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Jason Henderson
Market Street Fellowship

School Of Christ pt. 3

I'm going to continue where we left off in what I'm calling the "School of Christ". For those of you who have not been with us, "The School of Christ" is the name I'm giving to the way that the Holy Spirit teaches our hearts the truth as it is in Christ. It might even be a more appropriate title to call it "The Order of Spiritual Understanding". We've been talking about the specific order in which the Lord is able to instruct our hearts in the reality of salvation.

And, though it may sound like insanity to the natural mind, the order that we have been discussing is death first, then heaven, and then earth. It is according to this order that we grow up in the truth. I can't go back and review all that has been said. But I believe that we have established in Scripture from both Old Covenant typology and New Covenant reality that, in the mind of God, we face death first, then are raised up and seated with Christ in the heavens, and only then can the reality of the heavens be made manifest in the earth. Only when death has become your foundational starting point, do the heavens become the reality and place of your residence. And then, contrary to the old saying, ONLY when you are heavenly minded can you become any earthly good...at least from God's vantage point.

First you are crucified with Christ. That is the door. That is the way in. Then, immediately, you are taken in the Person of the High Priest, in the bosom of our Great Intercessor, you are taken into the Father's House. You are taken into the heavens. "Made alive together, raised together, and seated together with Christ in the heavens". And as this heavenly relationship, realm, reality, becomes the substance and experience of your soul, then does the "kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven".

I don't want to spend a whole lot of time proving that from the Scripture this week. Suffice to say, again, that much of the frustration and deadness of the church comes when we seek to be a manifestation of heaven in the earth before we know ourselves dead with Him and raised. Another way to put that would be, we think the order is earth, death, and then heaven. You hear that order all of the time. And yet it is not the truth. Wherever you look in the New Testament, you will find yourself first baptized into Christ's death, and then raised with Him, brought with Him into His Father. Into the heavens.

I think some of the confusion about this comes from a few sayings of Christ that are often misunderstood. On a couple occasions, Jesus said something to the effect that "if you lose this or that, or forgo this, or forsake that, then great will be your reward in heaven". Now, without even realizing it, the natural mind automatically attaches concepts and ideas to this statement. Somehow, automatically, Christ's mention of heaven in verses like these has attached to it another place and another time. Its like we read it to mean "if you forgo these things on earth, one day, when you go to heaven, God will pay you back". But that is NOT what Jesus said.

At no point in statements like these is Christ defining heaven as anything other than something contrary to earth. Here is the contrast of two realms, two lives, two realities. We are the ones adding the time element. We are adding the geographic location element. He is simply saying that a willingness to know Him in the cross, and bear in ourselves the loss of what was gain to one man, will result in an experience, a relationship, a gain that far surpasses anything lost. He's not saying that it will be a future place in a future location. If there is any future implication at all it is only because His cross was still future at the time He spoke those words.

Christ is teaching them that His Cross is soon to be the great exodus out of one realm, one man, and into another. And to whatever extent you are willing to be crucified to the one, great will be your experience of the other. To whatever extent you put off one, you will gain something far greater in the other. And the fact of the matter is that the great experience of heaven that he promises in verses like these, though existent long after the body dies, started happening in believers immediately after the resurrection. Heaven and earth came together in the body of Christ, the true temple of God, the church.

Those who by faith were joined to Him in His death, were also raised together with Him in the resurrection. And though natural bodies, being made of earth, will always occupy that realm, "those who have joined themselves to the Lord have become one spirit" (1 Cor. 6:17), have "been raised with Christ", and now are to "mind the things which are above, not the things on the earth".

In other words, the order is death, then heaven, and then earth. If you are a Christian, your soul is hidden with Christ in God. I know your body never goes anywhere. It is dust. Dust it remains, and to dust it returns. But your soul is occupying the realm of Life in Christ called heaven. And though it is simple to quote a multitude of Scriptures asserting this, many Christians will look at you like you are delusional. They would say that you live in a fantasy world. You have lost touch with reality. And yet, they are the ones, in defiance of Scripture and unbelief of heart, who are living in a fantasy world and are entirely out of touch with reality. They are the ones who have chosen the adamic dream over the Father's House. Finding gain and purpose in the dream, they refuse to wake up and see what God has done in Christ.

And even in sharing on this topic I get a little nervous. Nervous because I know something of the religious sacred cows that we Christians worship because they have made sense of our lives. I get nervous because thoughts about heaven and death are so personal and attached to so many ideas and emotions. You can't really try to adjust the thinking on these sorts of things without expecting a knee-jerk emotional reaction. Our man-made concepts of earth, and death, and heaven are how we've made sense of so much of what we experience on earth.

