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Ephesians 2:7

We're going to keep moving ahead in our study of Paul's letter to the Ephesians this morning. Last week we talked about the reality of being made alive together, raised together, and seated together in Christ in the heavens. And then we spent some time discussing a little of what it means to live where we are, or to live where we've been placed. We said that it is one thing to be made alive, raised, and seated with Christ as a matter of Spiritual fact. It is another thing altogether to learn by His Spirit how to abide there, live there, and know that reality as that which is most real to our soul.

Today I want to move on to the next verse in Ephesians, but continue talking about the same thing – living where we are. Lets start by reading the verse.

Eph 2:7 that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

It is my opinion that this verse simply continues the thought of what Paul was describing in verses five and six – namely the great love of God. I have said a number of times that God's love for us is much more than we think. But its not only more than we think, it is different than we think. Better, but different. And I've mentioned that what we generally do in order to picture God's love for us is to project our understanding or experience of love onto Him, and multiply it.

I remember as a kid asking my mom if God loved me more than she did. Considering how bad of a kid I was, that probably wasn't too hard to answer. She said that he did, and of course I imagined the exact same emotion of love that I understood, but with much more intensity and constancy. That was the imagination of a 8 year old. Unfortunately, that imagination was not challenged by anything I heard for the next two decades. In fact, that imagination was encouraged and cultivated.

What I'm saying is that rather than lose my man-made concept of God's love as the Spirit of God grew me up in the Truth, I was encouraged to do all that I could to hold on to that concept, make myself believe it, sing a song about it, read a book about it, remind myself it was true until I didn't doubt it. Of course I did doubt it, because, like any one of my own thoughts, it exists in my mind only until something more reasonable comes along.

Have you ever noticed that it is very difficult to make yourself believe something that you don't really believe, or to believe something that you seem to have evidence against? The natural mind is not supposed to be the source of what you know to be spiritually true. The natural mind was never intended to create your sense of

spiritual reality. I know that we attempt to use it for that purpose all the time, but that's like using a hammer to screw in a nail. It's like putting contact lenses in your ears. It may indeed be common, but it is insanely ridiculous.

There is absolutely no way that your mind can come up with what only His mind can reveal. It's a one-way road to reality. He teaches you, or you don't learn. Worse than that, He teaches you or you imagine. The Scriptures are full of verses that dogmatically insist that only the heart taught by the Spirit of God can know spiritual reality. There is a name for when a mind tries to force itself to believe something it has not seen by the Spirit, it is called brain-washing. Brain-washing might help you live radically for a belief system, but it won't ever help you know the Lord.

Anyway, back to my 8 year-old imagination about love. I had a belief system that I forced myself to believe, but I didn't know the love of God. And, as is the case with any belief system, when God was finally given room to teach my soul through my bowing out of His way...He did not seem very interested in adjusting or enlarging my belief system. On the contrary, He seemed to want to destroy it. There was not one part of it that was allowed to remain. Not because it was necessarily all wrong. But it was all still in the way of the Truth.

Even our knowing of true things has to be replaced by His knowing. I know that sounds strange, but it's true. Spiritual understanding is not our understanding of spiritual things. Spiritual understanding is God's understanding of all things working in our heart. It is a whole different mind – the mind of Christ. Maybe you're thinking "what's the difference?" Well, you might say it's the difference between an ant looking at a human, and a human looking in a mirror. They're both seeing the same thing, but only one is seeing with any real understanding.

So when I was 8 years old, it was not wrong that God's love was real. It was more real than I could have imagined. It was not wrong that God's love was greater than human love. No, that was true. But it was wrong and shallow and dangerous to hold on to my thoughts and feelings about what I wanted love to be instead of asking Him to show me the love of God in Christ.

Anyway, this verse here in Ephesians continues Paul's description of the great love of God as He came to know it in Christ. And, as we see in so many New Testament verses, that love has to do with far more than just something God feels. The love of God is a blood covered door out of one life and into another. The love of God is a Lamb that He offers you as a death to your self, and Life in the Father. The love of God is a cross, whereby when we are baptized into His death, we can then be made alive together, raised together, and seated together with Him in the heavens.

