

New Year Service

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[0:00] Turn with me to the first of the New Testament readings that we had Colossians chapter 3.

Paul's letter to the Colossians chapter 3 and verse 1. If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

I heard someone saying very recently, the gearbox of time has no neutral and no reverse.

It is always in drive. If you have an automatic car, you'll know what I'm talking about. It's always in drive and it always goes at the same speed.

I guess there are many of us here today who wish that there was a neutral. Where we could stop for a while. For whatever reason.

[1:27] That's not going to happen. I guess there are some of us here today who would like for the gearbox to have a reverse. So that we could go back for various reasons.

For some of us to undo the wrongs of the past or to relive the past. That's not going to happen either. Today we stand on the brink of a new year.

The future is ahead of us and whilst we can learn from the past. And whilst we can remember the past. There is no going back to it.

For us there is only the future and the present. The present is where we resolve towards the future. And for many people, new year affords the opportunity to make resolutions.

Many of which we're simply not able to keep. And many of which will disappear within a very short space of time. Don't get me wrong.

[2:36] There are many things that we should be resolving. And the Christian is no exception. There are many things in my life that I want to put right. There are many promises I would love to make.

Myself and the Lord. But I know I've lived long enough in the world now to be very careful before making promises. That doesn't mean that I cannot want.

To be different. And when I say different I mean with a kind of change that God wants there to be in my life. God wants there to be change in the life of every Christian.

No Christian must ever remain static. And when a Christian wants to change. That change must be for the glory of God.

It must be God-centered change in which we're asking the Holy Spirit to make us more like Jesus. That's a change that God himself wants to take place in our lives.

[3:41] We are to be more like Jesus. We're also to grow in our understanding and in our love for God's word. As the only rule to direct us at how we may glorify and enjoy him.

And I would love to think today that myself and you that we would want more than anything else to immerse ourselves in the Bible. To grow in our knowledge of the Bible and for the Bible to become more and more part of our very being.

And as we grow in understanding it so that we will have a living effect on our lives and that we will never be the same again.

That's the kind of change that every Christian ought to want. And yet sometimes I think that even as Christians we run ahead of ourselves. And before you know it you're wanting to do things and you're wanting to change and you're wanting to make promises to yourself.

But sometimes I think the very first thing to do is to stop. Because otherwise you'll trip over yourself because you haven't stopped and asked what is the basis for the Christian life?

[4 : 58] What is the basis for the future? And all these changes we've been talking about. What is the energy? Where is the energy and the impetus and the drive and the inspiration that there must be in order to put into effect the kind of measures that will make me more obedient?

That will be making me more humble and more Christ-like. Here it is. In Colossians chapter 3.

Where Paul is just about to tell the Christian people to whom he's writing how they should live. But the very first thing he does is he's saying stop and look upwards.

And that's what we need to do today. Some of us want to look backwards. Some of us want to look too far ahead. But the Bible says the very first thing we do is to look upwards.

If you then have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above. Where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.

[6 : 19] And if we do that, then we will acquire the basis, the incentive for every other promise and every other resolution that we make to the glory of God.

And so I want us today to very, very briefly look up to where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.

Now for some people, well, you might think, well that's all very well for somebody like you who's a minister to talk about. But all of that is very mysterious and it's very otherworldly.

And I would have to confess that there is, of course, as you always expect to find in the Bible, there's mystery. There's lots that we don't understand in the Bible.

And yet this is given, this verse is given just before Paul goes into some of the most practical instructions as to how to live the Christian life.

[7 : 21] And what I would challenge you with today is this, that you don't skip past it. You don't try and shortcut this verse, thinking that it's in the realms of theology and it's only for theologians.

Remember this, theology is simply what the Bible teaches. And what the Bible teaches is given to God's people, not just to a select few. There ought not to be a select few.

But God's word is for everyone. And it's for everyone to use our brains and our understanding to try and grasp even the most mysterious elements in God's word.

Because as you do, then what you discover is that these are living truths. And once you discover these living truths for yourself, you discover that they are full of the power of God to live as he wants us to live.

So that's where we have to start today. Jesus sitting at the Father's right hand. Now, of course, what the apostle was talking about is what happened after he rose from the dead.

[8 : 39] You remember that 40 days after he rose from the dead, he took, gathered all his disciples and he went to a mountain. And there he said goodbye to them.

He gave them the instructions as to how they were to carry out his plan to go into all the world and to make disciples of all nations. And what happened then was something, I guess, that filled them with sadness and bewilderment.

But it was absolutely necessary. He was taken from them. He was lifted from them. And the Bible goes on to say in Hebrews chapter 1 that when he went into heaven, he sat at the Father's right hand.

Now, if the disciples, of course, had known their Bible a little bit better or if they had listened to Jesus more carefully, and I don't think I would have perhaps been any better than any one of them.

I'm not trying to criticize them. Then they would have heard Jesus saying, If I be lifted out of this world, I will draw all men unto me.

[9 : 54] Now, again, I know that that's a different interpretation perhaps. But what Jesus was saying there was that Jesus, through his death and his resurrection and his ascension, was going to draw all men, people from all tribes and nations and cultures and languages, to himself.

