

# Sermon 33, Is Jesus at home in Your Heart?, Ephesians 3:17a

**Proposition:** You need to pray that Christ would come into your heart and dwell there.

- I. How Christ Comes into Your Heart, vv. 16-17
  - A. The Spirit prepares you for Him, v. 16
  - B. He comes only through prayer, vv. 14-19
  - C. He comes only as the richest gift of God's wealth, v. 16a
  - D. He comes only to those who have faith, v. 17a
- II. What Christ Does in Your Heart
  - A. He Dwells: You in Christ, Christ in You
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## **Introduction**

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we have not looked together at half a verse for a whole sermon since Ephesians 1:11 and its teaching that God works all things according to the counsel of His own will. Yet today, we will slow down and look at a half-verse, and indeed we will do the same next week. The two halves of Ephesians 3:17 each need an entire sermon, because together they address two of the most important concepts in the entire Christian faith. The first of these is the truth that Jesus dwells in the hearts of His people. The second is that we Christians are rooted and grounded in love. Both deserve our full attention, for both sum up key aspects of what we believe and how we live. What I hope to show you today is how Christ comes to dwell in your heart and what results His presence there will have in your life. Again, we will see with God's help how Christ comes to dwell in us and how we live when He dwells within us.

### **I. How Christ Comes into Your Heart, vv. 16-17**

Our text is a fragment of Paul's prayer, a fragment in which he asks that Christ would dwell in our hearts by faith. But this is not how the prayer begins. The preceding context makes it clear that before Christ comes to dwell in your heart, certain events are logically prior and even temporally prior. You were not born ready to be Jesus' dwelling place. You must be prepared for His residence within you.

#### **A. The Spirit prepares you for Him, v. 16**

The first way in which you're prepared is through the work of the Holy Spirit. You have to be strengthened with might by the Holy Spirit in the inner man before you are ready for Christ to come and dwell in your heart.

During my time at Patrick Henry College in Purcellville, Virginia, the school opened a huge new building that contained a dining common, a gymnasium, offices, and classrooms. This meant that we moved out of our old dining common, of course, and the school promptly

announced that the old dining common would be made an extension of the library. But then they added that it would only be a reading room, because the floor of the old dining hall was not strong enough to hold rows of bookshelves.

Well, just as the PHC dining common was not fit for books to dwell in it, so you and I are not naturally fit for Christ to dwell in. We are too weak to receive Him; we would, I think, collapse under the weight of His glory.

No one wants to imagine the wreckage of an entire library fallen through the floor into the basement; no one wants to imagine the wreckage of a sinful human person crushed by the majesty of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of Glory. But that seems to be what the transition from vv. 16-17 is saying. Without the strengthening work of the Holy Spirit, you aren't able to hold Christ. His presence would be too much for you; His divine energy would burn right through you; you would be slaughtered by His glory, as God told Moses long ago.

Brothers and sisters, do you thank the Spirit for strengthening you to receive Jesus? In your evangelism to your children and to your friends and neighbors, do you reckon with the weight of what you're asking people to do when you ask them to ask Jesus into their heart? This is not something to be undertaken lightly. This is dangerous business, this practice of asking the Son of God in His majesty to come and take up residence in you.

Further, this truth should apply to you when you need to fight temptation. We generally think of ourselves as weak — or if we think of ourselves as strong, it is a prideful way of thinking that quickly results in defeat. But the truth that the Spirit strengthens us to be the dwelling place of Christ should encourage us that in Christ, by the Spirit's work, we actually do have the strength to fight sin. It is not our own strength; it is His. Don't call on your own arrogant mis-estimate of your powers to stand strong against the wiles of the Devil; call on the work of the mighty Spirit of Holiness.

This truth also shows us the close connection between Christ and His Spirit. You cannot have one without the other. To receive Christ you must be strengthened by the Spirit, and yet to have the Spirit at work in your life you must belong to Christ. Now, of course, that is speaking in absolute terms. The Spirit works in many people who are not saved. Part of His job is to work in people to prepare them for salvation. But even after salvation, He continues to work, strengthening and upholding us so that we can bear the presence of the mighty Son of God.

