

Seated in the Heavenly Places with Christ

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Date: 07 February 2010

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[0 : 0 0] let me read that passage just once more from verse 4 down 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 verse 6 and 7 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus now I hope you've been following with me I'm sure that you have and as we've been thinking about what Paul is saying in Ephesians during chapter 1 and chapter 2 you'll begin to notice that he's returning to the same theme over and over again his great passion is the gospel of course there's no surprise there because that is the apostle Paul it doesn't matter where he goes he's driven by the gospel he's excited by the gospel he's thrilled by the gospel it says the one motivating factor in his life it's the one thing he wants to do reach as many people as he possibly can with a message of

Jesus Christ and as long as long as he's got breath in his body he's going to use that breath and every day that exists for him to be able to explain the the grace of God to people who aren't believers woe is me he said if I do not preach the gospel Paul and the gospel are synonymous Paul and the good news and the grace of God are synonymous Paul is a living embodiment of the gospel and indeed he's a he's a living example of the grace of God itself and he we've seen in chapter 1 how he sets out to explain the gospel first of all in terms of it being of it beginning before even the world and the universe were created then he gives it certain titles he he goes through various names and various titles of the gospel he talks about redemption he talks about inheritance he talks about calling he talks about uh in in chapter 2 he he focuses his attention on the people to whom he's writing and he's asking them to reflect to think back over their own lives and to what has happened to them as they've come to discover God in all his goodness and in all his grace and we saw that as Paul looked back over what the Ephesian people were we saw that there's a remarkable similarity to ourselves this evening that's why the Bible is so relevant it's why you can give a Bible to somebody don't ever be afraid of giving a Bible to somebody even although they have absolutely no knowledge whatsoever I would have no hesitation and I've done it give a Bible to somebody and ask them to read it you want to know what the good news of Jesus you want to know what the Christian faith is all about go and take that

Bible but make a point of reading it because it's not just some kind of archaic old stuffy irrelevant book it's the living word of God and we have to believe today that God speaks as much and as powerfully through the Bible as he ever did I believe that I know people who have been converted just through reading the Bible and we have to believe and I do believe that it is God's word and every part of it is God's word and God speaks powerfully through it but Paul of course is in the first part of chapter 2 he's going it's all the way back and we saw three things about the Christian faith and the way in which Paul describes the people in Ephesus as they once lived that were totally the opposite to what we think we are in the way that we think we live we saw three things first of all we think we are free Paul tells us we're not free secondly we think we're good we like to think the best of ourselves Paul says we are not good that's why we need to be saved and we need to be forgiven and cleansed and washed the third thing is that we think that everything is going to be fine in the end Paul says it's not as long as a person lives in sin the way he is or she is then he is under the wrath of God whereby nature the children of God like the rest of mankind so this chapter is a devastating indictment on the human race not just the people in Ephesus but the human race what wherever you find them including where we are this evening and it's only as he paints that awful dark picture and it's only as he tells it as it is that we begin to appreciate the greatness of the love of God the love of God is meaningless if we don't realize how much we need the love of God but once you discover what you really are and how much you really need God's kindness and that you can't do a thing for yourself then all of a sudden you realize that the love of God is absolutely marvelous what's more it's the one thing you absolutely need more than anything else in the world there is no greater need in you tonight than the love of God a lot of people think they don't need the love can do quite happily without it but that's because you don't know the place we that you don't know your own condition before God but as soon as you begin to take on board what the Bible tells you in this chapter for example this is only one of many places in the Bible which describes us as we really and truly are then we realize that things are not as good as we thought they were and we need God more than we ever thought we need and more we discover more we delve into a chapter like this the more we realize that I have to stop and I have to discover what this grace is all about so we saw then that the only hope for a lost mankind is the grace of God but God verse 4 but God what irrespective of the awful condition of humankind but God being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead and trespass of sins made us alive together with Christ now I've got a confession to make I'm tempted to skip the next part I tried to make a point of opening out the first part to try and make it as as relevant as it possibly could and yet I'm trying to I'm I'm I'm I was tempted earlier on in the week to just go on to the second half of the chapter that talks about of course the great separations that there were even in those days the ethnic separations and the religious separation and how the gospel actually brought people together as the gospel does even today but I'm not going to jump to that section and I'm not going to be tempted to skip that skip the next bit if I was

