

Ephesians 2 “Located in Christ”

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[0 : 0 0] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama.! Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

! Last week, if you weren't here, we wrapped up a two-year journey through John's Gospel to encounter Jesus, to see more of who He is, to consider our belief and others' belief in Him.

Jesus is incredible. We've been singing of Him. Just going through John's Gospel that long, some of you know, I considered going back to the beginning and starting over and emptying the church.

I mean, getting to preach more of John and of Jesus in John just forever. It's been really good for my heart. But I want to tell you what often happens in my heart. This has been happening for me really since I was a child in many ways. I still hear it sometimes now in my preaching. I know it's a part of my struggle. See if I can describe it to you. I hear about Jesus a lot, okay? I admire Him so much.

I want to learn from Him. I try to live like Him. I talk about focusing on Jesus, right? Most of you've heard that. And so what I do then is I wake up in the morning and I picture Jesus up there in heaven, far above me. And I'm way down here below, but He's up there and He's willing to send help to me.

[1 : 5 3] He loves me. He's promising me eternal life if I trust in Him that He died and that He rose for me. And it sounds great. I mean, that sounds pretty good, right? That sounds pretty Christian.

Sounds pretty normal. We are the beggars crying out to Jesus, dependent on His mercy to shower His riches down upon us, right? Listen for just a minute to the great Puritan preacher Thomas Boston.

Men must not think to stand afar from Christ and partake of the benefits of His death upon their praying to Him for it as the beggar on his crying gets of the rich man's money thrown to him.

Must not? Are you kidding me? I thought that was the whole point. Certainly that's close, right? Maybe he's going to say it's just a little different. Listen. He says, which I observe is the soul-ruining notion that many have of this matter. Good grief. We don't even talk that way anymore, do we? Soul-ruining notion. Instead, listen, but he must unite with Christ and so partake of the redemption purchased by Christ as the poor widow drowned in debt by marrying the rich man is interested in benefits from his substance, who he really is. Can you hear the difference in those two things? It may sound small to you, but I don't think it will if you think about marriage. There's a lot of truth in that first analogy, right? That's why we talk that way a lot. We are the beggars. He is the one with all the riches. But the good news of Jesus is even better than we often imagine. By faith, we're not only helped out by Jesus, we're not only rescued by

Jesus, but we're actually united to Jesus more closely and personally than we realize almost any day. The biblical images of this include oneness like husband and wife in marriage, as connected to Jesus as the members of a body are connected to the head. Very connected. As united to Jesus as the vine and its branches, right? And this, if you think about it, it's actually a fundamental uniqueness of Christianity among all the religions in the world. No other religion talks like this. We are actually personally united to Jesus. That's where life, where salvation comes from, not merely following him or admiring him, but becoming one with him by faith. That makes Jesus different from Buddha, from Muhammad, from Joseph Smith, from whomever. And it is the glorious reality at the heart of Jesus' message that he has come down to us so that we find life actually in him. That's why he's come down in a mysterious but personal and glorious relationship with him that never ends. We are inseparable.

[5 : 37] We and Jesus. That inseparable bond, that unbreakable union is what I want to explore for a few weeks this summer. Having encountered Jesus and John, and it's been so wonderful, it's so glorious, and who he is, and I don't want us just to gaze from a distance, okay? We've talked about this a little bit, but I want us to slow down so that we never leave him, and we realize the truth of that. The theological term for it is union with Christ. What is it? More importantly, perhaps, how does it transform every part of my life?

This summer, I hope that we can explore together, maybe not everything, but not only what it means, but more than that, the impact that that reality has on my identity and my eternity, on how we suffer, how we find love, on how we fight sin, and how we bear fruit.

It transforms all of those. I pray, this is my heart, that we would avoid that soul-ruining notion of being far from Jesus. That's really my desire in this. That we would grasp that when we believe in Jesus, that truth is a soul-healing, soul-inspiring notion of unbreakable union with him, that we'd get a grasp on that in a new way. I don't want you just to take my word as we start this series for how central this is to Christianity. There are hundreds of references in the New Testament to our being united to Christ, in Christ, with Christ. We're going to read some in a few minutes, but since we've been in John, let's remember what John highlights. This is that theme, that purpose verse in John 20, 31.

