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Wherever We Are, Christ Is

The disciples in Jesus' day had a problem.

They were continually seeking a physical manifestation of the kingdom of God. Jesus had to tell them repeatedly that the kingdom was different from what they pictured.

Today we have the same problem, so I want to stress just one point in this chapter: the kingdom of God is in us.

Don't look for it around you some place because you will not find it there. It is within you.

Paul prayed for the people of God in his day, "That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith" (Ephesians 3:16-17).

I want you to notice what he asked. He didn't say, "I ask that you might have nice meetings." No, he asked that our inner man be strengthened, and that Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith.

Where does Christ live?

In our hearts, by faith. That is what it means to be in the kingdom of God. Jesus is the King, and He comes to live within us. We are joined to Him in spirit so that He rules our hearts. We are subject to His government in our lives, and He is our Lord. This is the kingdom of God.

Paul went on to say, "That you may be filled with all the

fullness of God." To be filled is to have Him inside you; just as the water in a full glass is inside the glass, not on the outside.

"Filled with all the fullness of God."

"Paul, do you know what you are saying?"

"Yes, Sir, I know!"

Then he said, "Now unto Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us."

Where does His power work? It works in us.

Paul's message was very simple. It was very down-to-earth, and applied to everyday life. In our theologies we become too idealistic and try to scale the peaks of high mountains. But Paul starts where we are, with the little things of life. And if we are faithful in the little things, the Lord will give us the bigger things.

His Gospel was really good news because it concerned how to live. It was about living today, and tomorrow—the ordinary, everyday life that each of us must lead. He summed it up in one clear statement: "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27). This is what the new covenant is about.

Essentially, the difference between the old and new covenants is that the old covenant worked outside of people, whereas the new works within.

With the old covenant, they had to read it in a book and then try to do it.

But the new covenant is, "I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts, and will be their God, and they shall be My people" (Jeremiah 31:33). The law is internalized, like a built-in guidance system.

Ezekiel expressed it this way: "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you shall keep My ordi-

nances, and do them" (Ezekiel 36:26-27).

We don't have to try to do the new covenant; God causes us to do it from within. It is an internal urge. The Spirit is in us, in the new heart, and impells us to walk God's way.

Jesus expressed it very clearly to His disciples. The Spirit "dwells with you," He told them, "and shall be in you." In you! From Pentecost on, the Spirit is within.

In the Old Testament, they spoke more usually of anointing rather than filling. This was because the Spirit moved upon people from outside to accomplish His purposes. He only visited people. So with the old covenant, the term was anointing.

Now in the new covenant it is not a visit. He comes with all His luggage, to stay, to abide. So in the new covenant we speak of filling more than anointing. He is inside of us.

Jesus made a remarkable statement at the Feast of Tabernacles.

All the people were in Jerusalem participating in this great religious celebration. He went up into the temple and announced to them all, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink. He who believes on Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water" (John 7:37-39).

Where does the Spirit come from? Not from outside, but from within the believer! He is in us. This is the new covenant—Christ in us the hope of glory.

We don't need to study to learn how to seek the Lord. We do not have to try to pull Him down from heaven to come and anoint us. He has come to dwell in us through the Spirit, and He seeks to flow out through us. We need to learn how to release what we already have within us.

This is a completely different approach from the attitude many of us have had. We have been trying to seek God, trying to get fresh outpourings of the Spirit from up in heaven. But the Bible presents Christ in us not as a goal to be attained, but as a fact to be realized.

When we continue to think of Christ as being outside of us

and needing to come and fill us, we are denying what the Bible says. We are making the Bible into a lie, because the fact of Christ in us is the greatest and clearest promise of the Holy Scriptures.

Now, we have to be sure that this has really happened to us, that He is within us. But once we have Him within us, He does not have to come into us again. We just need to believe that He is there in all His fullness.

So Jesus said that rivers of living water would flow out of us. Not into us, but out of us.

So to the Samaritan woman He said, "Whosoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst, but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:14). The water springs up within and flows out of us.

Paul asked the Corinthians, "Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have of God, and you are not your own?" (I Corinthians 6:19). Again, we see that the Spirit of God is in us. He has taken up residence.

To the Romans, Paul said the same thing. Those who are led by the Spirit of Christ are the sons of God, and if anyone doesn't have the Spirit of Christ he is none of His—he is not a Christian. So we don't have to try to get the Spirit of God. We have the Spirit, and He leads us from within.

That the Spirit is in us is clear from many statements of Scripture. It also is clear from some of the symbols that are used in the Bible. Consider the symbol of the tabernacle or temple.

When the old covenant tabernacle and Solomon's temple were inaugurated, God came down as a flame of fire over the tabernacle and over the temple. He said, "I will abide here; I will live here." He came upon the building.

