

**Online in Heaven – Ascended with Christ
Ephesians 2:4-7, John 14:4-14**

Brothers and sisters, back in the middle of March when we entered into this period of social distancing and isolation as the Coronavirus lock-down started, everything changed quickly and drastically.

Suddenly there were no more concerts, pub-nights, sporting events, movie-theaters shut down, classes were cancelled, the gyms were closed and we could no longer gather together to see our extended families and friends or even gather with our fellow Christians for prayer and worship.

And the list of significant social events and celebrations that has been affected by this continues to grow – first it was Good Friday and Easter Sunday services, then came the decision to cancel Stampede this summer.

When May rolled around men panicked, caught off guard because school closures meant their kids hadn't made any special crafts to take home as a reminder to celebrate

Mother's Day – and going out for Brunch at the last minute wasn't an option.

And this month all the familiar rites of passage and celebrations for those who are graduating and finishing school this June have been put on hold.

However... just because everything had to shut down doesn't mean that everything stopped.

New ways of celebrating graduations have emerged, like driving down main street in a graduation parade, and thanks to Skip-the-Dishes and Take out services Mother's Day brunch was delivered this year. New movies are being released via video on demand services, sports networks are reliving the glory days with past seasons, and thanks to our communications technology many people are able to work from home.

And we're using social media to stay connected with our family and friends and we've learned how to use video

streaming and online meeting platforms like Zoom and Go-to-Meeting to gather together online and worship with our fellow Christians.

And while we are making good progress in our re-opening plans here in AB, which will allow us to engage in a spectacularly extravagant celebration of Father's Day - and go shopping **in-person** for socks and ties, we're not quite ready to move offline completely and so I suspect many people will be celebrating Father's Day online in some way – just as we are still gathering to be together online for worship.

And meeting online has become a regular part of our everyday lives these days – its not just for guys who play video games anymore. Our kids are attending classes and doing music lessons online, we have work meetings online, maybe we've had to attend a funeral or a wedding online, and of course for everyone that is here this morning – we have been holding our corporate worship services online for the past three months.

And the really cool thing about meeting online is how we are all in separate places geographically – you are all are your homes this morning across Calgary, and other places in Canada or the U.S. or even all the way over in Africa – but yet we are all here together with each other. It's like being in two places at once – or being able to have a taste of what its like to be at Valleyview for worship service transported into your home.

And it's the whole meeting on-line experience that I want to draw on this morning for our object lesson, because like I mentioned last week the experiences that have become common for us as we go through this pandemic together, can serve as a poignant analogies that give us greater a understanding and insight into other issues which we may struggle to comprehend.

And the truth is that there are many aspects about our relationship and connection to our heavenly Father that we find difficult to grasp or we miss the significance of – and

there's nothing quite like the right analogy to help open that up for us so we understand it better...

And the experience of meeting online is the perfect analogy to explain how we are seated in heaven with Jesus and how this helps us connect to our heavenly Father.

And I wonder – if such technology had existed while Jesus was on earth – if He would have used it to help explain to Thomas, Philip and the rest of the disciples what it meant when He told them that He was going to go away to the Father.

When Thomas says, *“Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?”*

Jesus could have maybe said something like *“look – you know how you need to receive a link in your email and you have to click on it in order to connect to an online meeting? And if you don't have the link – or you don't have the right link, you just can't connect and be a part of the online meeting... right?”*

And the disciples would be like – *“oh right, like that time Peter forgot to forward the email with the meeting link to James and John and they couldn't connect to the online meeting where you taught us about how we should pray”*

And then Jesus would go – *“exactly, well just think of ME as a kind of link that enables you to connect and meet with the Father. I am the way... thus you KNOW the WAY to where I am going!”*

And then Philip would respond by saying *“Well Jesus – its not that we are insisting that we have to go were you are going because we think so highly of ourselves, or at least not all of us do...Peter... we just want to see God the Father – that will be enough for us – just a glimpse of God.”*

And again Jesus could say *“Philp... look at ME – do you know how when we meet online and the reality is that all you have where you are is just a device with a screen and speakers, but yet when you are looking at the device you can see ME on the screen, and so you can say that you have seen ME and you can also hear what I'm saying?”*

And Philip would be like *“Uh-huh...”*

And Jesus would continue and say “Well just think of ME as being like a lap-top or a smartphone or a tablet that allows you to see the Father – if you have seen ME, then you have seen God the Father! And just like our devices are connected to each other so that we can see each other – I’m connected to God the Father – He is in Me and I am in Him – and its like when you hear me speaking, you’re hearing God speak. Where do you think I get all my amazing teaching from and how I performed all those miracles?? Philip – if you see and hear ME – you see and hear God the Father, I’m your laptop that you are using to see God”

And hopefully through this analogy of online meetings the disciples would have gained a deeper understanding into who Jesus really was – and maybe we have as well.

