

At the Right Hand of God

Acts 2:33; John 20:19-31

Sunday, April 16, 2023 The Second Sunday of Easter at The First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa

Introduction: St. Stephen sees Jesus standing at the right hand of God just before he is martyred.

Acts 6-7 tells the story of one of the first deacons of the church, St. Stephen, who was a person filled with wisdom and the Holy Spirit. God did miracles in answer to his prayers and when people debated him, his wisdom was such that they could not dispute his assertion that Jesus was the Messiah. Eventually, they did what many have done when they can't win a theological argument, they set up false witnesses against him. When brought to the council, Stephen gives a long defense, reviewing the history of Israel and coming to the conclusion that rebellion was never far away, and that they, Stephen's accusers, were the worst of the bunch. This cut to the heart (Acts 7:21) and Stephen's opponents "gnashed their teeth" (they got really mad). But what happened after that is what makes this episode so riveting.

Stephen has a vision (Acts 7:55-56) in which he sees the heavens opened and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. If Stephen's opponents were furious before, they were enraged at this point and they cast him out of the city and stoned him to death. The traditional site of his martyrdom is within sight of the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus spend His final hours before His arrest. Stephen's opponents, now his murderers, entrusted a young man named Saul to guard their coast while they stoned Stephen to death. He later became the Apostle Paul. Stephen's vision makes two startling points: first, Jesus is standing; in a monarchy that was the highest honor a king could give a subject; second, Jesus is standing at the right hand of God, which puts Him in a position of ultimate authority.

Set the Stage

Sometime earlier, the Apostle Peter in Acts 2 (14-39) gave a famous sermon on the day of Pentecost with the coming of the Holy Spirit in which he confronted the crowd in much the same way that Stephen would later, and he made the same point that would later lead Stephen to his death; that Jesus has been exalted to the right hand of God and has poured out the Holy Spirit according to the promise given to Him by God the Father. The Holy Spirit-the One who gives us newness of life, who fulfills promises, causes us to grow characteristics called "fruit" and brings gifts-that Spirit is present because Jesus is exalted to the right hand of God the Father. 3,000 people joined the church that day and the church began to grow rapidly.

Yet still earlier, before Pentecost, the disciples encountered Jesus while still in hiding for fear for their lives. He joined their gathering in spite of the fact that the door was locked. Thomas was not there and when told of the event, he demanded proof. He said that unless he saw the wounds on His hands, feet and side, he would not believe. Later, Jesus returned and actually honored Thomas request, though He gave him a gentle rebuke. Thomas would go on to be the apostle to India and there be martyred but we have him to thank for the knowledge that Jesus retained, even in His resurrected form, the wounds to His hands, feet and side, as reminders that He was obedient to God the Father even to death, and so committed to humanity and He retained those wounds even while seated at the right hand of the Father. There is a combination of power and humility found here that is rarely, if ever, seen. So what does this tell us?

Main Point: The Scriptures point to the power and might and the humility of Jesus

Take a look at the verb in Acts 2:33 that says that Jesus is "exalted." It means to elevate, literally or figuratively and it itself based on the noun for "elevation" or "dignity." At its root is the preposition translated "over" as in "over you and me." There is no limit to the authority of the Lord Jesus. He even said that all authority has been given Him in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18-20). God the Father resides in unapproachable light, in which no one can gaze upon Him and live (Exodus 33:20, but compare with Job 19:26), yet Jesus said that to see Him is to see the Father (John 14:9). I don't think that we will ever actually see God the Father face to face, but we will see God the Son face to face, and that is good enough. 1 Corinthians 13:12-13 says, "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known." There will be a glorious moment in which we look at Jesus face to face and finally reach the apex of all our years of spiritual growth and finally fully become the people we were always meant to be. When we see Him we see the Father, and we will find in Him the same humble leader who accommodated Thomas when he wanted to see the wounds in His hands and side..

**Application:** Recognize that Jesus has all authority yet remains humble and meek. Pray boldly and seek humble service as an honor.

Here's the application: recognize that Jesus has all authority yet remains humble and meek. Pray boldly: pray that the Lord will endorse the preaching of the Word with boldness and signs and wonders (Acts 4:23-31). Pray that the Holy Spirit will reveal the hearts and minds of people, so that they know that there really is a God (1 Corinthians 14:25). Pray that we grow in unconditional love (John 13:35) and pray Ephesians 1 and 2 Peter 1:1-8 for each other. Then accept even the most menial act of service as an honor, for such as the character of our Savior, who is seated at the right hand of the power on high.

### Conclusion

Peter, on the day of Pentecost, preached that Jesus was seated at the right hand of God, and later Stephen was stoned for preaching the same point. Yet before all this, Jesus accommodated His disciple Thomas when Thomas demanded to see the wounds at His hands, feet and side. There is a marvelous juxtaposition of greatness, power and humility that we would do well to consider carefully and emulate. Our Lord is humble and seated at the right hand of the power on high.