We need to think in these terms. We need to understand that Christ in our hearts is a massive, weighty privilege that is way beyond anything that we could withstand, never mind enjoy, without the help of the Holy Spirit. Living in close communion with Jesus is not a given, something that comes along simply with being human. It is an extra gift that God gives out of His amazing grace.

### **B. He comes only through prayer, vv. 14-19**

Notice, too, the context of this request. Christ only comes to dwell in your heart by faith through prayer. This request is embedded in a prayer. You will not have Christ dwelling in your heart if

you do not pray! This means, Christian, that you need to make and maintain regular times of prayer. Christ dwells in your heart only if you ask Him to. He is a guest who wants to be invited.

Now, the obvious question here is, doesn't Christ begin to dwell in your heart at the moment of salvation? And doesn't He stay there permanently from then on? So why is Paul asking for the Ephesians something that they already had?

The answer, as best as I can tell, goes something like this: Paul was praying that the Ephesians would think and live in such a way that Christ would be at home in their hearts. Obviously one cannot live somewhere by degrees. Either you live in a place or you don't. We can't even think of Christ taking a two-week vacation and then coming back. When He lives in you, He is there. But you can grow in your ability to welcome Him; you can make your heart a more homey place for Him. That is the best way to understand this verse. And, of course, when we understand it that way, then we need to pray regularly for Christ to dwell in our hearts. We need to be constantly cultivating our hearts to make them more welcoming to Jesus! And we do that, as this prayer shows us, through prayer and through the work of the Holy Spirit strengthening us to be fit dwelling places for Jesus Christ.

When was the last time you purposely set about making your heart more welcoming to Jesus? When was the last time you sought to do some "heart work," some remodeling in there, tearing out lusts and idols and putting in those things like love and faith that Jesus loves to see? Brothers and sisters, just as we must stop assuming that we are perfectly fitted by nature to have Jesus dwelling in us, so we need to stop assuming that of course our hearts are exactly what Jesus wants and that no further work is necessary. We have to shape and tame our hearts to make them into beautiful apartments for Jesus.

### **C. He comes only as the richest gift of God's wealth, v. 16a**

In keeping with this theme that we do not deserve to have Christ living in us, that we may not after all be the most desirable real estate a deity could possibly find, we must be reminded that Christ dwells in us as the richest gift of the wealth of God's glory. We are the recipients of God's infinite wealth. He has given us the world to enjoy; He has given us the spiritual blessing of chs. 1 & 2; but more than that, He has given us His Son. God did not give us stuff and leave us alone; He gave us Himself. Brothers and sisters, why do your hearts want stuff more than they want Jesus? I know they do, because I know that mine does! We have to stop thinking in terms of salaries and neighborhoods and cars and colleges. We are too frequently obsessed with the status items of the world, and build our lives around them, rather than being delighted with the Son of God who loved us and gave Himself for us. "Whom have I in Heaven but Thee? And there is nothing upon Earth that I desire beside Thee." So said Asaph in Ps. 73. Can you say as much? *There is nothing upon Earth that I desire beside Thee.* I have Christ, and therefore in Him I have everything, infinitude itself. We need to get our eyes off the gifts and onto the giver. We need to stop thinking primarily in terms of earthly gifts and start thinking in personal terms. God has given Himself to us — twice. He has given us His Son, and He has given us His Spirit. We have both the Spirit and the Son, and therefore we have the Father too! Do you want God, or do you

merely want things? You see, we have Christ dwelling in our hearts. We have the absolute best gift God could ever give. He cannot give us more. It is impossible even for the Almighty to give us anything better than Jesus and the Spirit. So why are we still ungrateful? Why do we still complain? Why do we still doubt that our needs will be met? Why do we sometimes get more excited over the Dow or the latest movie than we do over the chance to worship God? Imagine waking up on Christmas morning and getting both a teddy bear and a new Corvette, and being more excited about the teddy bear. Indeed, we are like children making mud pies in a slum who cannot even imagine what a holiday at the beach would be like! Brothers and sisters, let's value Christ aright. Let's see Him as He truly is, in all His glory, and celebrate the reality that He has given Himself to us and that He dwells in our hearts by faith!