And in this new relationship with God where we are dead, and our life is hidden with Christ in God, we become participants in His eternal purpose. We become participants in Christ's relationship with His Father. We become participants in the glory that the Son has always had with the Father. We become participants with Him, because He is our life, in everything that He is and everything that He has. By giving us Christ as our life, God has given to us all things that He could give. He has given us Himself. He has given us His righteousness. He has given us His glory. This is the love of God.

And what our verse for the day describes is the reality that this gift of grace is eternal throughout the ages. It never ceases. We who have been baptized into

Christ are the permanent recipients of this grace. We are the permanent recipients of His overflowing kindness. God's eternal purpose, having to do with the glorification and exaltation of Himself in the Person of Christ, will permanently and perfectly include us who are in Him.

In other words, what God has done for His Son in making Him alive, raising Him, and seating Him at the right hand of glory...is also our eternal possession and experience because we have become one spirit with Him. We are the eternal beneficiary of this plan, this goodness, this love, because we are in the Son of His love.

But can you see how the love of God is so much bigger than just **how** He feels. It is **Who** He has given to be the death, the judgment, the resurrection, and the Life of all who will receive Him. And now we, who live in and by Christ, live in the love of God. It's a state of being, a state of reality. It's a Person in whom we live, a life in which we abide. And so now you can understand what the Scriptures mean when they speak of the love of God having been poured out in our hearts. (Romans 5) Now you can understand what it means that we need to be rooted and grounded in this love. (Eph 4) Not rooted and grounded in a permanent emotion. Not grounded in our belief system about God's emotion. But rooted and grounded in the actual love of God. Now you can see what Paul meant when he said that this love begins to compel us in all things. (2 Cor 5) It is this love, this reality of relationship, in which we abide as those who have lost our lives and found His. (John 17) And it is this love that we manifest to those in His body who are also recipients of His great love.

I'm not trying to be mysterious or clever. Somebody once said that they don't like how I'm always re-defining words. Well, I'm not redefining them. We already re-defined them, and now we're seeing them as they are in Christ, as they have always been in Christ. What we're really doing is throwing away our pre-defined definitions, and exchanging them for a view of Christ. A view of Christ in whom all spiritual things have meaning and definition. Apart from whom nothing means anything.

And I know that I repeat myself frequently, but I also know something of how this works. I know that what we are coming to is not an understanding of a bunch of things that we learn about, but an ever increasing view of one Person in whom are all things. And so the more that we look to Him, regardless of how much we have already seen, there is always more to show. There is always more to see. And so we linger on spiritual realities, like love, in order to give the Spirit of God ample time to increase our spiritual understanding, to enlarge our view.

So our verse in Ephesians tells us that we are the eternal recipients of God's kindness and grace, because we have come to an eternal union with His Son. And all of eternity (starting the day you are born again) is the ongoing learning, and experience, and enjoyment, and expression of the great love with which God has loved us in Christ.

But, as we mentioned last week, this eternal life, this heavenly relationship, does not begin when the body dies. The death of the body is merely when we drop back to the earth the vessel that we temporarily borrowed. New Life, heaven, full salvation, are realities that we have come to in Christ and so we must learn to live where we now are.

And when I talk about living where we now are, I'm not talking about believing where we now are. I wish I knew how to say this stronger. I am not talking about

learning about where we now are. Friends, this is infinitely more real and substantial than a belief system. I'm talking about living according to God's view of what is real and not our own which stands in constant contradiction to what God has done.

I want to make a statement here, and then I'd like to talk about it some. **Spiritual growth, in the eyes of God, is simply the measure to which we have come to God's view of all things in Christ, and subsequently, the measure to which we abide in, rest in, experience, and give expression to that finished work.**

That may sound entirely too simple, and yet I know it to be true with all of my heart. If that isn't a true statement, then I'm afraid that I don't know anything at all. Why? Why is it true? It is true because God has already "given us everything that pertains to life and godliness". It is true because Christ said it is finished. It is true because we have been crucified with Christ, and there remains nothing left for us to do except learn the reality of the rest of that sentence - "nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me". We live in Christ in order to "gain the excellency of the knowledge of Him" and 2 Cor 2:14 "become the fragrance of the knowing of Him in every place".