These things, this whole gospel written, so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in his name. The whole book for the purpose of your believing into Jesus, John says, as you believe, you have life. Not in being enough like Jesus, not in looking at Jesus, but in Jesus, in his name.

So many theologians through the centuries have highlighted union with Christ, but for the sake of time, I thought I'd give you a representative sampling to join John the Apostle of theologians named John, talking about the importance of this topic. I had to limit it somehow, okay? You can imagine how many more there must be if this is what the Johns have to say. Puritan John Owen, union with Christ is the greatest, most honorable, and glorious of all graces that we are made partakers of. Wow. Swiss reformer John Calvin, this mystical union is accorded by us the highest degree of importance. We do not therefore contemplate Jesus outside ourselves from afar in order that we, that his righteousness may be imputed to us, but because we put on Christ and are engrafted into his body, in short, because he deigns to make us one with him. John Bunyan, author of Pilgrim's Progress, he tells of his life-changing theological breakthrough when God showed up in his life.

[9 : 40] The Lord did also lead me into the mystery of union with the Son of God, that I was joined to him, that I was flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone. If he and I were one, then his righteousness was mine, his merits mine, his victory also mine. It changed everything for Bunyan.

More modern Johns, the late British pastor John Stott, says, our relationship with Jesus is something much more than a formal attachment or nodding acquaintance, something more even than a personal friendship. It is nothing less than a vital, organic, intimate union with Jesus Christ involving a shared life and love.

One more. Famed Scottish theologian John Murray sums it up. Union with Christ is really the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation. That's a big task for one summer. That's an exciting journey, I hope, that seeing the wonder of that and the importance of that makes you eager to dive in.

If you want to read more along with our series this summer, there are a bunch of books. Here are three that I've particularly enjoyed. Sam Alberry and Rankin Wilborn are still living. Thomas Boston from hundreds of years ago. All of these have been really helpful for me and look how thin they all are.

Paperback. You could read one this summer with no problem. We're going to see this central doctrine and its application to our lives all over the Bible.

[11 : 28] Going to go to so many different passages, but we're going to start today in Ephesians chapter 2. If you need to grab a new Bible, that's on page 976. We're going to read some there after we pray. Before I pray, those of you getting worried, don't let the length of the introduction worry you about the length of the sermon, okay?

Let's pray and ask God to teach us and change us. Father, we so need your help. We want you to show us things too wonderful for us.

We ask by your spirit that you would show us Jesus more beautifully and up closer and show us the reality of relationship with Him. Would you do that? Because we need your help. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

A helpful shorthand for us this summer for what it means that we are united to Christ is you in Christ and Christ in you. You are one, connected, united. A couple times in John's gospel, we saw both of these ideas in the same sentence. Abiding in Christ and Christ in us. They're connected.

Both of these are biblical concepts, we'll see repeatedly, but by far the Bible's predominant emphasis is on our being located in Christ. We're going to start there. In real estate, you know what matters most, right? Location, location, location. The house may not look great.

[13 : 31] It may not work well in every area, but location makes all the difference. That's where Paul starts his explanation of what happens in our relationship with God in Ephesians 2. Having been born in sin, having lived in rebellion, by the way, for this morning, that's this side of the stage, okay? That's where sin and death is. Living like our father Adam, we needed a location change.

Verse 1, and you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that's now at work in the sons of disobedience, among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind. It was not looking good for us, right? Created to be close in loving relationship with God, we had run far away, right?

We had earned his wrath, deserved his just punishment, spiritually in death. Thankfully, we weren't the only ones bothered by our location problem. Verse 4, but God, but God, being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ, by grace you have been saved. What did God do by his grace to save us? He relocated us from death in our sin to life in Christ? These verses here say three things that God did. And all three times, Paul actually makes up a new word. This is so unique.