Again, Jesus said, Now is the Son of Man glorified. And God is glorified in him. These were promises that Jesus made to his disciples about what he was about to do in dying on the cross.

And so that as a result of his death, he would be glorified in every nation and in every tribe and language. And that still remains the purpose of God for this world.

That men and women and boys and girls, they will hear that God has come into the world and given his life on the cross at Calvary for the forgiveness of our sin.

And that's why he told his disciples to go into all the world and to make disciples of all nations. But as he did so, he was lifted up and he was made to sit.

[11 : 06] He was invited to sit at the right hand of the Father. Now, I confess that there is much in that I don't fully understand. I guess nobody fully understands that. But one thing I do understand, and the very first thing, is that where Jesus is, is a real place.

Jesus did not disappear from existence when he left this world. Jesus is as real today as he ever was.

Furthermore, it tells me that Jesus is as human today as he ever was. Don't think for a moment that when Jesus left this world, when he left his disciples, that he left his humanity behind him.

Jesus took his humanity with him. And when we're told that he is seated at the Father's right hand in heaven, what that means is that he is seated there in our nature as our high priest.

It means that today there is an unchanging truth that I can go to confidently and boldly, knowing that the Christian faith is not confined to 2,000 years ago.

[12 : 19] It's not simply a memory. It's a reality. It's a reality that not just equates to me and where I am today, but it's a reality that equates to the whole world.

That's why when John, on the Isle of Patmos, when he was trying to wrestle with what God was doing in the world and why it was that the Christian faith seemed to be swallowed up by the might of the Roman Empire, when he felt so isolated and when he felt so alone, that God's answer to that was to take him and to open the windows of heaven so that he saw, what did he see?

Exactly this. The throne. The real place. Where Jesus stands on that throne as the Redeemer, as the Lamb of God that has taken away our guilt and our iniquity and has washed us from our sin and who rules supremely and everlasting on his throne, who rules and reigns over each one of us individually and collectively.

And if you don't grasp that, then you don't have the basis with which to confidently take those steps that you need into the future.

We'll go into that in a few moments' time. When Jesus was, when Jesus sat at the Father's right hand, he did so because he was invited to do so.

[14:05] And that moment when he sat at the Father's right hand was an enormously significant moment. If you think of the investiture of a king or a queen, if you think of the coronation of a queen, you think of how significant, few of us of course have seen that in our lifetime because our present queen has been on the throne for so long.

Few of us can remember. I certainly can't. It was before my time. There are one or two of us who can. But it's a huge moment in the life of a country and in the life of a nation.

But that's what happened when Jesus was invited to sit on the throne. He was invited because he was, after having made purification, that's what Hebrews chapter 1 tells us.

He was invited as a consequence of him making purification for our sins. And as a mark of the completion and the finality of what he had done, he was invited to sit on the Father's right hand, where he was given the name, Philippians tells us, that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow and every tongue confess confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

And it's that finality that I want us to concentrate on in the very first instance. The security that we have in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[15:41] It's a security that says that because he died, and because the Father raised him from the dead, and because he now sits at the right hand of the Father, I am completely guaranteed, my salvation is guaranteed, and I know that my sin is forgiven.

This today is a great opportunity for God's people to reflect over their security in Jesus Christ, over what is true about them in Jesus Christ.

And what is true? It begins with our sin, which has been completely cleansed, washed, parched, purified, things past, things present, things to come.

Our guilt has been removed. Today, God declares his people to be forgiven.

But it goes further than that. The gospel goes further than that. Because not only are we declared to be forgiven from all our sin, but we have the righteousness of Jesus having been paid into our account.

[17:05] You think of how perfectly good Jesus was. Well, of course he was. He was God. He could not be guilty of any kind of sin, sin in any form.

What the gospel says is that by faith in Jesus, God takes that righteousness and he makes it mine. Today, I have, I possess the righteousness of Jesus.

You, if you're following Jesus, you possess that righteousness. The judge of all the earth who sees into your heart and knows every intention and every motive and everything that goes on in your heart, he says to you that in Christ you have his righteousness.

That's what 2 Corinthians 5 says. He made him who knew no sin to be sin for us that we, so that we might be made the righteousness of God through him, in him.

Another timeless truth is that that it's just that. That God has taken me and he has united me to Jesus. I am united to Christ.

[18:23] I've been joined to Jesus. When God thinks of me, he thinks of me as in Christ. That's why when Paul describes what a Christian is, his favorite expression is in Christ, someone who's in Christ.

Do you remember on this first day of 2015 that you are in Christ, inseparably joined to him? Nothing can separate you from the Lord Jesus Christ.

I am the vine, you are the branches. Without me, you can do nothing. That's what he meant. When he used that great illustration to his disciples.

It's not only a timeless truth, it's a life changer. It's one that ought to affect our decisions and our choices and our desires.

The things that we do and how we are in this world, it ought to affect our conduct towards other people. If we would only remember that day by day, 24-7, we are joined to Jesus.

