

TBC – 10/29/00 a.m.

## THE CHURCH IN THE HEAVENLIES

Ephesians 1:3; 2:1-7

**Intro:** On Tuesday mornings, as most of you know, I am teaching Paul's epistle to the Colossians. I have been asking the members of the Class to read the epistle at least once a week. And so I have been trying to do the same, only not just once a week but several times a week. In reading any book of the Bible repeatedly, there are certain words, or certain expressions, that the Holy Spirit impresses upon our minds. I could express this also as certain truths. One of these is in the second verse of the first chapter of the Colossian epistle where he said that the believers had two dwelling places. One was on earth; the other is in heaven. Paul expressed it this way: "To the saints and faithful brethren **in Christ** which are **at Colosse.**"

Physically they were "at Colosse." Spiritually they were "in Christ." Not all believers were "at Colosse," but all were "in Christ." Some believers were at Rome, some were at Corinth, some were in Jerusalem – believers were scattered everywhere throughout the Roman Empire. *But what was true of all of them, wherever they lived on earth, was that they were "in Christ."* Perhaps you are like I am in that you have lived a number of places.

While I was in college I used to go out to preach in country churches in Texas. I was the pastor of three such churches. In one of those communities there was a lady who was up in years, in her eighties as I remember, who had never been into the town which was closest to the farm where she had raised her family – *a town just fourteen miles away!* I had trouble believing that, but people in the church where I was pastoring assured me that this was absolutely true. I know that people did not move around as much in those days, but that was a case different from anything I had heard of before or since!

Well, Colosse no longer exists, nor does Ephesus. So today there are no saints in old Colosse nor in old Ephesus, but those saints to whom Paul wrote are still "in Christ" – and they are more aware of what that means now than they did when their were in Colosse or Ephesus.

Now all of us who are saints, who are faithful brethren, because we have been saved, have some earthly dwelling place. Many different communi-

ties in the Portland-Vancouver area are represented here today. Wherever you live here on earth, is your earthly dwelling place, but spiritually you are “in Christ.” I don’t know of any truth in Scripture that is more profound than the fact that we are “in Christ.” This is a part of our salvation. Most of you know that verse found in 2 Corinthians 5:17 where Paul wrote,

Therefore if any man be **in Christ**, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new (2 Cor. 5:17). You and I could never put ourselves in Christ, and so this is another verse which confirms that salvation is a work of God.

My text for today, and the Scripture which I asked Mr. Ryan to read for us, is in the book of Ephesians. Ephesians and Colossians were written very close to the same time, probably in the same year, about A.D. 63. We don’t know which was written first. A. T. Robertson, in his commentary on the Greek New Testament, put Colossians first. But we can’t really know which was written first. What we do know is that they were both written during Paul’s first imprisonment in Rome. Ephesians is a little longer than Colossians, but the language in the two epistles is very similar. And so it is not surprising that Paul began his letter to the Ephesians in much the same way that he began his letter to the church at Colosse. Look, if you will, at Ephesians 1:1. (Read.)

The words “at Ephesus” are not in some of the Greek manuscripts of this epistle, and that has given rise to the idea that Paul probably wrote it to the believers in Ephesus, but probably intended it to be circulated among several cities where there were churches.

But you have the same truth, don’t you? He wrote “to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus.” He was not addressing two groups, but two ways of referring to the same group. The saints in Ephesus and the saints in Colosse lived in different places on earth (about one hundred miles apart), but the saints in both places were “in Christ.” And the same is true today. And if you do like the Friscos have done, you move from Gresham, Oregon to Grand Rapids, Minnesota, your earthly home is different, but you are still “in Christ.”

And let me say that even when you sin, you still are “in Christ.” You can’t really enjoy that relationship with the Lord when you sin, but nothing can ever change that fact: once in Christ, always in Christ.

But now I want to look at the way the Apostle Paul spoke of our relationship to Christ, being *in Him*, here in his epistle to the Ephesians. And we will begin with Eph. 1:3 where Paul began to write about the spiritual blessings that we all enjoy.

**I. PAUL'S PRAISE FOR SPIRITUAL OUR BLESSING (Eph. 1:3).**

(Read.) Notice in particular where the blessings are: "in heavenly places in Christ." The Greek does not use the word "places." It is more accurately translated, *in the heavenlies*. The same words are used by the Apostle Paul in 1:20; 2:6; 3:10 and 6:12. Expositors seem to be agreed that the idea of location is involved here. Not only the words, "in the heavenlies," would seem to point to heaven, but the words "in Christ" seem to confirm that heaven is involved here because while Christ is omnipresent, His place now is at the right hand of the Father where He is interceding for us.

It seems to me that Paul is saying that these blessings, which he will go on to mention in part, are secured for us "in the heavenlies in Christ. We have been blessed with every blessing that is necessary to guarantee our complete and eternal acceptance with God the Father. No blessing can be dispensed with. And every blessing that we have in salvation is "in Christ."

Without taking time on each one that the Apostle Paul mentioned here, note that the first is God's choice of us, the doctrine of election, and God's purpose in our election. But Paul quickly moves on to mention that we have been predestined to be the sons of God, not by adoption as so many say, but by the new birth. We have been redeemed, and forgiven, and we need to remember that when Christ died for our redemption, *all of our sins were future*. And so provision has been made in Christ not only for the forgiveness of sins that were past when we were saved, *but for all of our sins*. Furthermore, all who in Christ are going to be gathered together as one in the plan and purpose of God. We are also predestined to be to the praise of God's glory. This is our inheritance, or part of it, a major part, and we have been sealed in Christ by the Holy Spirit Who has been given to us as the earnest of our inheritance.