But this deeper understanding of who Jesus is raises an important question for us... Why do we need Jesus in order to

see God? Why is Jesus THE way to God – and the truth and the life??

Well, think about why we currently we need a laptop or a tablet or a phone and a link in order to meet together online... its because we are separated from each other, we must stay apart from each other because of the coronavirus.

And brothers and sisters in the same way right now we are separated... from God the Father, and we are forced to stay apart from God because of the sin virus.

You see brothers and sisters – its helpful and important for us to know that not only is our sin offensive to God, but it puts us in danger with God because God in His very nature is antithetical to what sin is - and if you missed the first sermon in this series on the Sin Virus you might want to go back and read that online.

But let me just explain that if there was not a separation between God and humanity because of sin, if God had stayed

close to us – like He was with Adam and Eve in the Garden before they sinned, the result would be like when our immune system goes into full on attack mode because of a virus and in doing so it also attacks us and destroys us as well – doctors call this a cytokine storm, and the reality of how God is antithetical to sin in this same way is why He says to Moses in Exodus 33:20 that *“no man may see my face and live”*

So, we are separated from God right now because of the sin virus and we need something that still allows us to be able to connect with God the Father in spite of that separation – and this is what Jesus is explaining to his disciples happens **through** Him.

Now we might be wondering why we would want to connect with God or see God if it is dangerous for us to do so because of our sin – and there’s a bit of irony in the answer that its because we need God since He is the source of our life, and then also knowing that he would be the cause of our destruction.

And there is also quite a bit of irony in the fact that in our current situation of being separated from God we experience ourselves as being alive – at least in the biological sense – but so many people, including ourselves, have no idea that being separated from God means that we are spiritually dead.

Are you following me?

In fact, if we didn’t have the scriptures spell it out for us explicitly like Paul does in Ephesians 2:1 we wouldn’t even be aware of it. The worst consequence of being dead is not knowing that you are dead!

Instead –we’re just thinking we’re alive as we go about our daily business as Paul says in vs 3 *“gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts”*

It’s almost like the sin-virus is what is really alive in us, and since we are spiritually dead we are totally unaware that this virus is living vicariously through us – we think that it’s life... is

actually our own life... and that it is real life – but its not, we’re deceived.

The truth is that we are actually spiritually dead because of the separation from God – and Paul echoes the reality that if we were too close to God in this state we would be in grave danger, he says *“by nature (because of our sinful nature) we were objects of wrath”*

And brothers and sisters – I pray that each and every one of you would be aware of this reality in your life, that you would come to know it to be true and you would be able to see it and that you would be convicted of it.

Because then you are ready for the good news brothers and sisters! Because of how Jesus connects us to God – Paul can confidently say in vs. 4-5 *“But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made **us alive with Christ** even when we were dead in transgressions!”*

This is why we say put your faith and trust and believe in Jesus Christ, because Jesus is the only true and reliable connection with God and through Him we are forgiven of sin and we receive the spiritual life that we need to overcome sin.

And here’s the amazing part brothers and sisters – being made spiritually alive in Jesus Christ changes what biological death means for us. Paul is hinting at this when he says in vs. 6 that *“God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus”*

Now... let’s just pause for a second, before we go deeper into this verse and we answer the question of how biological death changes for us.

Let’s go back to Jesus explaining to his disciples how if they have seen Him they have seen the Father and He is the means by which they connect to the Father – like how we use a tablet for an online meeting. That’s a great analogy I think – but it only works if Jesus is around right?

And this whole conversation got started because Jesus had told the disciples that he was going to leave them. So, how are the disciples going to connect to the Father if Jesus is not with them anymore? Or to go back to our analogy – how would you connect to an online meeting if you didn't have a link or a device to use?

Well to stick with the analogy – Jesus is going to give the disciples a major technology upgrade when He returns to the Father, and that's the angle I want us to be thinking about as we consider what is going on in Eph 2:6 with John 14 as a background.

You see when Jesus returns to the Father and sends the Holy Spirit upon the disciples at Pentecost its like a major technology shift has occurred where we go from having to use devices to connect to an online meeting to being able to plug ourselves into the Matrix and enter into a virtual reality. It's not like we're connected with someone by looking at some tiny little picture on a screen – the Holy Spirit connects us to Christ and puts us in Christ like being in a virtual reality.

