

Saints and Sinners in Christ

Father, thank You that You put us in Your Son. Thank You that we are there right now. Now we ask You, Lord Jesus, to speak to our hearts. Amen.

It is really quite an honor to be able to represent the Lord to you today. All over this country there are a lot of things that will be said about Christ today, but rather than talking about Christ today I would rather that we be in Christ, learn from Christ, and what He has for us through His Word.

Luke 12:35-37: "Let your loins be girded, and your lamps burning; and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the marriage feast, so that they may open to Him at once when He comes and knocks. Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. Truly I say to you, he will gird himself and have them set at table, and he will come and serve them."

Luke 17:7: "Will anyone of you who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come at once and sit down at table.' Will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare a supper for me and gird yourself, and serve me until I eat and drink, and afterward you shall eat and drink.' Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? So you also when you have done all that is commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy servants, we have only done what was our duty.'"

Here we have a dichotomy, for there are two opposites. One is the picture in the parable of the Lord coming and asking us to sit down while He serves us at the table." It is a very common refrain through the Scriptures that Jesus used over and over again at the time of the centurion, talking about sitting at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. A man came and asked if there were few to be saved, and the answer from Jesus was that there will be many who come from the East, the West, the North and the South, and shall sit at the table. We have the imagery of the marriage feast in which ones are sitting at the table and feasting. It is a very common theme in Jesus' teaching about the privilege and the blessing that are given to the saints to sit at table with Him.

Then there is the one in Luke chapter 17 that says we are not asked to sit down but we are asked to serve at the table. What is the truth? I think the truth is found in the phrase, "We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty."

We have a picture of the saints who are seated at the table in the heavens with the Lord, but that is God's perspective of things towards us. But the second verse that I read is our perspective, our attitude towards the Lord: "Lord, we are unworthy servants; we should be serving You." There is that which is the saint and that which is still the sinner. There is still something of that recognition that we are unworthy, we are still sinners. That is what I would like to look at this morning, this whole idea of being a saint yet being a sinner and being a sinner yet being a saint.

There was a banner in Pacific Beach, San Diego where I used to live on Mission Boulevard. There was a Lutheran Church, and I always remember this big banner that said, "Welcome, Surfers, Sinners, Saints." I do not know whether the surfers were worse sinners or better saints

or what that really meant. Since I was not a surfer, I do not know. But I did see a bumper sticker yesterday on somebody's car that said, "Pray for surf." Maybe that explains to us about surfers.

We come to this idea, and I want to look first at the sinner that becomes a saint or is a saint. It is an exalted position that the Lord has laid out before us that we are able to sit at table with Him and He serves us. Yet there is this humble and grateful repentant sinner that is there at table with the Lord, saying to Him, "We are unworthy servants" from their hearts.

The Prodigal Son

I want to use the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15 as an illustration of this. I might be askewing the parable a little bit, but I think it serves as an illustration of this whole idea of a sinner yet being a saint. The younger son received the inheritance from his father; it was laid out before him. He received the inheritance because he was the father's son, and positionally he was declared to be a saint. But there was something wrong with this young man, and he knew with this great gift that was given to him, he could be independent. He wanted to be set free from what was in the household that was sort of rubbing him in the wrong way or whatever the reason may have been.

So he went his own way, but in the father's eyes he was still his son. He left the home, and he was no longer among his neighbors, his friends, or his brothers and sisters. While he lived in that land, it was a very unprofitable life, very dishonoring to the father and the father's name, yet he was still the father's son. But he came to the place where it had gotten so bad living in the world that he was wearing rags. The luxurious clothes and other things that he had acquired or were given to him were now just rags that he was wearing. And we find him feeding on the swine's slop and in the worst condition that he could be in. I think the key to the story about the prodigal son is that he came to himself. He looked around him and thought: "Wait a minute, I am my father's son, but look at the rags I am wearing and I am feeding on slop. Where am I? What am I doing?"

So he comes to himself and considers where he is. He comes to his senses, and he finally sees himself as he really is—just this ragged person. I want to use a couple of quotes from Watchman Nee, and the picture I see of this young man at this point in time is very necessary for this saint to see himself as a sinner, to see the real state of just what he has become.