The journey that we are on is not a journey that takes us from point A to point Z. It is a journey that begins in the fullness of point Z, even though we have a point A understanding. We are at point Z with a point A comprehension. Our journey, as far as destination, goal, objective is finished the moment we begin. The progress that is made, the journey that we experience, is the process of spiritual comprehension, otherwise known as faith, catching up to where we already are. And as faith catches up to reality, then we can walk by faith and not by sight. Or you could say, when spiritual perspective catches up with spiritual reality, then, and then alone, can we abide in it.

In simpler terms, we start at Z but our mind is full of A. God sees Z. We see A, though salvation has us made alive, raised, and seated in Z. Z isn't where we're going. These verses tell us that heaven is not where we're going. Heaven is where we have been seated. Just read it. I'm not making this up. Heaven is the eternal Life and relationship and realm to which you have come in Christ. It is finished. We start at Z with an A comprehension. What is needed? God's view of where we are. God's view of what you are. God's view of Z. We need to know even as we are known.

You have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. I've been crucified nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ. You've been baptized into Christ's death, raised with Him to walk in the newness of life. These are all part of Z. Why is it that the church so often makes these things future realities that must await another time, another place, another event? Only because though we live in Z, we have no idea where we are or what is now real.

And so what happens? Well, this wonderful thing called the renewing of the mind happens with those who turn their heart to Him. What does it do? It causes my view, my faith, my spiritual knowledge to catch up with God's finished fact. It brings my A to a B to a C...NOT because I'm actually moving to different places, but because I am growing in my Spirit-given comprehension of where I am.

What am I saying? I'm saying that there is absolutely no chance of us growing up in the Lord, growing in the true knowledge of Him, or in transformation into His

likeness, unless we allow Him to give us HIS view of what is now in Christ. God's view, working in our souls, to show us that indeed we have been made alive in His life, raised up in union with Him, and seated in the heavens in Christ. And as the Spirit is allowed to work this reality in a soul, then we can heed Paul's admonition in Colossians chapter 3 – we can fix our mind on things of Z, not on things of A...because as to A, we have died.

Now friends, there are a lot of things that we try to drag into Him because we so want them to have a place. But they do not. There are so many things that we want this journey to involve, ways we want it to go, directions we would like to see it take. We are so sure that it involves this, and leaves room for that. We are positive that God would not do this, or couldn't mean that, or it has to mean this. Bottom line: we're scared, because this is unknown territory...and we want desperately for it to include something familiar. Something we can do. Something we can be. It is a place we've never gone before, so we try to bring something safe, something familiar, something to hold on to. Its like one of my kids bringing their favorite Teddy Bear to a sleepover. Its almost like they're bringing a piece of our home and our family with them.

We do that. We do that with the Lord, only, unlike the Teddy Bear, it doesn't work, it doesn't fit, except in the imagination of our unrenewed mind. We're scared. We're scared because what God is showing to us might involve this, might include that, might take away this, might not leave room for that. We're scared because there in front of us is a bloody door that says "not I, but Christ", and we're just not exactly sure what all that means.

And really, behind that fear is the ever-present root of self-preservation. We don't really call it that. We call it more innocuous words like "proper balance" and "practicality". As though there is a proper balance between life and death, light and dark. As though there is something practical that death can bring with it into life. Maybe some of you have no idea what I'm talking about. I apologize. I'm not trying to be cryptic. I'm talking about the way that our hearts resist God in His desire to show us Z, God's desire to show us where we are, what we are, and what it all means. We resist it because it always means an increase of Him, and a decrease of us.

And we're scared of that. We like the theology of it. We like stories of people who walked it. We love to make up our own version of that journey, especially if it leaves us the radical one who made sacrifices for God. But what if it leaves you dead to yourself and alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord? There's no glory in that! Well, there is, just not yours.