Paul did not intend for this to be a complete list but most of the blessings

we have in Christ are in one way or another related to these blessings. Dr. Chafer, in his book on *Salvation*, mentions thirty-three blessings we receive when we are saved, all secured for us “in Christ.” And yet the full effect of these blessings, and the full enjoyment of them, is to be ours only when we are in heaven. And yet our understanding of them, and the practical effect of these blessings, is seen progressively in our lives as we walk in obedience and in fellowship with our Lord. But more of this later.

As we go on to verse 20 in chapter 1 where we have the second time in Ephesians that we read of *the heavenlies*, we have in Paul’s prayer what to me is proof-positive that “in the heavenly places,” means *heaven! God, by His mighty power raised Christ from the dead, and seated Him “at His own right hand in the heavenly places.”* That is in heaven for sure.

Then in chapter 3 we have a marvelous, a truly amazing addition to the teaching of Scripture regarding the resurrection of Christ. I don’t mean by what I have just said that this is the only, or even the first time that Paul has referred to this. It is clear several places in his teaching. I am referring to the glorious truth of:

## **II. OUR UNION WITH CHRIST (Eph. 2:4-7).**

(Read.) In verse 5 Paul said that we were “quickened,” *made alive, resurrected with Christ*. “Raised us up together” (v. 6) has to refer to our Lord’s ascension, when we also ascended. And then in the latter part of the same verse, verse 6, we see that seated together [with Him, and in Him understood] “in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”

This is deep spiritual truth, and I doubt if there has ever been a person who has felt that, in explaining this text, he has done justice to it.

Every true Christian believes that Christ died in our place, that He took our sins upon Himself, and paid our penalty in full. But the Scriptures take all of that a step further and tell us that when Christ died, we died with Him and in Him, when He was raised, we were raised in Him, when He ascended, we ascended in Him, and now in Christ we are seated at the right hand of the Father, the place of total and perfect acceptance, the greatest place of honor in all of the universe.

Now this is what Paul had in mind when he wrote so adoringly about the heavenlies. And it was this truth that gave him the right to say for all of us, "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless . . ."

God saw us in Christ at the Cross. He saw us in Christ in the grave. He saw us in Christ when our Lord was raised from the dead. When Christ ascended, God saw us as ascended into the heavenlies. And today God sees us seated in His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at His right hand.

In John 14 where we spent the last two Sundays, on down into the chapter after the Lord repeated His promise in verse 18 He said, "At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you." So the Lord doesn't expect us to be able to explain these deep and wonderful truths to our own satisfaction, but He wants us to believe them, and to act upon them, and to profit from them. Do you remember that Paul in his letter to the Colossian church said, "Christ in you, the hope of glory." We have to believe that God is sovereign in salvation because we can't put ourselves in Christ, nor can we put Christ in us. That was settle long ago. And so when you and I believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, God enabling us to recognize what God had already done in us and for us.

So I trust that this will make those statements at the beginning of Paul's letters where he spoke of their earthly location and their heavenly position mean more to all of us than ever before. Since we are Trinity Bible Church, during the time that we are here we are at Portland, but we are also "in Christ," those of us who truly know the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior.

But now let me make one more point.

### **III. THE MEANING OF THIS GREAT TRUTH FOR EACH OF US.**

You can see it in Paul's prayers in chapters 1 and 3 of Ephesians. And you can see it in the practical section of Ephesians. And it is this: There is not going to be any question in any person's mind but that we are here in Portland. *What is going to have been shown is that we are "in Christ." And there is only one way that we can show that, and that is by the way we live. And when I say by the way we live, I mean, by the kind of people that we are, by the way we talk, by the way we live, by the place that*

*Jesus Christ has in our lives.* Do people see a difference in the way we live? Most of our friends and neighbors probably know that you and I go to church. But do they know that we are “in Christ”? Many of the people we know go to church, but they don’t know what we are talking about today when we speak of being “in Christ,” and about Christ being in us. We can’t pretend that this is so. We can’t pretend that the living Christ is in us. How do we live so that people will be able to know that there is much more to having a relationship with God than simply going to church.

I want to close this morning by taking you to the third chapter of the book of Colossians where we have one place that we can find the answer. Look with me at the first four verses of Colossians 3. (Read.)

Paul covers much of the same truth in Colossians 1 and 2 that he did in Ephesians 1 and 2. Here in chapter 3 he really began to apply the truth. And so he said, “Seek those things which are above where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.” And then he added, “Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.” Why? Because *lit. you died, and your life has been hidden with Christ in God.*

We all live in Portland. We have our families in this area. We work to support them, to provide a home for them, to feed them, to take care of them. We have responsibilities to the city, and to our government. We live in this corrupt world where we face temptations of different kinds, and trials. We have our sorrows like everybody else does. A lot of our time is taken up with just the task of living from day to day. But we have resources from which we can draw which people who do not know the Lord do not have. But let us ask ourselves today: Am I seeking the things which are above, where Christ is? Am I setting my love upon the things that are above, in the heavenlies? Do I love the Lord, really love Him? Do I look forward to reading the Word so I can learn more about Him? Is my main objective in life to please the Lord? Am I laying up treasure in heaven?

Our problem is that we are too earthly minded, and we need to be heavenly-minded. Have you ever heard someone say about a Christian that he is so heavenly-minded that he is of no earthly good? I haven’t found that to be true. The people I have known who are truly heavenly-minded are the people who have been doing the most good on earth. The

problem is that there aren't enough of the Lord's people who are seeking those things which are above, where Christ is sitting on the right hand of God.

**Concl:** Let all of us take stock of our own lives. These are evil days in which we live, days when men are calling good evil, and evil they are calling good. It would be wonderful if we were able to say truthfully what the Apostle Paul said to the believers at Corinth who were in Christ:

17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;

18 While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal (2 Cor. 4:17-18).