

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 2

“14 For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, 15 having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, 16 and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. 17 And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. 18 For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. 19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.”

''Citizens of Heaven''

This morning is celebrated by many Churches as Ascension Sunday and so I want to begin with some questions about special days... First a ‘tough’ one for the children: When is the 4th of July?

OK, that was too easy, so what do we celebrate on the 4th of July?

For the adults, when is Labor Day? What do we celebrate on Labor Day?

As a bonus, when is earth day? [I was almost hoping no one would get that one!]

- So, I could go on but you see even in the church, we know a good deal about those secular special days.

Here at Church of the King we do make it our practice to focus on certain days in the Church calendar because as our text teaches us we are citizens of heaven...

- And that truth leads me to my final question: When was Ascension Day this year?
[yes I had to look it up to make sure]

As I have in years past, I want to again share some challenging comments from Pastor Wilkins on that important day, but before I do that I want to consider how our text in Ephesians teaches us about our standing as those in Christ and then review some of the basics of the Ascension of Jesus and I hope we see how they are very closely related.

- The closing verses of chapter two use three examples to instruct us about our standing: A nation, a household and a building.

Ephesians 2: “19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.”

The Apostle is going to build on the concept of us being a whole building, [pun intended], in the coming chapters so I will leave my comments on that until after I return from Sabbatical.

For this morning I will focus on what it means to be citizens of heaven and members of the household of God. The Apostle here uses very common occurrences in human life to illustrate the new reality that we have in Christ, fleshing out what it means to be new creatures in Christ.

AND we need to remember our past lessons about how great divisions, like Jew and Gentile are broken down so that we can all be one in Christ.

Men & Women, rich and poor, black and white, old and young and any other divisions that you can think of can be torn down when the parties draw near to God through the blood of Jesus!

- **We must also realize that with both examples Paul speaks about results as a REAL unity!**

The Apostle uses those human examples, but we know that they are not real unity without God...

- **Under the sun all is vanity including nations and families!**

Now we can certainly see times where a strong community is demonstrated, but again without God it cannot last: Think of how united our nation was after the attacks of 9-11...

AND think about how fast that unity broke down into some of the nastiest divisions I have seen in my lifetime? We often see examples of family unity and people defending the family honor, but as our nation has turned its back on God, the divorce rate has come close to destroying half of those who even bother to get married. Rather than building generational wealth we see the bumper sticker, "I am spending my children's inheritance."

- **What we as Christians must do is always focus on the fact that we are citizens of heaven and members of the household of God.**

This is why I contrasted our focus on the 4th of July with Ascension Day. We cannot expect our increasing pagan nation to focus on the important remembrances, but WE must, if we are to see true revival some day. We have an obligation to teach our children about who they are & what is expected of them: We do this with proper instruction and proper actions!

- **They must learn that being citizens of heaven means that they serve the risen AND reigning Lord Jesus!**

As we raise our covenant children in the fear and admonition of the Lord, having them learn a proper understanding of the church calendar and what we celebrate on these various Sundays as they come around each year is critically important.

- **We cannot just assume they pick it up over the years, so at times we should focus on the fundamentals from the pulpit!**
- **AND you as families need to be faithful in making sure the children understand what we are doing and learning, along with why.**

And of course, just as is the case whenever we faithfully instruct our children, we are often the ones who really learn the lessons! *[talk about family devotions or meal times]*

- **So what is the ascension of Jesus and why should we celebrate and focus on it each and every year?**

The ascension was the particular time and place in history where Jesus who had come in the flesh, ascended in bodily form to the throne of His Father in heaven. It was described by Luke in both his Gospel and the Book of Acts from the perspective of those here on the earth and by the Revelation given to John from the perspective of those who were in heaven [which is also seen in Daniel 7 for those who want to do further study, noting that Jesus comes TO the Ancient of days on the clouds because the dispensational folks get that backwards, thinking it is a reference to the Second coming.]

Luke tells us what happened from the perspective of the Disciples who were with Jesus at the time here on earth. Jesus finished His teachings and was then taken up in bodily form on the clouds and taken up into heaven. Daniel's vision and Revelation chapter five tell us about the very same event only from the perspective of those in heaven in God's throne room. In Revelation 5, John looks and sees "a Lamb as though it had been slain." The Savior who was promised had come to earth and accomplished the work for which He was sent: He has sacrificed Himself as the Lamb of God to save His people from their sins.

- **He is now seated as the reigning King of Kings and Lord of Lords!**

Now I hope that some of you are now asking yourselves a good follow-up question...
[as you study with them, I can assure you the children will ask the 'tough' questions!]

- Is Jesus only in heaven?

Don't we believe and teach that Jesus is God and as God don't we believe and teach that He is everywhere, being all knowing, all powerful and eternal?

- Yes we do!
- Asking & answering that simple question brings us to one of the great mysteries of the Christian faith.

The two natures of Jesus which the Apostle Paul clearly presents at the beginning of the Book of Romans:

Romans 1:1 “ Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God 2 which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, 3 concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, 4 and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.”

- Jesus is truly man, born of the seed of David with a real human mother, Mary.
- Jesus is also revealed as the Word, who was with God and who is God.

Jesus was not a man who acted 'god-like' and Jesus was not God acting 'man-like.'

- Jesus is the eternal Son of God who truly came in the flesh, born as a man!