He puts the prefix sin, S-Y-N in English, at the beginning of a verb. And we know that prefix from words like synonym, right? Means the same. Or synchronized, that's when a bunch of people swim together and they do things at the same time. Synchronized or synthesis, working together. What does God do? He alive together with us. Raised up together with us. Raised up together with us. And seated together with us in the heavenly places.

How? In Christ Jesus. He took us out of our trespasses and sin and death, where we were, where he found us, and all that went with that. And he moved us into life by uniting us to Jesus, the one in whom was life.

[17 : 02] Elsewhere, we learned that we were crucified and buried with Jesus. That too. If we were united with him in death, then surely we're united with him in resurrection, Romans 6 says. So united to him, here's the point of it, here's the point of it, that whatever happens to Jesus, happens to us, right?

I'm going to come back to that. But let's finish this section, verse 7. So that in the coming ages, he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. He's done that already, right? Showing us his grace. But there's even more to come in the future. There's something to look forward to in Christ Jesus. Verse 8, for by grace you have been saved through faith. This is not your own doing. It is the gift of God, not a result of works so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. See, God has totally remade us in Christ Jesus. New life, relocated, united to Jesus. That's the point.

Christ. You can think of being located in Christ like getting on a plane. It's actually, I just humor me for a second. How cool is it that they write the word united across the side of this image we're going to use several times this summer? It's just for you, so that you will remember that you're united to Christ. That's why they did that, I'm pretty sure.

Think about getting on that plane. Once you're on board the plane, whatever happens to the plane happens to you, right? As long as you are in the plane, whether you sleep or you stay up worrying, whether you work really hard the whole flight, whether you run in place, I don't know what you do on long plane flights. Whatever you're doing, when that plane goes up above the clouds, you go up above the clouds. When it lands, you land. If it goes to D.C. or somewhere, you go to D.C.

D.C. It's what happens when you're in the plane. It's what happens when we are in Christ. And I want to be clear here because all my analogies for this mysterious reality are going to fall short in some way, okay? They don't communicate everything. This is not a physical, geographical location primarily at least. But the Bible says there is no location more important for you than being in Christ. You've read New Testament letters. Often they're addressed to God's people in a particular city like Philippi, in Philippi, in Christ. It's the way God talks about us. You may be, in Huntsville. Most of you are. You may feel like your primary location is in turmoil or in confusion or in despair or in conflict. But God says your primary location is in Christ. You can bring all that other heavy baggage that you've got. You can bring it with you onto the plane. And when the plane goes up, you go up. If Jesus is seated in the heavenly places, so are you. If you get on board, if you get in Christ, whatever happens to him happens to you no matter where else you are, in Huntsville, in despair, in turmoil, you are made alive with Christ, raised up with Christ, seated with Christ, graced in Christ. See, that's why Puritan Thomas Goodwin says being in Christ and united to him is the fundamental constitution of a Christian. He's saying that's what makes someone a Christian.

[21 : 56] Not whether you're trying hard to live right, or you're voting the right way, or you're attending the right church. Not that. It's not what makes you a Christian. It's whether you are in Christ, your location. To use our plane analogy one more time, you may stand in the terminal. I used to love doing this as a kid. You could see this as a picture from that window in the terminal. I was a kid back when you could actually go down to the terminal without going through security. Anybody else remember that? You could go all the way and see. Look at all of these old people in here with me. We could see the plane. You could actually stand in the terminal and look out at this plane, and you could do that for quite some time. You could study the plane, and you could learn a lot about it. You may even be there, and you may be one of those kids who got really excited about planes, and you loved looking at it, and you found it inspiring to watch.

You may even follow the plane as it backs up, and as it takes off, and you may hold your arms out and pretend to be like the plane, but if you stand even one step on the terminal side of that door, you see that door on the far side where you enter the plane? If you just stay one step on that side of the plane, then when it goes to DC or around the world, wherever it's headed, you will be where?

In Huntsville. Location, location, location. So what do I do, pastor?