Watchman Nee said a very definitive statement that I think can be so liberating for us: "The nature of the flesh is sin. The best that we can do, all the bad, all the good, the very best that we can do in the flesh is sin, it is rags. It is nothing before the wonders of the Lord; all of it is stained by sin." As brothers and sisters, as saints in the Lord, I think we all need to come to that position of seeing the flesh. Some of us still think that there is a little bit of good that is still in me that the Lord will honor, that the Lord will accept. There is nothing! Everything has to be done away with. Maybe there can still be a little bit of me that is acceptable before the Lord, but no, it is all rags, it is feeding with the swine.

I will quote what Jim quoted last time in Romans chapter 7. Finally, Paul gets to the place and says, "Wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to

God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Then Paul went on to say in Galatians 2:20. He realized finally, “I have been crucified with Christ; Christ now lives in me.”

This young man and us as Christians, through the process of the Lord’s dealing with us, must come to a really true crisis of the cross before we can really get on with the Lord and know what it is to be His child, to be a saint for the Lord, not just positionally in the Father’s eyes and the blessing of the Father, but to know it experientially in our own life’s experience. “Now I know what it is to know God’s anointing on His Son through me, rather than trying to do something in my own strength, in my own power.”

Watchman Nee went on to say in one of his books: “Death is emancipation.” Hear that? Death is emancipation! What freedom there is to finally know what we are in the flesh! You do come to a crisis in this, but it is also a process. I do not care if you have been a Christian for one day or fifty years like myself. Even the greats that we consider to be greats in the faith, whether it is Stephen Kaung or whoever it might be, they all experienced the same thing, probably on a daily basis, a death to self, a death to the flesh. Experiencing anew and coming into the reality of “It has all been dealt with; it is dead. What I am doing is dead. I accept it, I accept that it is dead.”

And Watchman Nee said this profound thing: “It is no longer an issue of prayer: O Lord, crucify my flesh. O Lord, deal with me. Oh Lord, the things that I do, I do not want to do.” He said, “Forget it; it is no longer a matter of prayer about these things when you finally see that you have been put to death, that you died with Christ on that cross, and now there is a new life living in you. Christ lives in me, and now it is a matter of praise, just a matter of praise. Thank You, Lord, that You have dealt with me. Thank You that now I know what it is to have Christ live in me.” But we all have to come to that place once, then twice, and throughout our lives. Finally, we know we have been set free, truly set free.

So when the son finally realizes just who he is in the flesh, he goes back to the father, and there we see the wonderful picture of the father’s heart. He has been looking for the son to return, and he sees the son off in the distance. He goes to him and he embraces him in his rags with that smell of the swine all over him. The father just puts his arms around him and loves his son, welcoming him back to fellowship in the home. Those rags are taken off, that ugliness of the flesh is taken off of the sinner, and he is given the robes of a saint. He is able to sit at the table, and the father serves him.

Positionally, we are always a saint. The day we first believed in the Lord, the Lord declared that we are saints. But we have to go through the experiences of life and learn it for ourselves. Though I am a sinner, though I still have that sense of flesh in me, yet I am a saint with the Lord.

Then we finally see the son’s attitude about all of this and he says, “Father, I have sinned; I am unworthy to be called your son.” There is again that same refrain of feeling that sense of unworthiness and yet being robed with the robes of a saint sitting at the father’s table, yet feeling so unworthy of it because he is actually seeing who he really is in the flesh. I hope that we can all come to that place in our lives and stop trying to be a Christian. Please stop trying to be a Christian; you are not going to become a Christian by trying harder, trying to get rid of that temper, trying to get rid of that pride or whatever it might be in your own life. You are never

going to get rid of it; it is only going to crop up its head someplace else. So accept the Lord's verdict, "You have died! You are dead! Give it up; it is gone!"

I want us to think in terms of not just on this earth that we are a sinner, yet a saint. I might suggest something that is suggested in the book of Revelation as we look at the eternal, that there is something that might still be there that might surprise us. We look at the book of Revelation in chapters 4-5, and there is the ascendant Lord Jesus. He has come into the heavens, and He is before the throne, and it says, "I saw a Lamb standing as though it had been slain. I thought He was now the exalted Christ, the One we see in Revelation 1, or the One we see later as the triumphant, mighty One that is on the horse with a sword. But no, "I saw a Lamb standing." Then we find that through the unfolding of this age or maybe at the end of this age as He opens the seals, it is said, "I saw the Lamb opening the seven seals." *The Lamb opens those seven seals.*

You might say, "Well, that is all because of humanity, and there is still redemption going on in the earth, and He needs to have the appearance of the Lamb. But then we go on to the end of the book of Revelation and we are shown this marriage feast that is going on, this beautiful thing at the end of the age. The age has now ended, and we have entered into the eternal of eternal at the marriage feast. It says, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." He is still the Lamb in the heavens.