really honest with you I would say the reason I wanted to skip the next bit is because it's a little bit difficult it's a little bit perhaps obscure perhaps not ready readily understood but it's just it's not good enough to do that because it's here because God wants us to see it and he wants us to be thrilled by it and he wants us to know what his message is in its fullness not just the way we try to water things down sometimes it's highly dangerous and and highly a uh and it's unhelpful and indeed in fact it's harmful when we try and dilute uh the message of the gospel and try and and when we skip bits the bits that we find to be difficult so tonight I'm going to dwell on these verses verse 4 down to verse 7 I'm going to try and make sense of them and it's only when we give them some attention that you actually discover that you can make some sense and all the questions are not going to be answered but you can actually make sense of them and here's what God tells us in between verse 4 and verse 7 here we're coming to the part where it's like a if you if you can imagine a trough and we're at the bottom if you can imagine a valley and we're at the bottom of this valley in all its darkness and in all its hopelessness that's where the chapter uh begins and God has taken us out of that trough but he hasn't just put us into uh a place where the minimum is done for us but he has actually lifted us and look at what Paul says he has lifted us to a height that we perhaps have never appreciated before and I hope that as we go through it this evening that we will begin to appreciate perhaps the height to which God has taken those who have trusted in him the first thing I want us to notice about these verses but God and who is rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead in trespasses and sins made us alive together with Christ the first thing that it tells us then is that a person who comes to faith in Jesus

Christ is made alive the second thing he tells us is that the person who has come to faith in Jesus Christ has been raised up and the third thing is that he has been made to sit he has been seated in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus that's quite an adverse reading I guess that it's quite an obscure thing to think about and yet I hope that we'll be able to clarify it a little bit later on so I hope you'll stay with me please stay with me as I try to explore what Paul is saying in this chapter first of all the first thing that is that he makes us alive with Jesus Christ and you'll if you've been following this you'll realize that there's this is not the first time we've heard this if you go back to the previous chapter in verse 20 where he talked about Jesus and where he worked in Christ when he raised him God raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is named not only in this age but also in the one to come now the reason of course that Paul is going back to this great fact is because it thrills him so much the apostle was absolutely thrilled as he thought of Jesus not just the Jesus who died and not even just the Jesus who was raised on the third day but the Jesus who today in Paul's day as he wrote those words was in heaven now we've spoken about this before and we said somehow or other that this was the one thing that really drove and energized and equipped the apostle Paul he was absolutely thrilled by this fact by the knowledge every time he thought about Jesus seated at the right hand of God in heaven he he he just leapt for joy and this was what motivated him this was what he focused on as he preached and as he went from person to person and town to town and village to village this was the one scene in his mind that gave him the energy and the power and the impetus to keep going now I say that because it's not likely that that truth gives us the emphasis and the impetus and the power to live our lives now if the apostle Paul was energized by that one fact my question is this why am I not energized by that same fact why does the thought of Jesus Christ sitting in heaven tonight not fill me with the thrill that it filled the apostle and right away I see a kind of dislocation between the way he thinks and the way that perhaps I think and perhaps if you were honest the way you think this evening and anytime we have we see that difference or that dislocation we have to ask well why is that that difference there and one of the reasons I believe is because in our world the world in which you and I live and remember I said before we can't help the kind of world we live in you and I have been born and brought up in a world that is in the west we're living in the 21st century and we have massive privileges but there are also massive obstacles to the way in which we live our Christian life and here is one of them a character of the world that you and I live is that it's

[13 : 51] thrilled by fantasy is that not the case what is it that thrills you tonight what is it let me let me stop for a moment and ask what is it that really excites you tonight be honest with yourself if you think of your whole life and everything that you think lies in front of you everything that you're involved in at the moment everything you're doing your life your situation your job your family your your pastimes what is it that you look forward to when you come home from work at night do you look what do you look forward to in the evening time what do you look forward to on a Saturday what do you look forward to about going into work maybe you're one of these people who really loves your job you can't wait to get back in a Monday morning and so even right now you're in church and you're you're thinking about what you're going to do you're planning your day tomorrow because you think that's really what excites me and thrills me and what I look forward to more than anything else and the fact is that we there's something about our the here and now the life that we know in this life that really motivates us and it captures our attention and for some people we'll happen to live at a time in the world where we can be excited by our careers and our jobs we can be excited by our lifestyle because it is relatively an easy lifestyle in the 21st century western world

