sisters in the faith to join with us.

In our community, every day we speak to someone who don't know Christ. Since we know that, think about how you're going to reach them ... with a simple invitation to church? By talking about some sadness in their life and sharing with them the gladness they can have through Jesus?

In our nation, every minute more are crying out for meaning to their lives. As Christians, we've got that in our ascended Lord. Let's share him and the purpose he gives us. Every day, more are aching, getting diagnosed with disease, and limping toward death. As Christians, we've got the answer to that in the ascended Christ. Let's share him! And it's never been easier. You've got snapchat, Instagram, Facebook, texting and email. Use them! No cyber security system can keep the gospel out.

In our world, the gospel continues to spread ... in communist China. Some of our synod's fastest growing missions are in superstitious Africa, Hindu India and Viet Nam. No government can keep Christ out!

The news of Christ's Ascension Cheers us up! He sits at God's right hand and from there he rules all things for his Church, for us!

Your forgiveness, your salvation and your eternal life are all safe, safe in the ascended, powerful and nail-scarred hands of your Savior.