But on the day of Pentecost, something different happened. God also came with fire to inaugurate the new building, but in this case the building is us.

Jesus said, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." This was heresy to those listening. The building had taken years and years to build, and He claimed to be able to build a new temple in three days!

Of course, He was talking about a different kind of temple that would replace the building. He was talking of His body. It takes more than three days to build an earthly temple, but in three days His body was raised up. And this was a symbol of the new temple which you and I form.

I ask myself why it is that we continue to call physical buildings the church. I wonder if we have ever really realized that we are the temple today?

Why do we call a building the church?

Words are symbols of ideas. And though people know that the building is not the church, they still say, "I am going to church."

But that is a wrong idea. We never can go to church because we are the church. The church is not the building at all. I wonder if we do not fail to function as the church all week long because we persist in saying words that give us a concept of the church as somewhere we have to go.

Jesus said, "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there I am in the midst of them." What does that make us think of? We imagine the church meeting. We think of people coming together to church.

That is not what Jesus meant. He never said, "Where there is a piano and an organ, and two flags, there I am in the midst of them." He said two or three people.

When I wake up in the morning I ask, "Martha, are you there?"

She says, "Yes, Johnny."

We are two, and we both have Christ. We both believe in Him, and we both trust Him. So we are the church. At that particular moment, the church is in bed.

Then we go to the breakfast table, where David joins us, and then Robert John. Soon we are six because our two daughters also arrive. The church is having breakfast. This is

the building that Jesus said He would build in three days.

We need to stress what the church really is. We know it in our heads, but we don't know it in our hearts, and so we don't live accordingly.

One of the greatest problems in the church is that we know these things but we don't do them. We don't need a concept, but life. We need to live as we believe.

So on the day of Pentecost when this new building was inaugurated we find that the fire came just as it came upon the tabernacle and the temple. And what did it come upon? The building or the people? It came upon the people. It did not come upon the roof of the building, it came upon the people, because from that day on Christ was going to dwell in those people as He formerly dwelt in the temple.

When we believe in Jesus Christ, He comes to dwell within us.

We pray, "Thy kingdom come." His kingdom comes to our hearts. He enters into us and becomes one with us so that He can rule our lives from our command-center, the new heart.

Where is the risen Lord?

Perhaps you think of Him as beyond the clouds, maybe even beyond the stars. But according to Scripture, where is He? Here, within us. He has come to make His abode with us, to take up residence in us, to eat and drink with us. He shares our everyday, ordinary lives with us—all of the things that we do throughout the day and night.

People think that to live a spiritual life is to live a life that is not normal. They think it is to go to meetings in the church building, or to spend a great deal of time locked away in a room studying the Bible or on their knees. To be spiritual is thought of as something different from ordinary life.

No, to be spiritual is to live the whole time in Jesus. It is to be in union with Him—to be one with Him—and to let Him guide you in all of the things that you do. So you live a normal life, but it is all under the control of Jesus Christ. That is what it is to live in the kingdom of God—to live a full, whole physical life

under the internal direction of the King.

This is what Paul was referring to when he prayed that we might "be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith... that you might be filled with all the fullness of God... according to the power that works in us."

Christianity is not an external matter, like religion. It is an "in" thing. And it works by faith. We believe that He is within us. We don't have to depend on outer feelings because we know for a fact that Christ is within us.

Perhaps you are saying to yourself about this time, "But we know that. We didn't pick up this book to waste our time reading what we already know. Tell us something that we don't know."

Do you really know it?

For years, I thought I did. I preached about it, using all of the Scripture passages that talk about Christ in us. Yet I would say to the people, "Brethren open your hearts to the Lord."

You see, I was using all the right words, but I didn't know the life. I had the concept, but not the life!

This may make you laugh, but on one occasion I found myself in a situation in my own church which demonstrates the difference between having a concept and experiencing the life.

There was a song leader in our church and he said, "Let's start the meeting with hymn 224, 'Since Jesus came into my heart.'"

We sang the hymn. Then he announced, "Now let's sing hymn 191, 'Come into my heart, Lord Jesus.'"

What happened between the first hymn and the second? In the first hymn He was there, but in the second He is not there—He has to come!

We were more concept- and doctrine-centered than life-centered.

We had a doctrine that said Christ had to come into our hearts, and that is a perfectly correct doctrine. But we also

had a doctrine that says Christ is in our hearts. The trouble is, we got them mixed up.

Now if our doctrines were a reality in our lives, when the pastor says, "Let's sing, 'Come into my heart, Lord Jesus,'" we would answer, "Pastor, if you don't have Him, sing it yourself. But we have Him."

We should be careful what we sing, because many of our songs are old covenant. In those days they were right to sing, "Let us go unto the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of our God." The mountain of the Lord was in Jerusalem and the house of God was the temple. But if we don't translate those songs into new covenant, we will get confused.