Then in the last chapter of Revelation when we get there, if there is such a thing as the eternal of eternal or however we want to phrase it or think about it, we are now in the new heavens and the new earth which are before us. There John was shown a river of life that was flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb. He is still a Lamb. Why? I think because there has to be still a suggestion of our humanity, of our flesh. I am not saying that it is the prevalent thing in our lives because as Paul says about these things, when we get into the heavens we are going to have new bodies that will not perish. They will be bodies of glory, bodies that are powerful, that are spiritual, that are heavenly. Yes, we have all of that as saints, but He is still the Lamb. There has to be something there that still suggests to us that there is still a remembrance of what we are, no longer in its prevalence, no longer in the flesh and its glory, and all of that, but now it is just a suggestion, the tiniest of seed I think within us, but it is still there. We are still going to appreciate the Lamb in the heavens.

Sainthood

I want to talk a little bit about our sainthood. We know that Paul uses that term quite frequently as he speaks to most of the churches, even to the Corinthian Church. He is writing to the saints who are in Corinth. It might surprise us but it is true.

So positionally we are made saints, but then there is something we experience in life that is called sainthood, a wonderful thing that the Lord has done for us. I want us to ponder a couple of the things that the Lord has done for us. When we are first born into the kingdom and the Lord has introduced Himself to us, He calls us the children of God. What a term! What an idea, we are the children of God now; no longer children of this world or children of the enemy or children of darkness, but now we are the children of God.

What does that idea connote? I just want to suggest a couple of things. One is that now you are a part of a family. God is our Father; Jesus is our elder brother, and our God also. We are in a family now. We are no longer orphans, we are no longer the wayward sons out there in the world, but now we are brought back into this family. As a child we know what it is to be nourished, to be cared for, to be fed, to be clothed, to know what it is to be secure. It is all there in the family as the children of God, the nurtured ones, and we begin to recognize and know that there is a Provider; there is Someone taking care of us. There is Someone who is always there. There is a voice that we hear that is familiar to us and is becoming more familiar to us as the days go on. It is such a comfort to us, such a solace to this man that we are until we know what it is to be contentedly dependent on our Father. We are His children, and we do not want to go off free, independently living our lives because we know what it is to eat the swine's slop. We have all been there, and we know what it is like. We know what it is in our lives to have offended the Lord or grieved the Holy Spirit. How uncomfortable it now becomes within us. How I want that fellowship back with the Lord, how I want that voice to be speaking to me, but now I feel so ugly and so dirty. And then we come back to the blood of Jesus Christ, and fellowship is restored for us. We do not want to go there anymore. We do not want to touch those things. We want to know what it is to be dependent, to be living under the shelter of the Father.

This quality that we have learned as a child will see us through all the stages of sainthood. That quality of dependence needs to be always there and never lost. I am absolutely dependent on the Lord for His life, for His everything in my life, always present, probably with more and more import into our lives as we go on, and the longer we go on with the Lord.

Sons of God

Then the Scriptures talk about our becoming sons of God. It might be said that it is sons and daughters of God. There is a sense of maturity in this, a sense that we have grown up. There is now something that the Lord expects from us. We are no longer just babies to be fed, drinking the milk of the Word, but we are old enough to eat the meat of the Word, which brings us to a place of capacity. There is a capacity to rule and reign with the Lord. There is now a wisdom that has been given to us that we can discern the mind of the Lord in matters that are before us, not only individually but corporately. I think the greatest sense of being sons and daughters of God is the corporate sense of it. We are no longer that independent child who is the center and focus of all the universe, but now we are sons or daughters with brothers and sisters, and you become aware of your brothers and sisters around you. You are not only living for yourself any longer but you are living for your brothers and sisters, the Father and for the Lord Jesus Christ. Then the Lord gives us dominion as a son or a daughter of God. Dominion has been given to us that we might rule and reign.