We say things like "life has been hard to me, but one day I'll go to heaven and be with Jesus". I'm sorry, but that statement cannot come from the mouth of one who has seen the Lord. First of all such a person is calling life the collection of experiences and relationships that are entirely earthly. I'm afraid that has virtually nothing to do with life. Second they're putting what is now into the future. And worse than all of that, they have made heaven a better place for YOU to live, rather than the gracious reality of losing your life and being found in Him.

Heaven isn't a fixed earth. It isn't the reunion of relationships that we've had in the flesh. Heaven is the realm and relationship and life that Christ has brought us into in His Father. And this order that we've been talking about is so important. Not just as a fact, but as an understanding of what and how the Spirit of God is attempting to teach your soul. When the Spirit of God presents to you the Perfect Object of God's purpose – the living Christ – then you are first of all faced with your contrariness to Him. We talked about this. First you face your otherness. Not the doctrine of divinity versus humanity. Everybody knows THAT they are not God (well, almost everybody). But in seeing Christ you are confronted with the utter contrariness of all that you are seen contrasted with all that He is. That is the first real dealing of the Lord in the soul.

But from there (and this is what I'm talking about today), He seeks to show you that you have come to heavenly ground. God wants to teach you that you are not a mere man, but a heavenly creature. A creature that lives by the life of Another, and who has been placed into the Son's relationship with His Father. This sort of learning chafes against the natural mind. As Paul says it is foolishness to man. It seems entirely irrational and, were it not true, would perhaps be the most absurd idea that man could suggest. And yet it is the wisdom of God to first bring you out of one man, one creation, and one covenant through death. And then to reveal in you the reality, realm, and relationship of another. "Since you have been raised with Christ, [we must] mind the things above, NOT the things on the earth"

Once we begin to face this death, the Spirit seeks to educate your soul with regards to the heavens. The Person, Place, and Position of eternal life. That might be a good functional definition of heaven – the Person, Place, and Position of eternal Life. You must come to know it, or it is you who will live out the rest of your days in a fantasy world. The earth is a fantasy world for those who have been raised with Christ. It is real as far as natural things go, but it is not the reality of what, where, or why you exist. To live as though it is, is insanity.

Col 2:20 Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, **as though living in the world**, do you subject yourselves to regulations—
21 "Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,"

Rom 8:7 Because the carnal mind *is* enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. **8** So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. **9** But **you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit**, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you.

Heb 12:18 For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest,... **22** **But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem**, to an innumerable company of angels, **23** to the general assembly and church of the firstborn written in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, **24** to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than *that of* Abel.

Rather than living as earthlings waiting for heaven, Paul insists that we must live as true citizens of the Heavenly Jerusalem, ones who HAVE COME to Mt. Zion. In other words, we who have died with Him, must realize where the resurrection has brought us. This is the second class in the School of Christ. And once again, all of these

classes are forever ongoing, but they built on one another. The second will only begin to awaken in your soul if there is something of the first to build on.

God has brought us into the heavens in Christ. But for our soul to be found there, or to be secured there, to know itself there, to abide there...now that is another matter altogether. And too often we refuse to believe where God has us. We refuse what faith would show us in favor of what sight wants to see. What natural man would want to see that God has brought the natural realm to nothingness through the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ? **It is nothingness to Him, and those who chose to abide there chose to abide in the nothingness of it.**

Isa 40:15 Behold, the nations *are* as a drop in a bucket, And are counted as the small dust on the scales; Look, He lifts up the isles as a very little thing. **16** And Lebanon *is* not sufficient to burn, Nor its beasts sufficient for a burnt offering. **17** All nations before Him *are* as nothing, And they are counted by Him less than nothing and worthless.

He is not trying to fix to fix the earth. I'm not saying that He won't act in it for the purpose of bringing your soul out of it. But his goal is not to fix it. Many lives have come and gone waiting for that to happen. His goal is to raise a people out from it into an eternal habitation in His Son. These are hard words. I know. But they are true words. And the sooner we face into them, the sooner we will cease trying to make the earth our home until we die. We must learn the heavens, because through the cross, the Lord has judged the earth, and in a very real sense, separated it from Himself.

God did not need to blow up the planet in order to judge it. In fact, blowing up the planet would not accomplish what the cross did. The judgment of God separated the natural creation and the natural man from Himself. Judgment has accomplished this eternal division. There is a chasm that cannot be bridged, except by the cross which "transfers you out of the kingdom of darkness into the Son of His love". Col 1:13 There is a way for all men to know God. But that way will cost you the forfeiting of the wrong man and his creation. Or as Jesus says "lose your life, and you will find it".