[19 : 32] We are in Christ. We are united to him. There is an inseparable connection and it's not a connection in which Jesus is far off, it's a connection in which there is a mysterious identification in which Jesus has made himself ours and he has made us in him.

that's why Paul says you are not your own. You were bought with a price. This is life changing. This is earth shattering for the life of a Christian.

You are not on your own and you are not your own. Jesus sitting at the right hand of the Father means also that we have a great high priest that we can come to boldly, boldly, confidently.

I'm sure you wouldn't disagree with me when I say that every Christian has the right, the privilege of being able to come to Jesus.

but it's a different thing in real life because the Bible tells us we can come boldly into his presence. We are to come not on the basis of what we have done or what we haven't done but we are to come on the basis of his death, his resurrection and his ascension to the right hand of the Father.

[21 : 10] For many of us we look back into the past and we wish so much our looking back in the past is all about things that we've done and things that we wish we hadn't done or perhaps things that we have failed to do that we wish we had done but this is where we are today and the great truth of the gospel is that God starts where we are he starts today and his love for his people is not diminished because of their unfaithfulness or their sinfulness or their failure his love for his people is the same today as it always was it cannot increase and it cannot decrease so that ought to give us today the greatest encouragement we can ever have that nothing can separate us from the love of

God in Christ Jesus and it also reminds us that God's rule and his sovereignty over us again as we look at Jesus sitting at the father's right hand we're gazing at the king who rules and he reigns as our great high priest he rules and reigns in a very special way in a way which is unknown to any of us he reigns and he rules by his providence and his providence is that that incredible way in which only God can weave the events that take place in this world and in our own lives and turn them into his own purpose Paul says in Romans chapter 8 and 28 he says God works all things together all things together for good to those who love

God and who are called according to his purpose and these all things are all things it's not some things it's not the things that we can calculate as being useful to God God works all things together for good to those who love him and who are called according to his purpose and that means that we don't need to go into the past it means that we don't need to relive the past it means that God can take us as we are now and he can bring about in us his purpose one of the most marvelous examples of this is the life of Moses remember Moses as a young man who and after he had grown up he killed an Egyptian he shouldn't have done that it was wrong it got him into all kinds of trouble and Pharaoh heard about it as you know and Moses had to flee the country and if ever there was a man who could easily have concluded that I've blown it

I've made a terrible mistake and therefore look at me now I'm having to leave the country I'm no longer I can no longer be useful in the hands of God I'm an exile I'm going into a country where where I have I have no idea what lies ahead of me they're a strange country I've never been here before I'm on my own and surely God has washed his hands of me Moses could have concluded that maybe he did at the time but that wasn't the case because the fact was that God was going to take everything in Moses life and he was going to weave them all together and he was going to bring about his own plan and his purpose his perfect plan and his perfect purpose now that doesn't give us an excuse to live any way we want in fact it's quite the reverse because we serve such a great God then we will want today to give him the very first place of honour and glory in our thinking and in our choices and in our intentions is that not the case that we want to live for him as he gives us the power well two more minutes what does

Jesus sitting at the right hand of God the Father mean for us immediately today well first of all it's an incentive for prayer real prayer and I'm sure you would agree with me today that if only we as congregations whichever congregation you belong to whether you're a visitor whether you're a regular here whether you're from another congregation or whatever that we would love to be a more praying people prayer is one of the great privileges that God has given to us but if we keep our eyes upon Jesus sitting at the Father's right hand we're reminded that we have a Lord who listens to us and who is concerned for our lives because the Bible tells us he ever lives to make intercession for us the second thing it teaches us is that it's a reminder to evangelize the fact that Jesus is sitting at the

[27 : 06] Father's right hand reminds us that all authority has been given to him therefore he said to go into all the world and to make disciples of all nations he is in control thirdly it's an occasion for worship the disciples when they saw Jesus being lifted up from the earth and disappearing from them their response was to fall down and to worship and surely our response should be exactly the same that response of awesome that response in which we are awestruck in which our breath is taken away from us by the reality of what God has done fourthly is an incentive to persevere to carry on to keep going and not to be discouraged because God is on the throne Jesus has risen triumphant over the grave and then fifthly you know what I'm going to say

Jesus and his place in heaven today is a pledge for what is to come one day no one will be celebrating new year we do it now in this world but the bible tells us that this world will come to an end and that will happen when Jesus comes again when he raises the dead those who have lived and died in him and those who will now who will then go forever to be with the Lord that day there will be a new heaven a new earth where there will not be the years that we celebrate here in this world but it will be a place of perfection a place of ultimate joy and unbroken bliss where God's people see the face of their saviour and where we worship him in perfection forevermore and I hope that we will all be there that we will all one day see each other having been perfected by the

Holy Spirit and having been brought into the presence of Jesus as he has completed us and made us perfectly in his image may the Lord bless our time together thoughts on his word may he take us into the new year with confidence with prayerfulness with in obedience with faithfulness may he give us the strength to be honest with ourselves and to ask the Holy Spirit to change us as he shows us what we are in comparison with himself let's sing together in Psalm 67 Stacy to to to record