If I want to be on the plane, but I don't think I am. Do I need to save up to buy a ticket? Do I need to go get dressed up so that I look the part and they'll let me on board?

Do I need to take a running start and try to jump high and hang on tight? Please don't do that. None of those. You believe.

[24 : 13] What I mean is, we are united to Christ by faith, by believing into Jesus as John describes it.

See, repeatedly in the Bible, we're told that it's God who locates us in Christ. God makes us alive here, raises us up, seats us with Christ.

It's by grace that we then have faith. It's God's work. As Paul says elsewhere, God bought the ticket. He doesn't use those words, but he's saying God bought the ticket for the weak and the foolish and the despised so that it is because of God, Him, that you are in Christ Jesus.

His work. His gift. His gift. His gift. We do what? We receive it. And thus we receive Christ Himself.

He went to the cross. He rose from the grave. You take your seat in Christ. With all of our baggage, we are seated in Christ.

[25 : 33] And so the good things that we know will happen to Him, right? We're sure of it because He's amazing. Those things happen to us. The eternal blessedness. The moment-by-moment care of a heavenly Father.

The ultimate joy and glory are ours in Christ. That's the hope. Welcome aboard. You receive that. You sit down and rest in Jesus.

You sit down and rest in Jesus. Just one quick application before we move on. We're going to spend the summer teasing out applications. How this changes different areas of our lives.

But for now, I just want us to marvel at the protection we have if we are in Christ. What I'm talking about is the assurance that we have of our eternal security.

Therefore, our security right now. Think of it this way. Is God ever going to forget His Son? No way.

[26 : 43] So He hasn't forgotten you and He won't. Would God ever send Jesus on the wrong route? No way.

So neither will He you. Would God ever envision the eternal glory of heaven without His Son present with Him?

No way. No way. So neither will you be lost along the way. You will never face accusation without being covered in Christ.

You will never endure suffering without being protected in Christ. You will never face loss without being comforted in Christ. You are safe in Christ.

He wants you to be assured of it. To know that. So that you can be bold in taking risks for Him. So that you can be confident enough to repent deeply and honestly.

[27 : 49] So that you can be regular before the throne of grace to find help because you need it and He knows that. Even when you feel that you are in Christ. Even when you feel that you're in turmoil, in conflict, in despair, by grace, through faith, you are in Christ.

So you are protected. Now that reality is glorious. Inseparable. You are in Christ.

That's what's emphasized in the Bible. But briefly we'll also see there's a dynamic reality to our union with Christ. Because it's also true that Christ is in you.

It takes a minute to get there in this passage. But what Paul does next is he starts talking about Jews and Gentiles. Who especially get a location change.

Verse 13. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

[28 : 56] Near to God because they're in Jesus. Okay. Verse 14. For he himself, Jesus, is our peace who made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility.

By abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two. So making peace. And might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross.

Thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off. And peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one spirit to the Father.

Jews and Gentiles both experiencing the relocation of being brought to God by being united to Jesus. Now focus on these last verses.

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens. But you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.

[30 : 01] Built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone in whom the whole structure being joined together grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

In him. In case you haven't caught it yet. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by his spirit.

The picture now is not a plane. It's a house. Right? God's house. His family. We're each being built into it when we're connected to the cornerstone to Jesus.

That's how the structure holds together. Right? That's how it worked back then. All the stones connected to the same cornerstone built one house. That's what it means to be connected.

In Christ then he says we are being built into this house. And who's going to live there? God. By his spirit.

[31 : 06] By his spirit. We're going to come back later this summer to what that means for our relationships with one another. There's a wonderful corporate reality here.

I just want us to see today that being united to Christ means that he lives in us. In fact we said that God locates us in Christ.

Now we see God locates us in Christ so that he can live in us. It's amazing.

This is the heart of God from the very beginning. It's the whole story of the Bible. Right? God creates people in his image to live in relationship with him.

Near to him. Walking and talking with him in the garden. And after we break that relationship and we run over here and push God away. He keeps coming after us over and over.