I know that there are hard things that people go through their sickness and their trouble and there's disputes and all the rest of it but relatively speaking relative to a hundred years ago or 200 years ago when people used to have operations without anesthetic and where people would die by the dozen with all kinds of disease like like consumption and all of these things we live in a completely different world and we're motivated and we're excited by certain things and one of the things that we're excited by is a sense of fantasy a sense of the unreal we hope and we dream for things that are that are not grounded in reality at all but you see when we come to the bible what excited the apostle and you may not think the christian life is full of excitement let me tell you you are wrong there is nothing so exciting and thrilling as being a christian and i'll tell you why because when you're a christian you have a vision of the reality of heaven itself that this world while it will come to an end for every one of us that god has prepared for us a place and an everlasting life in which our lives will continue forever in a exalted and a perfect and a blissfully happy state now for the apostle paul heaven wasn't just something in the future it was something that existed there and then heaven was a place where jesus christ who had come into the world and had died for him to set him free for sin and had risen again he now was situated in heaven and that was something that was real to him and i'm challenging me and i'm challenging us tonight to not be so excited about the unreal about the things that are going to last only for a time the time being the life that we live in this world it's only going to last our careers our jobs our families and the things that really thrill us and the and the things that we that we get lost in and that we spend time in whether it's your favorite soap or your favorite thriller or with your favorite uh a game on the ps3 or whatever it is ask yourself the question why is something unreal and something fantastic more important to me than what god is telling me about himself ask yourself that question and ask yourself how long can i continue to live how long can i go in this kind of anesthetized doped state where i just enjoy the here and now and everything that's provided for me and i spend hours and days in all the things that are never going to get me anywhere rather than listening to the lord now here's the difference the apostle paul every day he woke up and he thought jesus is sitting at the right hand of god he's sitting in heaven that's where i will be one day that's where my power comes from that's where that's where the holy spirit is poured out from and that's what makes the difference to when i tell somebody that jesus died for sinners whether they'll become a christian and and and who will who will know so the apostle paul is never ever unconscious of the fact that he is that that jesus sits on the throne now here's what happens when somebody comes to faith

in Jesus and here's what this chapter tells us you'll notice first of all that God being rich in mercy this is what God does for us because of this great love to which he for with which he loves us even when we were dead in our trespasses made us alive together with Christ by grace you have been saved and raised us up with him and seated with him in the heavenly places in Jesus Christ now the first thing I want to say is this that a person who has been brought to know Jesus has been joined to Jesus he has been he or she has been joined to Jesus look at how Paul speaks in these verses about being with Jesus he has made us alive with Jesus and he has been raised with Jesus and we have been seated with him in other words what Paul is talking about is no more and no less than what Jesus himself said to his disciples in John chapter 15 when he said I am the true vine and you are the branches you know what he was saying there he was saying that a relationship to Jesus goes deeper than any relationship we ever experience in this world and it's one in which when a person comes to faith he is joined to Jesus he is and I'm going to say this for effect I'm not being irreverent at all but I want us to really drive this message home because it's so clear in this chapter he's hooked up to Jesus he gets tied to Jesus let me say something even more outrageous he gets bolted to Jesus do you get the message do you get the message he gets attached to Jesus he gets glued to Jesus why am I saying all this I'll tell you why I'm saying this because one of the big problems in again a modern Christian church is that we've tended to minimize what God has done for someone when he comes to faith in Jesus and we kind of tend to say well when a person comes to faith he gets forgiven and you say to that person well is there anything more than that and he's struggling to find much more than that well he has everlasting life but when we explore the new testament what you discover is that there's far more information given in the new testament about what God does for a person and to a person who comes to faith in Jesus and the more you know and discover the stronger you will be as a Christian one of the reasons why we're so weak as God's people and why we fall so easily is because we're not grounded in what the Bible tells us about ourselves and I'll tell you in a few moments why it's so important to believe and to see our relationship to Jesus as one of attachment to him I am the vine he says and you are the branches now it's not it's as if I am the vine and you are the branches or it's not as if at Jesus saying to us I like to think of you as being so close to me that I am attached he's actually saying that if a person as a person follows Jesus by faith that that person is actually attached to Jesus don't ask me how it works I'm not going to say anything about them but God is creates a bond a relationship which never gets broken between a person who's a believer and the Lord Jesus Christ that's why the apostle Paul he always describes the Christian relationship as a person in Jesus Christ in Jesus Christ now I would like you

