

Sermon – 27/04/2008 am

Together in Christ

Study Text: Ephesians 2:6–7

High up in the Himalayas are the headwaters of the Ganges and Yamuna rivers. They are fed by melting glaciers. At the headwaters of the Yamuna are hot springs also. Pilgrims flock to these holy places. But the motor road does not reach to these places. The last few kilometres is just a mountain path. Pilgrims have to walk, or if they are elderly – as many are as they seek a blessing before they die – they ride a mule or get carried. They sit in a ‘dandy’ and get carried up the river valley.

No one can approach the holy place of our God under their own steam. It is not simply that we were weak and frail – we were dead. Unlike other religions in which men and women make pilgrimage to some holy place hoping to receive new life, the Bible tells us we must be made alive before we can enter the holy place. We were dead in our sin and going nowhere. But in Christ God made us alive and *raised us up together and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus (2:6)*.

Lazarus died and was buried. He was in the grave four days before Jesus came. When Jesus said to take away the stone Martha was concerned – *Lord by this time there is a stench (John 11:39)*. But Jesus called Lazarus to come out of the grave. He came out still bound from head to foot in his grave clothes. A few days later he was at the table with Jesus.

This miracle is an illustration of an even greater work of God, a work that God performs on every soul that he saves. You were dead in your sin. You were as helpless as Lazarus in the grave. But God through Christ Jesus made you alive; he raised you from the dead. He made you to sit with Christ at the table in heaven.

Baptism is another illustration of being dead and being made alive in Christ, of being buried and being raised from the dead. *Buried with him in baptism, in which you also were raised with him through faith in the working of God who raised him from the dead (Colossians 2:12)*. Paul goes on in Colossians to say the same thing as he does here in Ephesians 2, telling us that we were made alive together with Christ. In Romans 6 he also speaks about being *buried with Christ through baptism, that just as Christ was raised from dead...we also should walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4)*.

What then does it mean to be raised with Christ? Before we look at this question we will review what we have learned thus far in this chapter by looking at a few theological terms.

Regeneration

Regeneration refers to our being made alive in Christ. When we were dead in our sin God in Christ made us alive or quickened our hearts. It is the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit by which a sinner is instantaneously changed from being dead in trespasses and sins to being a new creature in Christ Jesus. It is instantaneous because one cannot be both dead and alive at the same time. You are either dead in your sin or alive in Christ.

Regeneration is possible because of God’s great love. God in his love sent his son Jesus into this world. Jesus in his love and obedience took our sins upon himself and died for us on the

cross. The Holy Spirit in love and power changed or quickened our hearts. *You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the spirit of our God* (I Corinthians 6:11).

Regeneration is rebirth; being born again of the Spirit of God. Jesus said to Nicodemus 'unless one is born again he cannot see the Kingdom of God'. 'How can one be born again?' asked Nicodemus. Jesus was referring to spiritual rebirth, to being born of the Holy Spirit. The wind blows from nowhere to nowhere as it seems, but has power to drastically change the landscape. Just so the Holy Spirit of God is not seen but has power to change human hearts. Mighty power is needed to do this, and it is only the almighty power of God that can change a human heart.

Regeneration is actually the first resurrection. The hour has come said Jesus *when the dead will hear the voice of the son of God, and those who hear will live* (John 5:25). Our physical bodies are not changed by this rebirth, at least not for the moment. But such a change will come because of rebirth. It will not be like Nicodemus thought, going back into his mother's womb. At the general resurrection of the dead, when Jesus comes again (Revelation 20:13), we will put off this natural or 'earthly' body and be given a spiritual body.

Reconciliation

Walking according to the way of this world is walking contrary to the way of God. Being a friend of the world means being an enemy of God (James 4:4). To love the world means the love of the Father is not in you (I John 2:15). In this state of separation from God we need reconciliation.

In Christ God was reconciling us to himself. He was restoring the relationship that was broken by sin. *Now all things are of God who has reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ* (II Corinthians 5:18). God in Christ forgives our sin; he does not reckon our trespasses against us. Notice this is all of God. We did not initiate this reconciliation. God initiated it and God completed it. He did so through Jesus Christ. God made him who was without sin to be sin for us. *We rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ through whom we have received the reconciliation* (Romans 5:11).

Sin severed our relationship with God, and it did the same to our relationships with one another. Adam and Eve started to blame one another after sin. Their son Cain killed his brother Abel. The effects of sin are plain to see all around us and in us. In each generation we hear the plea for reconciliation – reconciliation between nations, between peoples, between genders, between young and old and even in the home. We have recently had the word 'sorry' spoken to the indigenous people. Has this brought about reconciliation?

Can you reconcile yourself with your enemies? Do you not choose rather to stay as far away as possible from your enemies? Do you remember being reconciled with anyone after a dispute? True reconciliation will come only through prayer and by the power of God. We have no power to reconcile ourselves with God even if we wanted to. Our reconciliation with God is all of his love and his grace. It is all through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is all in Christ.

Redemption

In sin we were slaves of the devil, the ruler of the power of the air. We were not able to free ourselves from this spiritual power of evil. We need one more powerful than the devil to free

us from his power. We were slaves in need of someone to redeem us. It was Adam who first sold his soul to the devil. All his descendants have done the same thing.

Redemption means to take back, by the payment of a ransom, that which was yours. Jesus gave his life as a ransom for many. It was his life given in exchange for ours. In Jesus we have *redemption by his blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of his grace* (1:7).

Paul is fond of the word *riches* (1:7, 2:4, 7, 3:8). Many people like the idea of being rich but Paul was not thinking of money or material possessions. He is talking about the riches of God's grace. There is nothing more precious to the believer than the grace of God. We are alive because of the grace of God. As you read these words and hear Christians talking about the riches of God's grace do you understand what they are talking about, and do you rejoice with them in the riches of God's grace.

Paul often reflected on his old life, his life before God in his grace redeemed him. *I am the least of all the saints* he said of himself, but the grace of God was given him (3:8). He was given grace to preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.

Redemption means you now belong to Christ. You are no longer a slave to Satan, and you are not your own either. You were bought at a price and belong to Christ (I Corinthians 6:20). Beloved, we are now children of God (I John 3:2). Since we belong to Christ as those redeemed by his blood let us walk as his children. Let us walk to please him by obeying his commands. Let us walk with a new heart and a transformed mind set upon things that are above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.

Raised Up

We have been made alive with Christ and raised up with him – together with him. God has made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Can you comprehend something of what Paul is telling us here? Many Christians have no idea. They think that all Christ does is give them a better life here in this world. 'Give me a happy family, give me good health, and give me happiness...' is all they ask.

Already Paul has praised God for the spiritual blessings we have in the heavenly places in Christ (1:3). Now he says that we have been raised with Christ to sit with him in these heavenly places. Jesus was bearing our sin on the Cross, so in a sense we were crucified with him (Romans 6:6). We died with him, were buried with him and now have been raised with him. See how often Paul uses the word *together*. He also says that we are united with Christ or simply that we are 'in Christ'.

Are you living as one who has been raised with Christ to sit with him in the heavenly places? Our spiritual forefathers used to speak about the way Christians 'live below the level of their privileges'. Are you aware that you have a seat at the table of the Lord in heaven? Are you aware that you are a citizen of heaven? If you have been made alive in Christ, your life is hid with Christ in God, *that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us in Christ Jesus* (2:7).

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