The cross isn't for making the world a better place. Not really. I'm all for making the world a better place. My body has to live here for several decades. But the cross is for making a people alive, raising them up, and seating them high above the world. Now if we would only turn our hearts to learn where we are rather than spending our lives praying that God would come back down and change our circumstances. If only we would awaken to what He has done, rather than demand He do what we want done.

Clearly the world is a mess. Clearly it is filled with Adam and his fruit. But God's answer to the world is not to repair it, but to bring us out from it in the Person of Christ. To bring us through death into the heavens. And then, to offer through us the ministry of reconciliation to those willing to be crucified to the world.

Gal 6:14 But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

To those in the earth looking, searching, hungering for truth, for reality, we become the light of the world. Salt and light. We become a city on a hill. And then "blessed

are those hungering and thirsting for righteousness", because we can show them where to be filled. And "blessed are the poor in spirit", because then we can show them the kingdom of heaven. Do you hear me?

We're not to be those who incessantly call on God to come down and change things. He already did that. He already rent the heavens and came down. He already emptied Himself, became a man, became the last Adam, bore that man of shame on the cross, was raised out from among the dead, and brought many sons to glory. What is it that we are hoping He would do next? Give me a better car? Listen, I'm not saying that God does not touch the earth. But I am saying that when He touches the earth it is to invite you into the heavens. When he heals a cancer or provides for you in a circumstance, that's certainly not His end-game. He's wanting you to come through the Way that He has prepared – DEATH – into the Heavens where He can know you and relate to you in His Son. If only we would turn our heart to know where we are in Him as much as we try to turn Him to involve Himself in our circumstances.

Death came through Christ, so that you could be raised to where He has always been. "Father", Jesus cried right before the cross, "I desire that they be with me where I am – that they may behold my glory. The glory that I had with you before the world was". And then...then he says "that the world may know". Here we have the earth. Here, we have a people raised with Christ into His Father, making something manifest in the earth. But first comes the reality of the heavens. And before that comes the drinking of the cup of His death.

Remember when the mother of James and John comes up to Jesus and says "Hey, can my two boys sit at your right and at your left in the kingdom of God?". Incidentally, this question makes no sense. And as was often the case, there wasn't enough truth in the question to even warrant a direct answer. Jesus knows that these men have no idea what His kingdom even is. This woman is wanting prominence for her boys in the natural realm. So Jesus rewinds a little and answers their question with a question. Rather than even dealing with the kingdom, he asks them if they are willing to even enter in. The way, the door, the beginning is to be baptized into His death. Are you willing to drink that cup? He answers them:

Mat 20:22 "You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" They said to Him, "We are able."

Now that answer is really comical. I probably would have said the same thing, but it's still funny. There is absolutely no way that they have any idea what He is talking about. I can just picture them looking at each other and saying "yeah, I think I can do that?".

23 So He said to them, "You will indeed drink My cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with

This is more of a prophecy than a statement of their commitment. It's like Jesus says "indeed you will, because whether you ever realize the reality of this death, it is the way into the heavens".

And this is exactly what Jesus tells them in John chapter 14. John 14 is about the tabernacle. Well, more accurately, the tabernacle is about John 14. We've been

talking about all of this in a few of our small groups with respect to the tabernacle. I've been sharing recently about the tabernacle, and the eternal plan and purpose of God that can be seen in the pattern established there. What is John chapter 14 about? It is about Christ bringing a people through His death, in Himself into the Father. It is about Christ preparing a way in His death and taking a people into the heavens. It has nothing to do future times or dispensations or mansions. It has to do with death, heavens, and then the earth.

Jesus says "guys, I'm going back to where I was before, I'm going back to the Father, and I'm making a way for you in my death. In a little while you won't see me. But then again, in a little while, you will. And in that day you will know something. In that day you will realize something. You will know that I am in my Father, you are in me, and I am in you."

"In that day you will know..." How sad that we are in that day, and we yet we know so little. But when the truth of this day, the light of this day, dawns in the human heart this is exactly what you see. You see it with a light brighter than the sun. You see it in the light of the face of Jesus Christ. You see that you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. It's not a doctrine. Its not a "positional" truth that awaits consummation. It is the reality of heaven. And if you continue to turn, and continue to see, you will begin to bear the image of what and where you are.

"Beholding in a mirror the glory of the Lord, we are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory".

And this is where what has been established in the heavens begins to leave its mark in the earth. Death, heaven, and finally earth.

I'd like to conclude by saying some things about what it means for a Christian to bear the fruit of Christ in the earth. I think there are just as many misunderstandings with this as there is with death and heaven.

