

Jesus' Present Ministry
Where is Jesus now?

This morning we begin a sermon series on “Jesus’ Present Ministry.” The gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) talk about what Jesus **did** while on earth; He was born, lived a sinless life, taught about the Kingdom, performed miracles, was crucified, was raised on the third day, and appeared to His disciples over the next 40 days. The gospels talk about what Jesus **did**. But the rest of the New Testament also talks about what Jesus **is doing** now. That is the topic of this sermon series: Jesus’ Present Ministry.

Today we are simply going to answer the question, “Where is Jesus now?” There are a number of valid ways to answer that question (He is in heaven, He dwells within the church, etc.). But perhaps the most precise answer given in the New Testament is. . . spoiler alert. . . “seated at the right hand of God.” For example, we read in Colossians 3:1. . .

Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

Colossians 3:1 (NASB)

Today we are going to discuss the significance of Jesus being seated at the right hand of God. If you’ve never studied and pondered this topic, you might be wondering, “Why does this even matter?” Well, it matters because Jesus being seated at the right hand of God is **a spiritual reality that affects every area of our discipleship**. In Colossians 3:1, for example, if you don’t know the significance of Christ being seated at the right hand of God, you won’t understand how you (as a believer) “have been raised up with Christ,” and the idea of “seeking the things above” will be nothing more than a vague religious idea. In other words, our study today could actually fuel our faith in a very practical way.

Throughout the New Testament specific areas of our discipleship are linked to the spiritual reality that Jesus is seated at the right hand of God. . . Because Jesus has been raised up and seated at God’s right hand. . .

- * . . . you can have confidence/boldness in prayer.
- * . . . you can have confidence in the spiritual battle.
- * . . . you can persevere like Jesus did.
- * . . . you can keep seeking the things above.

In other words, understanding that Jesus is seated at God’s right hand gives definition and nuance to our walks with Jesus.

Today I’m not going to challenge you to do anything other than **believe**. I am going to challenge you to believe that **Jesus really has been raised up and is seated at the right hand of God**. When I say “believe,” I am talking about a deep, heart-level confidence that this really is true (as opposed to being a nice spiritual idea).

We're going to trace "the right hand of God" through both the Old and New Testaments, trying to understand its significance in a way that fuels our faith.

The Old Testament Background: References to God's "right hand" (Exodus 15:6, 12; Psalm 16:11; Psalm 17:7; Psalm 18:25; Psalm 48:10; Psalm 110:1, etc.)

I almost feel the need to apologize to those of you who are left handed (apparently around 10% of humans). But in the ancient world, since the vast majority of people were right handed, the right hand was associated with strength, competence, and confidence. Even today refer to their "right hand man" as someone they can count on. I asked a left-handed friend about this, he said it's no big deal. . . hope that's the case for you.

Throughout the Old Testament we find dozens of references to God's "right hand." Of course God the Father doesn't have a body with arms and legs, hands and feet; so a reference to God's right hand is a metaphor or image that communicated something about Him. The better we understand this imagery, the more we'll appreciate the reality of Jesus being seated "at the right hand of God."

Let's consider just a few OT references to get a sense of the connotations that might have been in the minds of first-century believers when they were told that Jesus is now at the right hand of God. In Exodus 15 Moses refers to God's right hand twice. The previous chapter records how God delivered the children of Israel from slavery in Egypt. God parted the Red Sea, and the Jewish nation walked through on dry land. When Pharaoh's army chased after them, the Lord caused the waters to flow back over them. Moses composed a song to commemorate God's deliverance. Twice in this song of deliverance Moses mentions God's right hand:

4 "Pharaoh's chariots and his army
He has cast into the sea;
And the choicest of his officers
are drowned in the Red Sea.
5 "The deeps cover them;
They went down into the depths like a stone.
6 "Your right hand, O Lord, is majestic in power,
Your right hand, O Lord, shatters the enemy.

God's right hand symbolized His power and majesty; it symbolized that He was powerful enough to deliver His people from their enemies. After all, He had authority over the seas! Down in verse 12 (still in Exodus 15), Moses says:

12 "You stretched out Your right hand,
The earth swallowed them.

When God "stretches out His right hand" He is taking decisive action. God's right hand is an instrument of power and (when necessary) judgment. In this case God's right hand is an instrument of deliverance for His people.