if you're a follower of jesus tonight to think attachment to jesus to wake up every morning and to say i am joined to jesus i am the theologians will tell us it's united to jesus but there is this unbreakable eternal unending bond this relationship that we have with jesus in which he becomes ours and we become his and there is this it's more than that it's closer than that there is a union a permanent union between him and us and that means that he goes where we go it means that what what we do in this world he's there with us attached to us bound to us fixed to us now how is that relevant well of course of course it's relevant because once you begin to think of yourself in these terms you think twice before doing certain things don't you when you're when you when you are tempted to do something that you know is wrong and sinful once you begin to think well i'm attached to jesus then you think twice before doing it don't you i hope it means that every place you go wherever you go in this world whatever conversations that you get into that you're taking part in that conversation you're going to that place and jesus is attached to you he tells us but god even when we were dead he's made us alive together with christ with christ he says paul says later on rather earlier on in corinthians if any man be in christ he is a new creation so here's the first thing i want us to look at then this evening we're just going to move on but i would love for you to reflect on what it means i would love for you to read the new testament and to discover for yourself how much is said about our attachment to jesus christ i'm not asking you to understand it i don't understand it but it's there black and white just plain as day the second thing he tells us about a person who follows jesus is that he is or she is a living and a resurrected creation a new creation again there's nothing new about this he tells us in romans chapter 6 because there were people in rome and they were asking this question can we sin then so that grace may abound if grace is so marvelous and all-encompassing and if i know that i have god's forgiveness shall we sin then is it okay then to carry on in a life of sin because i know that at the end of the day god will forgive me paul says i don't even know why you're thinking that way i can't understand anyone who thinks that way because if you are a new creation in jesus christ if you are raised to newness of life why do you want to sin why do you want to do something that you know is harmful to yourself and it's going to it's going to harm your relationship with jesus christ it's going to harm your witness okay it's going to give you some momentary pleasure but it's going to give you misery thereafter so why do you want to do it and yet we do don't we we do because there's still that residue within us there's still that voice within us that is powerful and that wants to lead us into all the wrong places and to do all the wrong things and sometimes tries to make the excuse shall we sin that grace may abound and the reason paul gives is this by no means how can we who die to sin still live in it do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into christ jesus

were baptized into his death we were buried with him by baptism in order now listen in order that christ as christ was raised from the dead by the glory of god we too might walk in newness of life so if you're a follower of jesus tonight you're a new creation and you walk you live you converse you eat and you drink a new creation the person that you are is in many ways not the person that once was that person has died you've been raised to newness of life well what's the difference i'll tell you what the difference is that whereas in the past god didn't figure in your thinking god is now the number one and whereas if you were really honest you'd have to say well i actually didn't i had no time for the lord and i actually wished that he wasn't around i wished he would leave me to do my own thing and to live my life as i wanted to live and to do what i wanted to now you actually want to please god you want to live for him you want to love him you want to obey him so that obedience now is not the chore that it once was and the reason it was a chore in the past is because you knew you could never do it and anyone here tonight and you think i'm okay i'll be able i can live by the bible i can do all the right things i can keep the ten commandments i can keep the sermon on the mount and i don't need the lord jesus in my life because i can do all these things by myself you're wrong you're wrong and i'll tell you how you're wrong because the first commandment is this the first commandment is to love the lord your god with all your heart do you love the lord with all your heart you'd have to say you don't well that's the first commandment and you've broken the whole thing then because you don't love the lord with all your heart and you can't love him with your heart until you discover jesus christ but a person who discovers jesus christ is a person for whom their whole world has turned upside down and instead of hating him and trying to hide from him and run from him as you did in the past now god is everything to you and i know that your life is not what it should be my life is not what it should be if i was to tell you tonight everything i have to confess to the lord you'd be shocked and yet i have to say tonight that christ is everything to me everything without jesus i can't do anything and i have him and i know that whilst i do fall and i fail in so many different ways i still know that i'm a new creation in jesus christ and the life that i am today is not the one that i once was before i came to know him but i want you to even go further than that and i know the time is passing but i really want you to see this i want you to go home and reflect on this because he doesn't even finish there chapter 2 and he raised us up with him so we're new we're new creatures we're resurrected people now listen to this verse 6 he has seated us look at this with me seated us with him in the heavenly places in christ jesus he has seat so what we've said so far is that a person who's a follower of jesus is joined to jesus with jesus we've said that a person who's a follower of jesus is a new person a raised person but look at the third thing he says he says that we are a seated person he seated us with him in the heavenly places in christ jesus this is what i meant by by paul is actually thinking back to what he said in the first chapter because for paul paul is just as thrilled with jesus going up into heaven and seat sitting in heaven on the throne of heaven beside the father because he knows what that signifies