David sang, "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go to the house of the Lord."

But in order to sing that psalm, I must translate it. So I simply change it to, "I am glad with those who tell me we are the house of the Lord." This makes it new covenant.

The temple was a shadow. We have the reality. If you sing about going to the house of the Lord, you are thinking of going somewhere, perhaps to the church building. Be careful when you sing the words of the Old Testament, especially the psalms. There are some wonderful psalms, but we need a translation into the new covenant.

I believe that we are suffering the consequences of a tremendous mixing of the old and new covenants. We are trying to live with two husbands at the same time. We want to be married to Mr. Law and to Jesus. That is adultery!

We have died to the law if we are Christians.

Paul tells us this in Romans 7:1-6. We should study that passage carefully, because it is a serious matter to engage in adultery. We no longer are married to the law. We are married to "another" husband—to the ascended Christ.

I was at another service in which the song leader said, "Let us sing, 'There's a river of life flowing out from me.'" Later in the same service they sang, "Cause me to come to Thy river, O Lord." What happened?

We were just singing about a river of life flowing out of us in gushing torrents, and in the next breath we were pleading, "Come and quench the thirsting of my soul." What confusion! No wonder we cannot convince the world of the life that we preach. We are not sure ourselves of what we have and what we don't!

Listen to Jesus' words again: "Whosoever drinks of this water (speaking of the water that sustains physical life) shall thirst again; but whosoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall *never* thirst, but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

When we sing, "Come and quench," we are contradicting Jesus. He talked about rivers of living water welling up within us and flowing out to others, but we speak of being dry and thirsty. Isn't that calling Him a liar?

"Never thirst." That means we are no longer thirsty. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst, for they shall be filled." But we don't believe the promise that we will be filled, so we continue to speak and to sing about hungering and thirsting for God.

Who was Jesus talking to when He said that those who were hungering and thirsting after righteousness would be filled? No, He was talking to unconverted people who experienced a continual thirst of the soul—who sought the Lord but were unable to know union with Him.

Just as Jesus said in John 6:35, "I am the bread of life; he that comes to Me shall never hunger, and he that believes on Me shall never thirst." He Himself would come to live in them to satisfy the thirst and the hunger of the soul. They would be filled up to all the fullness of God, because He Himself would dwell in them. Isn't that tremendous?

The Scripture says, "Seek and you shall find." But we have got into such a habit of always seeking something outside of us that it is as if we have never found. The truth is, we have found; so we don't need to seek Him any longer. We just need to have our eyes opened to see that He lives within us in all of His fullness and glory!

When we sing incorrect words, we become confused in our theology. We never will grow spiritually if one minute we think we are full and the next minute we are speaking of being empty. We don't know what we are! It is all a conceptual thing and not life.

Christ did not come to bring us a religion, but life. He came to be in a relationship with us. Jesus is a person, and I happen to have that person within me. He came, and He stays here. He said, "If you open to me I will come, and My Father with Me, and we will abide in you."

There is nothing that we need to be more clear on than this. It is vital that we are not messed up on this point. We are the building of God and He is within us. Wherever we are, Christ is. If we are confused on this, we will never grow.

People say to me, "Brother, we have to seek the Lord!" I tell them, "I never lost Him!"

What do you mean when you say, "Seek the Lord"? That is an old covenant concept. I don't know about you, but I found Him a long time ago, and He happens to be within me.

You know, sometimes when we pray we think of Him as far away. We plead, "Lord, I want to hear Your voice. Lord, Lord, Lord — " We point our fingers outwardly, away from ourselves, as if we were reaching out to Him.

But He says, "*I'm sorry, the higher you point, the further you are away from Me. I am down here.*"

When you pray, don't point your fingers outwardly, because He is in you.

Do you know who is *out there!* The god of this world is the one who is out there. But Christ is inside you, and that is the only place you can know Him.

Under the old covenant they said, "Let us lift our hands to the sanctuary and bless the Lord."

But what is the sanctuary today? It is a very different thing from the temple. We are the sanctuary!

I am not saying that we should not raise our arms in worship and praise. If you raise your arms because you are ex-

ploding with an inner joy and you want to express it outwardly, that is wonderful. If gladness is flowing out from you, then by all means put up your arms.

But if raising your hands gives you a feeling of God being out there somewhere, then put them down! That is not the new covenant. If you want to point your hands toward Him, try pointing your fingers at yourself, because that is where you will find Him.

We need to be continually conscious of the fact that He is in us. We have to know beyond a shadow of a doubt that we have within us all the resources of the One who upholds the universe.

"Filled to all the fullness of God," as Paul expressed it.

Once we really believe this, so that we no longer are confused as to where He is, then we have to learn how to release what we have.