What is the manifestation of Christ? What is the fruit of the Spirit? What does it mean to do something or say something or be something good in the earth. **I'm afraid that so often we try to define Christ by what we want goodness to be rather than define goodness by what the Spirit has shown Christ to be.**

The fruit of the Spirit, or the fragrance of Christ, or the manifestation of the Lord is something inward before it can ever be something outward. It is something the Father sees long before it is something the world appreciates. And frankly, quite often it is something the world never does appreciate or understand. If I were to try to present it in something of a functional definition, I might say that "a manifestation of Christ is any conceivable way in which the Life of God resident in a believer influences, defines, motivates, shapes, or subjugates the human soul." It is simply truth working in the believer towards the alignment of the soul. It is the Light of Life working, shining, and causing the soul to become the echo, the likeness, the instrument of that Life.

The Christian world is mostly concerned with the measure to which the world notices such fruit. But I am deeply convinced that the person most interested in seeing this fruit is the one who planted the Seed, and who, incidentally, is also the one who knows what His harvest looks like.

Whether or not any human being ever sees or comprehends it, a manifestation of Christ is when the soul of man is moved by the life of God. This could be in something as simple as an emotion, a lack of an emotion, a comprehension, a motivation, a rest, an awareness...or indeed something as dynamic as a creative miracle.

We often think that it is not a manifestation of Christ unless somebody is healed or something is shouted in King James English. And maybe not quite that far, but we are certainly looking for something in the natural realm. A kind deed. A friendly disposition. A wise statement. I would suggest that most of what God calls true fruit, true manifestation of Christ in the earth is happening in the hidden parts of the human soul. Certainly, Life working in the inner man DOES bring about outward expression. Please don't misunderstand. I am NOT saying that Life on the inside will not effect behavior on the outside. It does. But so many other things effect behavior as well.

T. Austin-Sparks jokes in one of his books that, according to the most familiar definitions, he could make a good Christian simply out of the right combination of prescription medication. In other words, if a congenial temperament and felt affection towards mankind is what a manifestation of Christ looks like, there are ways of making such people that have nothing to do with God whatsoever. Nothing to do with Life or truth.

What I'm trying to say is that it is not helpful to look to the earth, and especially not to yourself, to comprehend who Christ is, what He's doing, what He's changing. You can get caught up in that trap for a lifetime. You'll only understand a manifestation of Christ by knowing Christ. You know Him, you'll recognize His work, His fruit, His expression.

I'm saying all of this not in an attempt to minimize the reality or glory of Christ becoming visible in the earth through His church. That is obviously what we are to become through growing up in Him. We become conformed to Him and filled with Him and constrained by Him. Everything changes. And certainly heaven touches the earth through the souls of the redeemed. I'm just trying to keep you from learning something the hard way. Introspection is not the way to understand fruit. Assessing yourself, giving yourself a spiritual report card, looking for manifestations, wondering when something will change...all of this keeps your heart focused on yourself. Don't concern yourself with it. Manifestation isn't your business, it is His. Your business is to set your heart to know the Lord. His business is the way that will effect and work through your soul. Your business is to know the Truth. His business is the Truth setting you free. Fruit grows from His Seed, it is recognized by the Father whether you or anyone else shares His view. Your only concern is to know Him.

A while back I gave an analogy having to do with a tree in a swamp. I want to share that again because I don't know a better analogy that illustrates what I'm trying to say. I remember exactly when this analogy came to me. It was a time when I needed to know what fruit was, and who could see it.

Imagine for a minute a beautiful apple tree in the middle of a God-forsaken swamp. This swamp is the ugliest, darkest, and foulest place in the earth. So foul and uninhabitable that there are no animals. Bugs won't even live there. But deep in the middle of this swamp there is one thing that is beautiful. There is a giant, perfect

apple tree with enormous, lush apples. Every year this tree produces its enormous fruit...with absolutely no human, no animal, and no bug to enjoy it.

That image came into my head one day, followed by this thought: "Jason, when does it become fruit? Is it only fruit when somebody notices it? Is it only fruit when somebody picks it? Eats it? What makes it fruit? Is it not fruit when it is the increase of the Seed regardless of who ever sees or appreciates it?"

The manifestation of Christ in the earth is the increase of the Seed the Father planted in your soul. He planted it. He is tending it. The soul of man is the soil for its increase. And God is the one who is enjoying the harvest even if no one else ever sees it.

But, just one more time: here is our order. First there is realization of death. Then we begin to see and know and experience and live in the reality of heaven - the Person, Place, and Position of eternal Life. And then that works in us and through us what God calls fruit - the increased expression of the Lord Jesus Christ.