[31 : 36] he's just as excited as that as he is with every other element in the gospel the problem is i think that we've we kind of lose sight you know when jesus when we think of jesus we think of him as the baby in bethlehem we think of him as the miracle worker we think of him as the teacher we think of him as the the man who died on the cross the son of god who died on the cross was raised the third day but when he goes up and when he becomes obscured by the cloud we lose sight of him isn't that the case paul says don't let that happen because he's there and you're there that's what he says look at it with me verse 6 he's raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in christ jesus that's what he says it's happened we're there now you say well no no no no hold on now you're really becoming obscure okay what does it mean then well you say well it means what's going to happen one day that one day we will be raised and that we will go to be with christ and we will be forever with the lord i agree that is certainly something that it means the only problem is that here in verse 6 it's in the past tense it's not in the future tense it's in the past tense in other words what paul is saying has actually happened already now this is what i mean about the way in which we minimize the gospel how many of you have actually thought of this before how many of you have actually read this verse and actually said i wonder what it means but this is god speaking to us he's telling us something that's happened and if he's telling us it's for our own good it's so that we will understand what he's done for us and i hope i'll be able to explain that just by giving you an illustration of this in other words what paul is saying is that jesus is in heaven today living the same lord jesus in our nature as man and as god he exists and remember what i've said all along heaven is a real place it's not a concept or an idea it's a real place in other words a parallel universe there's this universe our life life as we know it and there's a parallel life where jesus is where god is and where the saints are where christians who have died and gone to be with the lord they are there the souls of believers are at their death they go immediately into glory there is that's a reality it's not just a figment of an imagination it's what the bible promises it's a real parallel universe but he says in us there is a sense paul says in which not only are the angels there not only are the souls of believers who have died there but we are there as well in the person of jesus christ how does that work well it works because jesus is our representative because we're attached to him because we're joined to him we're united with him and that means that just as he is where we are we are where he is in heaven do you understand that no well i don't either but i'll try and illustrate it the best possible way i can illustrate it is this next door in the upstairs hall there's a massive flat screen tv you've probably never seen it some of you have because some of you go to the saturday course it's a massive i believe me if you've got a flat screen tv in your house it's nothing compared to this one and it's used for video conferencing that means once a month they have this course in edinburgh it's conducted in edinburgh and it's run by some of the professors and the minister of the church there's a theology course i'd warmly recommend it to you if you haven't been there before you haven't signed up for it i would warmly recommend if you've got a saturday free a month and every month that course is conducted

lectures are given in front of an audience in what they call the chalmers hall and the free church offices in edinburgh that's where it takes place but a bunch of people from stornoway go out to the upstairs hall and they turn on this thing and by means of this marvelous technology called video conferencing they can actually see those who are giving the lectures they can hear what's more there's a camera so that those in edinburgh can see the stornoway people and those in stornoway can see the edinburgh people and so they actually take part in what's going on distance is not a problem the fact that we're 200 miles away is actually not an issue anymore they're taking part in what's going on in edinburgh it's the same when we have a committee meeting i say to my wife i'm going to a committee meeting in edinburgh and she says you're not getting the train the plane i said i'm not i'm going to the the ma hall i go upstairs i turn on the same thing and there's this committee in edinburgh they're all there around a table they say hi hi but how are you doing they can see me i can see them we open in prayer sometimes but i open in prayer me in stornoway them in edinburgh and i take part i ask questions i contribute and they tell me stuff i tell them stuff and they say they write minutes of the meeting and i was there it doesn't matter that i wasn't in edinburgh and it doesn't matter that we're not physically in heaven we're there we're there in the same way as i can be at that meeting in edinburgh via video conferencing i know it doesn't it only helps to understand i hope it helps to understand but paul is saying that right now in heaven is god and there is a conference within god there always was we communicate to one another because god communicates within himself have you ever sat and thought of how many the attributes of the human race actually are there because there is god relationship what kenny i was talking about this morning relationship i believe he was talking about the various relationships that we have in this world why are they there it's because god has given them to be a unique feature of the human race we relate to one another because god relates to himself within the godhead and so tonight within the godhead between father and son there is this marvelous conference going on and you know what i am invited i'm there that's what the bible tells us he has seated us with him in the heavenly places in christ jesus i want to say to you tonight that it's because we don't grapple with these marvelous elevated glorious truths that very often we live such impoverished christian lives but when you get down really to the to the to the the substance of what paul is saying then actually you're strengthened in your christian life and i'll tell you one way in which we can be strengthened by this one thing if then what the bible is saying is that actually we're taking part in god himself and in the conference that goes on between the father and the son then what an encouragement for us to pray what it means is that i don't have to wait until i feel