Its hard to turn our hearts away from everything familiar and recognizable. Its hard to leave our own country, kindred, and father's house and go to a land that must be shown to us. It reminds me of what the Lord said to the Israelites when they were about to cross the Jordan river. After 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, God tells Joshua that the Ark on the shoulder's of the priests would cross over into the Land ahead of them. He instructs them to follow after the ark, across the Jordan, into the Land.

Jos 3:3 and they commanded the people, saying, "When you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the priests, the Levites, bearing it, then you shall set out from your place and go after it. **4** Yet there shall be a space

between you and it, about two thousand cubits by measure. Do not come near it, that you may know the way by which you must go, **for you have not passed this way before.**"

I like that last sentence – "you have not passed this way before". It always feels like that, you know. There's never any familiar territory when the Father is revealing His Son in you. It's always a way that you have not passed before.

And what I really wanted to say is that, just like the Israelites, we often resist letting Him show us the Land He has already given us because we ultimately don't believe that it is better. Remember the two and a half tribes that were quite content with what they had come to know and possess in the wilderness, and decided to take their inheritance on the wrong side of the Jordan? That's how we are by nature. **In our hearts, the reason that we hold so tightly on to the familiar is because we can't imagine how life could possibly be better without it.**

We don't really trust Him with that knife, to remove only what is in the way and leave what is best. We think that if we really let go...who knows what's beyond the next bend.

Well, hopefully this verse in Ephesians that we read today is enough to show you what is behind every bend. Regardless of what you might perceive the cost to be (and that cost is always the loss of dung if we are seeing clearly), this verse should be enough to convince you that around every bend is a greater and greater experience and enjoyment of the "exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." Behind every unknown door is another way that Christ will be better than what you're holding onto. Even though it is not a way that you have passed before, it is exceedingly and abundantly beyond what you could ask or think.

I got an email recently from somebody with whom the Lord had been dealing about this very thing. I'd like to read a little bit from it because it clearly says what I'm trying to say.

When you talked about the judgment at the Cross being in the past "done forever" tense, something swelled in my heart and I was able to see that He isn't trying to lead us somewhere in the future or that He has yet to do something in me....I saw it all as DONE. Fully known. Ready to be revealed. I saw that my salvation isn't something open to anything unplanned or unexpected happening because He accomplished it once for all a long time ago.

And seeing it as done had the effect of unmasking all imaginations and lies in one fell swoop and reducing them to chaff that gets blown away so easily because they don't contain substance...Believing we need to find God's will, for example, becomes like still believing fairy tales, in the face of a salvation that's finished...Why would a grown up believe in fairy tales?? They wouldn't.

And I saw that walking with Him it isn't about Him taking my hand and leading me down a path to some place we have yet to come to....where on the journey, at any moment, something unforeseen or unexpected might happen, where He will have to make a quick adjustment or I would have to do something I won't like. I saw that TO ME, it feels like I am on a journey, but to Him, I'm already there. He's just trying to show me where I am...Why would I fight being shown

where I already am? I don't know. It doesn't make sense.

I guess I simply saw salvation as finished. Done. No surprises...No changes...And seeing it is done made it feel....Safe.

But the reason it is safe is that it has been done for years. I just haven't known it was done. I thought it was something that was continually unfolding, but not like it is unfolding to my understanding -- which it is...Here I've been seeing it more like it was unfolding to God or something...Like He is making it up as He goes along therefore there is always the chance it could go awry.

I wouldn't have said that of course, but somehow, something I heard about it being finished put it in a new light. A safer light. A light where I didn't have to worry about how it was going to turn out or whether or not I'd get it right. I also saw that since it's nothing I have to figure out or am expected to know, the pressure is off. I felt like it should be easy then, in the light of this new understanding to have a humble childlike heart that is poised to expect to discover something wonderful about what He's already done.

Well, that's just it. That's what I've been trying to say. As Peter says, it is a salvation that is ready to be revealed. And yet the revealing of it, the showing where we are, does damage to all of our most familiar thoughts and imaginations.