But the image of God's right hand has many other connotations. For example, in Psalm 16:11 we read:

11 You will make known to me the path of life;
In Your presence is fullness of joy;
In Your right hand there are pleasures forever.

When David drew near to God and lingered in His presence, he experienced life, joy, and pleasures. If you are a friend of God and draw near to Him, you will find that His right hand dispenses pleasure (sometimes translated "happiness").

We find other references in the Psalms which speak of the right hand of God in this way:

- * the right hand of God is a place of refuge (Psalm 17:7)
- * the right hand of God "upholds me" (Psalm 18:35, 63:8)
- * the right hand of God "is full of righteousness" (Psalm 48:10)
- * God saves with His right hand (Psalm 60:5)

For the psalmists, God's right hand reflects His character and therefore His actions. If all of these things are true, having access to the right hand of God is infinitely valuable, especially when you're desperate and helpless.

Perhaps the pinnacle of references in the Old Testament to God's right hand is found in Psalm 110. There David speaks about his Lord/master being seated at the right hand of YHWH.

1 The Lord says to my Lord:
"Sit at My right hand
Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet."

Two different terms are translated "Lord" in this verse. The first term is YHWH (the personal name for the God of Israel) and the second term is *adonai* (which is the common term for master or lord). David writes that YHWH says to his master/lord, "Sit at My right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for Your feet." This is a prophecy of David's "lord/master" being elevated to YHWH's right hand, the place of honor and power. This was commonly understood to be a Messianic psalm, describing the coming Messiah who would reign on the throne of David forever.

The Old Testament ends without this King/Messiah/Lord coming on the earthly scene and then reigning at YHWH's right hand. Every Davidic king had proven to be flawed and sinful. But the New Testament quickly identifies Jesus as this One. Matthew 1:1 begins:

1 The record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham. . .

As well, the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and said this about her son (Luke 1):

32 "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; 33 and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end."

Statements like this prompt us to read the gospels with anticipation that Jesus is the King who will reign forever at the right hand of God.

Jesus' statement about Himself: ". . .the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the power of God." (Luke 22:63-71)

Jesus had been arrested the night before His crucifixion. We pick up the narrative in Luke 22:63.

63 Now the men who were holding Jesus in custody were mocking Him and beating Him, 64 and they blindfolded Him and were asking Him, saying, "Prophecy, who is the one who hit You?" 65 And they were saying many other things against Him, blaspheming. 66 When it was day, the Council of elders of the people assembled, both chief priests and scribes, and they led Him away to their council chamber, saying, 67 "If You are the Christ, tell us." But He said to them, "If I tell you, you will not believe; 68 and if I ask a question, you will not answer.

In verse 69 Jesus makes this statement:

69 "But from now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God." 70 And they all said, "Are You the Son of God, then?" And He said to them, "Yes, I am." 71 Then they said, "What further need do we have of testimony? For we have heard it ourselves from His own mouth."

If you signed up to receive the reading guide, you got a link to a Bible Project video on the Son of Man. If you watched that video, you may remember that Son of Man was the expression Jesus most commonly used when referring to Himself. If you gave Him a nametag, He would fill it out, "Hello my name is ***the Son of Man***." The expression comes from Daniel 7. There we find recorded Daniel's vision of four great beasts representing four fierce kingdoms opposed to God and His kingdom. After YHWH, the Ancient of Days, subdues these beasts, Daniel sees this:

13 "I kept looking in the night visions,
And behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming,
And He came up to the Ancient of Days
And was presented before Him.

In Jewish thought, if you are the "son of" someone/something, you are part of that group. If you are "son of man" you are a human. On the one hand, this person was "One like a Son of Man"; in other words he was human and had the appearance of a human. On the other hand, we have clues that He was also divine. For starters, He was coming "with the clouds of heaven" - an image associated with divine beings. As well, notice the status given to the Son of Man in the following verses:

14 "And to Him was given dominion,
Glory and a kingdom,
That all the peoples, nations and men of every language
Might serve Him.
His dominion is an everlasting dominion
Which will not pass away;
And His kingdom is one
Which will not be destroyed.