And we need to understand whatever benefits we get from Jesus, whether it is forgiveness, or being made alive, or being able to pray to God – its all because the Holy Spirit has hooked us up to Jesus and immersed us in Him in this way.

That's why Jesus says in John 14:19-20 *"Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you."*

Notice how its expanded from *"I am in my Father and the Father is in me"* and now it also includes us? That's because through the Holy Spirit we are now directly linked into to Jesus like virtual reality, so wherever Jesus is we are there as well – even though we are still here.

Imagine what it would be like if we could have a technology upgrade from using Go-to-Meeting to Virtual church, where we could immerse ourselves so that we could be with each

other in a more realistic and 3-dimensional way... well that is what it is like to be connected to Jesus through the Holy Spirit.

Now – we also need to know that this connection with Jesus is retroactive.

You may remember how the series of events played out after Jesus told his disciples he was going to leave them. Later that night they went out to the Mount of Olives, Judas betrayed Jesus and had Him arrested, the disciples fled, Jesus is tried and handed over to Pontius Pilate and this all leads to His death on the cross...

And then Jesus doesn't just come back to life – He's resurrected, which means He's defeated death – He is now immortal, and then after He reveals Himself to the disciples and reminds them to wait in Jerusalem for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit – he commissions them to make disciples of all nations – and then He ascends into Heaven to return to the Father... and then He sends the Holy Spirit.

And as I said the Holy Spirit links us to Jesus retroactively - so that when God raised Jesus from the dead, as Paul says in Eph 2:6 we were raised from the dead... and because we are included in Jesus' resurrection biological death is now different for us.

Biological death is no longer the consequence of sin – instead it becomes the means by which we transition from a virtual reality connection to Christ in this life into our glorified existence with Him in the next, in the new heavens and the new earth.

This is why Paul writes to us in 1 Corinthians 15:42-44 *“So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual (glorified) body.”*

Brothers and sisters – do not fear death, you are in Christ – you have been raised with Him! Death is different for us now.

And death is also not the point when we finally get to go to Heaven to be with God – which might sound a bit contrary to us – but let us read again the second part of Eph 2:6 *“and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus!”*

Brothers and sisters because of our virtual reality connection with Jesus Christ - when He was seated at the right hand of God the Father – we were also seated there with Him. So in this way brothers and sisters... we are already in heaven in the very presence of the Father!

Now it may be through our Holy Spirit virtual reality connection – but it is still a true reality for us none the less and one that ought to be a far greater part of our everyday lives... much in the same way as meeting online is for us right now.

Brothers and sisters its like we can say that we are online in heaven – we are in two places at once, we get the experience of being in the presence of God, and the authority that comes from being seated at His right hand (not even the angels or

the mightiest living creatures in heaven have that privilege!) we get to experience a taste of what that is like being downloaded to us – right into our everyday lives.

So brothers and sisters – it has to make you wonder if Jesus was thinking about this, if he already had this in mind when He taught his disciples – and us – to pray *“your will be done and your kingdom come on earth... as it is in heaven!”*

Now what do we do with this? Well brothers and sisters, by using the online meeting analogy I not only hope that the Holy Spirit will give you greater understanding of these spiritual realities and be able to recognize them in your life and have your faith strengthened by them – but that you will be motivated to spend more time online in heaven.

In the same way that being online has become a much great part of our lives right now we can spend more time online in heaven.

First way to do that is to be online in Faithbook everyday – not Facebook, or other social media but Faithbook – the bible,

scripture – which makes the claim for itself that its source is God) and its purpose is to make us wise for salvation in Christ (2 Timothy 3:16) and indeed it testifies about Christ (John 5:39)

We all know how spending time online with Facebook and other social media affects us - it will work the same way if we spend more time in the scripture – online in heaven through Christ whom the scriptures point to.

The second way to do this is through prayer and praise – spend more time in prayer, spend more time praising God for who He is and what He has done and thanking Him for all His blessings... you will be online in heaven joining in with the worship that is always going on there.

And thirdly, exercise your heavenly authority – spend time online in heaven by living your day to day life as an ambassador for Christ – you are in two places at the same time and you are authorized to represent heaven to earth.

And finally – go online in heaven by literally going online to meet with other Christians to be the Body of Christ – we had a whole sermon series in May about how we actually need to be together in some way – and right now it is through being online together that we are connecting and being connected together with Christ in Heaven as His body on earth.

So brothers and sisters – may the Holy Spirit teach us through these circumstances and experiences, the deeper truths and spiritual realities that we need to know and respond to.

As we worship online may it give us greater insight into how we are connected to God in Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Heavenly Father, your kingdom come your will be done on earth... as it is in heaven. Amen