[32 : 06] Living near his people in the fire and the cloud in the wilderness. Then having them build him a tabernacle, a tent so that he could live among them as they traveled toward the promised land.

And when they get there he instructs King Solomon to build the temple in Jerusalem for a more lasting house for God. But even the temple, what happens? It eventually gets destroyed.

And so God promises as we read earlier in Jeremiah. And then God comes himself to tabernacle among us. Right?

In the flesh. In the person of Jesus. God with us. Can you just stop and... That was thousands of years of history.

Can you believe how amazingly God pursues us? The lengths that he goes to to be close to us.

[33 : 05] Can you see a little bit of his heart in that? So God designs us for communion, relationship, nearness. And when there was no other way for us to live close to him safely because of our sin.

He makes the way. He sends the way. He unites us to the way. Even Jesus. So that we are now the tabernacle of the most high God.

Individually and together. And Revelation tells us that the dwelling place of God is not leaving us. It will be with us forever. Y'all, if that's the Bible's story about God living with his people.

Us being close to him. Then union with Christ is the way we take our place in the story. That thing that doesn't seem, how could this work out?

How would this even be possible? It's how we find our spot in the house where God lives. We're going to have to unpack this later.

[34 : 10] But just a preview. Not only are you in Christ, which gives you all the blessings of his protection in life. But also Christ is in you, which gives him all the curses and debts of your sin.

Which is good news because he knows what to do with them, doesn't he? Nailed to the cross. Paid in full. Removed as far as the east is from the west.

So you stay with him. You remember Christ is in you. That's a mystery, Paul says. But you remember that and that is the hope of glory.

Finally, what keeps you at a distance from God is removed and you are forever united to the one who brings you near to God.

That's how it happens. So what? Briefly, if Christ is in you now, you have power.

[35 : 16] Wow, do you have power. I can assure you it is more than you imagine. It's more than you feel or have ever felt that you actually have.

It is resurrection power that changes the way you live. If God is for you, who can stand against you? Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world.

So even mighty enemies like Satan and sin that used to control you now can be fought and conquered in the power and presence of Christ. Now your own flesh that seems so weak and that's what you usually feel and feel like I've got no power.

It seems weak even when your spirit is willing. Now has the strength of a risen Savior within you. Now there's something that can fight against the flesh.

What glory, what life-changing reality he's inviting us to live in so that we're never alone. We're never too weak. We are struck down, yes, but never destroyed because Christ is in you.

[36 : 21] He's never destroyed. You know that. Can you see how the protection of you in Christ and the power of Christ in you are yours because of a person?

You don't find protection in a theological concept. You don't find power in a life hack. You find protection and power and so much else in a person like the poor widow drowning in debt finds herself completely relocated to a new life by marriage to the rich man.

Not just able to eat and live for a night because of his coins that got thrown down at her. But able to rest and love and live forever because her husband made himself and therefore all that he is and has hers.

And they're together, united, inseparably, forever. Union with Christ means you can have a personal relationship with the God who made you for himself.

Who outside of time connected you so deeply to himself in the person of his son that you would die with him. That you would be raised to new life with him.

[37 : 56] That you would be seated in heavenly glory with him. That you would be graced for the rest of eternity while God lives in the house with you.

And puts on like fireworks displays of the immeasurable riches of his grace. It's what he made you for and he's looking forward to sharing it with you.

All of that is yours when you are Christ's. And he is yours forever. You are in Christ.

And Christ is in you. Praise Jesus. Let's pray. Jesus, I am so aware that I'm only scratching the surface of the wonder of this.

Of the joy and the hope and the calm and the rest. And the excitement and the adventure and the... The life that should fill our hearts.

[39 : 04] Would you so by your spirit help us to experience the reality of something that we often don't feel the way it's really true. Would you keep teaching us and would you not just fill our heads but fill our hearts and our lives.

So that we live with Jesus. And in Jesus every moment of every day. We ask for your help with that Holy Spirit within us.

Grow our faith. We ask in his name. Amen. For more information visit us online at southwood.org.

Amen.