It is VERY important that we get this right, not only because it is clearly what the Bible teaches...

But because almost all of the major errors and heresies which have burdened the Church down through the ages have started by getting this truth wrong in some way.

- The Bible teaches that Jesus is the one true eternal God who was born as a man at His incarnation, while never ceasing to be the Son of God.

Yes, that is a truly a mystery we will never fully understand, but it is NOT a mystery kept from us as a secret! One of the reasons that groups like the Mormons or Jehovah's witnesses are so popular is because they try to give simplistic answers to all of the great truths given to us in the Bible!

Returning to our text in Ephesians,

I want us to remember that even with the failing of those human examples, they still have much to teach us about our standing in Christ.

Whether our civil order is a Kingdom with a king as ruler or a Constitutional Republic with representative leaders, we can relate to the importance of being citizens. Rightly understood they are there to protect our God-given rights of life, liberty & property.

- As citizens we have access to our leaders and the right to appeal to them, something an outsider would not have.

We see it much more intimately when it comes to the family:

Family members are much closer and are related by blood not just a membership in a nation.

Again, we should think about the child who knows that he or she has access to their father or mother because of that bond.

- We saw this in our relationship to God last week in the various verses that spoke of addressing the Mighty God of the Universe as Abba father!

Now with the addition of the truth that we are citizens it makes those statements even more amazing:

- We can come to the King Who is also our Father!

Again, we must always be reminding not only ourselves, but our children about these great truths.

- And it has very practical results!

It gives them the joy and contentment that we should all know and treasure in our lives even when they are full of challenges and disappointments...

- In those tough times we should be like a troubled child resting in the arms of a parent.

It also encourages them to be people of great vision because of the greatest of the One they serve and the position He has provided for them:

- Whether that vision is finding a cure for cancer or finding a better way to keep up with all those diapers and dirty dishes because both are very important to the King, our Father.

AND our standing protects them, and all of us, from the ravages of sin:

When temptations come to do what we know we should not do, remembering who we are keeps us on the straight and narrow... Not unlike the child who is pretty well behaved when mom or dad are in the room.

- However, more importantly, it impacts how they or we act when we are not being watched because we know that our Father in heaven is always watching.

There is much that we have yet to learn from this important Epistle, but as we ponder the reality of our being citizens of heaven and members of the household of God on this Ascension Sunday I want to close with some challenging words that I have shared before from our good friend Pastor Steve Wilkins:

“Ascension Day [is] the day on which the Church commemorates the ascension of our Savior in glory to the right hand of His Father as the ruler of all creation, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. This, coupled with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost was the climax of Jesus' work . . . and yet it is almost completely ignored by the world and even by most Christians. Why so? Some have suggested that contrary to Christmas and Easter, Ascension is difficult to sentimentalize. At Christmas, we can focus upon a baby born to a poor, homeless couple in the middle of winter. And at Easter, we can turn our thoughts to "new beginnings" and "second chances" -- But Ascension simply tells us, and tells us bluntly, that Jesus is Lord. That's unsettling and offensive to a world that has been trained to think of itself as its own "lord." You don't have to be a discerning theologian to understand that if the ascension really happened, if in fact Jesus is the Lord of all lords and the King of kings -- then He is the Judge of all the earth, and you can't safely (or sanely) ignore Him.

If Jesus is Lord, no matter how independent you might imagine yourself to be, you are not out from under His authority. You actually have an obligation to obey Him and you are accountable to Him for your disobedience and unbelief, for every word that proceeds out of your mouth and for every deed you do. If Jesus is Lord and King, then you have an obligation to worship and serve Him and if you don't, you're going to be in big trouble.

This is a BIG DEAL. Jesus is Lord. Not the government. Not your conscience. Not your feelings. Not the experts. Not the power-brokers, or the wealthy, or the influential. All men, all nations, all institutions, all areas of life, all of it, is under the authority of Jesus and all are accountable to Him.

The ascension means that you have only one Lord whom you must please -- Jesus. It means that you have only one opinion that matters.

It means you have only one word that is *the* rule of right and wrong, good and evil, truth and error -- Jesus' word.

The ascension means you have only One who has the authority to judge you *and* is fully and completely qualified to do so -- Jesus.

The ascension means that all nations should acknowledge Jesus as their true king and ruler. It means that all laws ought to be conformed to His revealed will.

It means that all men ought to seek to please Him in their every endeavor, in every place, at all times.

The ascension is a big deal. And this makes the ascension a problem for the world -- a *big* problem -- so, it is much safer to ignore it altogether.

But if the world ignores it, that means that Christians ought to make [Ascension Day] (and [Ascension] Sunday) a day of jollification and celebration that is rivaled only by Christmas and Easter.

We need to hold us a genuine wingding and a proper whoop-te-do to rejoice over the reality that Jesus is Lord. If the world doesn't want to hear about it, so much the worse for them -- but that doesn't change the reality: Jesus is Lord. He reigns.

Don't fight it. Don't ignore it. Don't deny it. The only proper response is to kiss the Son (Psalm 2).

And join us in our merry celebration, because Jesus *is* Lord.”

- **And as the Apostle reminded us in our text, we do all this because we are citizens of His Kingdom and members of His household!**

Communion Meditation: Hebrews 12:1

"Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God..”