I just want to say one thing about dominion that is misunderstood. Dominion does not mean dominance—husbands or fathers living in dominion over your family. It does not mean you are an overlord; it does not mean you have dominance over your wife and children, and you can do what you want because you have dominion. Dominion means “tender care.” You have been given the privilege to have dominion, tender care of those who are under you whether it is a husband, a wife, children, or the body of Christ, the sheep. Do not be dominant, do not be an overlord, but consider having tender care for those who are under you.

It seems to me that there are a few phrases that are found in the New Testament that talk about this whole idea of being sons and daughters.

II Peter 1:3-4 talk about something that is an aspect of being a son or a daughter of God: "His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us to His own glory and excellence, by which He has granted to us His precious and very great promises, that through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion and become partakers of the divine nature."

Wait a minute, not only have we been adopted into a family and know God as our Father, but it says that we are partakers of the divine nature. That is quite a calling, quite the position to be in, to be partakers of the divine nature, to draw on that which is divine that has been given to us in Christ who dwells within us. Make sure you understand that we are never ever divinity. Do not make this mistake of some churches and some cults that have mistaken this. We are not divinity. The church is never a part of the divinity, but we do know something of the divine nature within us.

John tells us in I John 3:9 that the divine seed has been implanted within us. There is a divine seed that is growing within us now which is such a marvelous thing for us.

If that was not enough we enter into a little controversy right here, maybe, maybe not. This verse was pointed out to us while we were in Los Angeles.

I Corinthians 12:12 is a very interesting verse that is given to us. Paul is talking about the body, the Christ, the members, each of us, talking to you, me, over here, over there; we are all these members of the body.

I Corinthians 12:12: "For just as the body is one and has many members and all the members of the body, though many are one body, so it is with Christ."

The Revised Standard is a bad translation. Darby, King James and many of the other translations are the better translations. Actually the translation is, "*so is the Christ.*" Now when I say that, we are not Christ divinity, but Paul does say that the members gathered together, joined together are Christ. When I say that, what I want us to understand about that is the privilege that God has given to us that He would look at His body, the small expression of His body in this room, the larger expression throughout the earth, throughout the ages, the saints gathered together, God says, "That is Christ; you are the representatives of Christ. You are not Christ Himself; you are not the divinity, but I so identify with you, I so impart unto you that I say, 'You are Christ.'"

When we gather together, let us not come as individuals, let us not come as just a stone here or a stone there as we studied recently, but we are something in God's eyes that is so wonderful. As we know, Jesus, the Son of God is the most precious thing to the Father, and for Him to say that the body together is Christ, there is a great mystery there, and of course it is the only place it is mentioned. So as many great men have said, "Don't ever build a theology on one verse." But I am just saying to some, "It really seems what a privilege God has given to us."

And if that is not enough, there are a couple of other verses I want to read in the Gospel of John chapter 10. Jesus is at the Feast of Dedication three months before His crucifixion and the Jews take up rocks, stones to kill Him, to murder Him.

John 10:33: "The Jews answered Him, 'We stone You for no good work, but we stone You for blasphemy because You being a Man make yourself God.' Jesus answered them, 'Is it not written in your law, "I said, You are gods?" If God called them gods to whom the Word of God came, and Scripture cannot be broken, do you say of Him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, "You are blaspheming" because I said, I am the Son of God?"

It seems to say through the Scriptures that we are brought to a position of being gods with a small 'g'. I have no idea what that means in the ages to come. I have no idea what that looks like. All I know is that the Word of God says that God said to the saints of old, "You are gods." Again, I am not going to even speculate on it except to remind us of what Paul told us in I Corinthians chapters 5 and 6 that right now as we sit here on this earth, Paul said, "You are not in a position, brothers and sisters, to judge the world." Remember there was an immoral Christian man that was among them and Paul had to deal with him. The Corinthians mistook what Paul said, and they thought to themselves, "Well that means we cannot fellowship nor can we deal with any immoral people. Even in the world we cannot deal with them. That is immorality; we cannot touch it." Paul said, "Corinthians, you are ridiculous." He is saying, "I am not telling you about the world; I am saying that you are to judge things that are in the church right now. If there is an immoral person in your midst, then you are given the authority and the position to judge that person but not the world. God is judging the world; you are not to be the judge. But in the world, in time to come, do you not know that you are to judge the world? Do you not know that you are to judge angels?" I think that is the aspect of being in a position of being gods, of being judges of worlds to come. I have no idea what that means or what that is going to look like, but we are to judge even the angels. And if we had any conception of what angels are we would fall down and say, "We are unworthy servants, Lord."