There's a lot in that verse, but notice a couple of things. First, this Son of Man is "served" - a status reserved for God. Second, notice that this Son of Man would be given "everlasting dominion, glory, and a kingdom which will not be destroyed." The description is meant to evoke the promise made to David that one of his descendants would sit on his throne forever (2 Samuel 7:12-13). The Son of Man is also the son of David who would reign forever.

All of this would have been in the minds of the chief priests and scribes who interrogated Jesus. Listen again to the claim made to them in Luke 22:

69 "But from now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God." 70 And they all said, "Are You the Son of God, then?" And He said to them, "Yes, I am." [NIV - "You say that I am."]

Jesus basically made the staggering claim, "I am the Son of Man prophesied in Daniel 7. From now on [after my crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension] I will be seated at the right hand of the power of God. There I will reign eternally." Through the incarnation, Jesus the divine Son of God became the Son of Man (i.e., a human who would reign on the throne of David forever - see Luke 2:32-33). He was fully God and fully man.

Jesus was very clear that after He was crucified and resurrected, He would be seated at the right hand of the power of God. In other words, He would occupy the place of power and authority; he would bring deliverance, protection, blessing, and pleasure (everything we read about the right hand of God in the Old Testament would come through Jesus).

Jesus had told His disciples these things at other times. But they couldn't begin to understand what Jesus meant about reigning in heaven at God's right hand until the Holy Spirit came upon them. Jesus had promised that the Spirit would bring to their remembrance the things He had said and would lead them into all truth (John 14:26, 16:13). The subsequent writings of the apostles and those close to the apostles confirm that Jesus had indeed been exalted and enthroned at God's right hand. Let's consider one such passage (out of many).

The Confirmation of the New Testament: ". . .He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high." (Hebrews 1, Acts 2:34-36, Ephesians 1:20, etc.)

The book of Hebrews explains Jesus' present ministry at the right hand of God more fully than any book in the New Testament. The author gives this description of Jesus in the first four verses of chapter 1.

1 God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, 2 in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.

Throughout the history of Israel, God spoke "in many portions and in many ways." He spoke in piecemeal fashion (vs. giving one comprehensive message all at one time). And He spoke in a wide variety of different ways. By contrast, in these last days God has spoken to us "in His Son" - literally "in **a** Son." This Son is a divine, uncreated being. Notice how the author continues:

3 And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, 4 having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they.

This Son is Jesus who "made purification of sins" by dying on the cross. Whereas the blood of animals cannot cleanse humans from the defilement of sin, the blood of a sinless human can. The Son Himself was that sacrifice that accomplished this purification of our sins.

"When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high." The fact that the Son is "**seated**" means that His work is completed. The fact that He is "**seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high**" means that He is indeed the Messiah of Psalm 110:1 and the Son of Man of Daniel 7.

Down in verse 13 Psalm 110:1 is quoted more fully:

13 But to which of the angels has He ever said, "Sit at My right hand,
Until I make Your enemies
A footstool for Your feet"?

The answer, of course, is "none of the angels." This status is reserved for the unique Son of God, Jesus Christ.

As I mentioned earlier, the main challenge I bring you this morning is to believe that **Jesus really has been raised up and is seated at the right hand of God**. Imagine how vibrant your walk with God would be if you had a deep, heart-level confidence that this really is true.

Honestly, my perception is that a great deal of American Christianity involves "staying positive" (which is better than staying negative) and/or getting pumped up (which is better than being deflated). But the Scriptures speak about spiritual realities that you

and I are supposed to believe and experience as if our life counted on it (because it does).

Next week we're going to talk about how Jesus being seated at the right hand of God should affect our praying. Instead of half-hearted, timid praying, we can now come boldly before the throne of grace because Jesus is seated at God's right hand and He's **for us**. He is actually there interceding for us. If we believe this, it changes our praying.

The following week we're going to talk about how Jesus being seated at the right hand of God should affect the way we approach the spiritual battles we face. One option is to ignore the battle and pretend like there aren't evil spiritual being who want to distract and destroy us. Another option is to withdraw from the battle and play it safe. The there is another option because Jesus - the One who calls us brothers and sisters - is seated at God's right hand far above every evil spiritual being. Because we are raised up and seated with Him, we can be confident in the spiritual battle because in Him we are fighting from a place of victory. After all, Jesus said "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth."

God expects us to cling to this spiritual reality by faith and let it inform the way we walk with Him.