#### **D. He comes only to those who have faith, v. 17a**

After all, that is what the passage goes on to say. The medium through which Christ dwells in your heart is faith. He doesn't dwell in your heart by love, or by grace, or by joy, or by jumping. All of those things are results of His presence with you (well, maybe not everyone can leap now, but everyone will leap and jump for joy in the resurrection!). But faith is the premier, transcendent grace. Faith is God's chosen method for dwelling in your heart. You must exercise a passive faith, which simply receives what God places into its empty hand. But you must also exercise an active faith, which grabs onto Christ and will never let Him go. Faith is both passive and active, both direct and reflexive. It involves knowledge, assent to the knowledge, and trust in the reality of the one known. Faith, therefore, both believes God and trusts that its belief is what God requires. Faith knows Christ, and trusts that He will be everything He has promised to be for His people.

Now, if Christ dwells in your heart by faith, does that mean that you must believe before He dwells there? In a sense, of course. In another sense, He is preparing your heart by His Spirit long before you believe, and even at the moment of belief He is already working in you. Paul is not trying to provide us with a detailed list of the events of conversion and a time-table of when they happen. He is rather teaching us to pray. One of the great things for which we must pray is faith. We must pray that God would enable us to believe in Jesus Christ, and believing to have life in His name.

## **II. What Christ Does in Your Heart**

Christ is the greatest gift God has ever given. He comes to the place in your heart which the Spirit has prepared for Him, He grows more at home there in response to your prayers, and He remains there as you continue to exercise faith in Him. What does He do once He has taken up residence in your heart?

### **A. He Dwells: You in Christ, Christ in You**

Well, the verb used here is "dwell." He lives in your heart; that's what He does. It's an ongoing, permanent state of affairs. Now, in common evangelical parlance we speak regularly of "asking Jesus into the heart" or of Jesus living in our hearts. But the New Testament hardly ever puts it in those terms. Rather, and especially in Ephesians, it is phrased the other way round. Rather than

Christ being in you, the New Testament constantly talks about you being in Christ. The phrase occurs over 30 times in this short little book.

The bottom line is that both are true. You are united to Christ by faith, and He is united to you. He dwells in your heart, and you are in His heart too. Again, the basic point is that this is a mutual relationship. This is a two-way street. Jesus is the omnipotent, infinite Son of God, yet He doesn't swallow you up. You continue to be yourself, to have your own individuality, to exist as one half of the relationship. Jesus is in your heart, and you are in Christ. He dwells in you by faith, and you are united to Him by faith. You are His brother, part of His bride, His Father's child. You are in the closest of mutual relationships with Him, united to Him, He says in His High Priestly Prayer, as He is united to His Father.

Does this reality that Christ is in you mean anything to you? Does it inspire you with joy and gratitude? And does it affect your behavior?

### **B. He Makes You Fruitful, Philippians 1:9-11**

After all, if Christ is in you, then you will begin growing the fruits of righteousness in your life.

And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. (Phi 1:9-11 ESV)

Are you filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through the presence and power of Jesus Christ in your life? Just as the Holy Spirit produces the fruits of the Spirit, so Jesus produces the fruits of Jesus. If you are not spiritually fruitful, then you need to reexamine whether Christ dwells in your heart at all. For if He is indeed living in your heart, then you will be growing the fruits of righteousness that come by Him.

Brothers and sisters, don't neglect this great truth that Christ dwells in your heart. Rejoice in it. Make your heart a homey place for Him. Seek the fruit that comes from His presence. And above all, keep on praying for Christ to remain with you. He is the Father's greatest gift; in Him is joy; to know Him is to know the true God and eternal life. Amen.