We were singing a hymn a few months ago, and there was something in the hymn that talked about angels. Suddenly I had this thought of the angels. Sometimes we have an image of angels being like cherubim, kind of fat little babies with wings that are pictured sometimes. I think there are probably beings that are like that, sweet and gentle, every child has their angel in heaven, and I do not dismiss that. But when we talk about another form of angels, they do not care a hoot about us. All they are concerned about is the purpose of God, and that is what they are going to accomplish. They do not know anything about grace or mercy which have been given to us. But if God commands them to complete His purpose on the earth, they will come and do that to men regardless of who they might be. God has to protect us from these angels. These are mighty beings who live for one reason, to accomplish the purpose of God. So let us fear the angels. So if that is the angels, who is our God that is the God of these angels? We should come before the Lord and be so thankful and so grateful for the position that He has given to us and the recognition that He has laid upon us.

Gentiles Brought Into the Kingdom

One last thing that I will say and this is found in Romans 11 which is an illustration that Paul uses of the olive tree. It is something that we have really lost the sense of as Christians of what it is for Gentiles to be brought into the kingdom. I have no idea what that really means. This was given to the Jews as their inheritance. And You are going to bring Gentiles into that!? I think the first generation of Christians really understood it and appreciated that as Gentiles they were brought into the kingdom. They so appreciated what the Lord had done for them in bringing them into the Commonwealth of Heaven and all the inheritance that was there for us. But we almost think that the church was meant for people like us. So Paul warns us as Gentiles that have been grafted into that olive tree. First of all he says, "You guys are a bunch of wild olive branches. The only fruit that is ever going to come from you naturally is these hard little things that are not good for anything—not for food nor anything else. You are wild olive branches that have been grafted into the tree. The natural branches, the Jews, have been plucked away that you might be grafted in." He said, "Listen, Gentile Christians, remember, do not boast because you are grafted in and the Jews have been cast away. Do not become proud about these things. There is no place for you to be proud about these things. Always take note of the kindness of God to you that you have been grafted in."

In this I just want us to remember that we should always have this attitude of being just unworthy servants. We do not deserve any of this. We are just unworthy Gentile servants that have been brought into something that is glorious and magnificent. What a position that He has brought us into, not only to be children but to be brought in as sons and daughters of God. But from God's perspective He says to us, "Well done thou good and faithful servants, sit at the table, and I will serve you as saints." What a dichotomy!

There was a hymn that was written back in the 1970's, and it is not in our song book. It speaks of this to me.

Verse 1: O welcome all ye noble saints of old,

As now before your very eyes unfold

The wonders all so long ago foretold,

Refrain:

God and man at table are sat down,

God and man at table are sat down,

Verse 3:

Beggars, lame and harlots also here,

Repentant publicans drawing near,

Wayward sons come home without a fear.

God and man at table are sat down,

God and man at table are sat down.

Wow! What a marvelous, marvelous inheritance God has given to us. I hope that we have not seen things about God today, but that we have experienced God today that you know what has been given to you as a saint, and there is a burning desire to get on with the Lord.

Oh Lord, just make me more and more of that saint. Lord, thank You that You have dealt with me as that sinner, that flesh, the flesh is sin.

Father, thank You as Brother Nee said that it is no longer a matter of prayer and asking and longing for something but that it is now a matter of praise. You have brought us into this place, this position. Oh Lord, may it be that as we face our flesh later today, I think of the young people maybe going out to witness today in the park and how self-conscious many of them will be. How awkward they will feel. I have been there, but Lord, these brothers and sisters would just find themselves in You being Your representatives today, dead to all that they feel. Lord, that in our days to come and because I have said this I am going to face things that probably You are going to bring home to me, but Lord I say thank You, that Lord, what a marvelous inheritance that You have in Your saints. Thank You that You made all of us saints before You. In Jesus' name. Amen.