

Choosing Life in a World Obsessed with Death

There's a lot of bad news out in the world. You see it multiple times a day on the TV, your social media news feed, on the radio – everywhere you look – people are in despair. From the wars in Ukraine and Gaza, rising suicide rates, all the divisive politics, concerns about global warming, to the quiet loneliness of the hyper-connected world. It can become easy for us to slip into this feeling that we're more dead than alive.

That's why we look to the Bible to find radical hope. We're going to look at a passage this morning that tells us God has made us alive with Christ. That's important. If you love and follow Jesus – or want to love and follow Him – that's your spiritual reality. Right now, God has made you alive with Christ. In Colossians 2:6-19, Paul explains to us what it means to really be alive – to be rooted in Christ, free from legalism, and victorious over sin and death. So let's look at this together this morning. If you have your Bible or Bible app handy, turn to Col. 2:6-19. **Read Col. 2:6-19.**

Rooted and Built Up in Christ

“So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in Him, rooted and built up in Him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness,” (Col. 2:6-7). Our passage today opens with a reminder from Paul. We've received Christ – now we must live in Him. You all know what a checklist is. When I was in CLM Academy, and even as I go through Course of Study, I find myself checking off classes. “Yep, did that, check.”

We might be tempted to think Paul's given us a checklist here. “Received Christ, live in Him, check.” It's a lot more complex than being a spiritual checklist though. It's a call to on-going relationship with God. Paul uses some pretty strong imagery. “Rooted,” like a tree; “Built up,” like a tower; “Strengthened,” like a weight lifter who grows stronger with training.

There are a lot of people in the world today living disconnected lives. They're rootless. Social media has created shallow interactions, and now AI is generating fake medical studies. Paul urges us to stay deeply rooted in Christ, not swayed by cultural trends or temporary emotions. A rooted tree can withstand storms. A well-built house stands secure. A strong body can endure hardship.

Paul adds that we're to be “overflowing with thankfulness.” Gratitude is the fruit of a heart that knows it is alive in Christ. So friends, this morning, while we're here in the quiet, I want you to ask yourself, and be brutally honest with yourself – “Am I truly living in Christ, or am I just coasting through my faith?”

Beware of Empty Philosophy

Notice what he tells us next. “See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental

spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ,” (verse 8). Paul’s sounding an alarm here for us. Not every idea that sounds wise leads to life. In fact, some teachings are spiritual traps – they’re “hollow,” and “deceptive.”

There are a lot of modern day examples of this. There’s a famous pastor in Texas who preaches on TV from a football stadium. He talks a lot about what’s called the “prosperity gospel.” What that is boils down to the idea that God’s blessing equals material wealth. What happens to someone who believes that idea when the stock market crashes and they lose everything?

You can go to any book store and find self-help books. They’re secular, not Bible based, and they promise you that you can have meaning apart from God. Friends, as followers of Jesus Christ, our fullest understanding of ourselves comes through understanding how God views us, through the lens of Holy Scripture. If we don’t have Jesus, we’re a lost cause. You have to believe in Him if you have any hope of life, salvation, redemption – whatever you want to call it.

And then of course, there are ideologies out there that deny the need for repentance, or that deny the reality of sin. Paul’s warning is as relevant today as it was when he first wrote it nearly 2,000 years ago. We mustn’t trade the truth of Christ for the slogans of the world – no matter how viral or inspiring they seem. Christ isn’t just a piece of wisdom – He’s the Source of all truth.

Fullness in Christ

Paul goes on, “For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the Head over every power and authority,” (verses 9-10). What Paul’s telling us and everyone else here is that Jesus is God. He’s fully God, fully Human, and we are filled through Him. In Jesus, we are complete human beings.

A lot of people today feel empty. They’re emotionally empty, spiritually empty, relationally empty. And they don’t know how to fix it. So some turn to substances. Others to distractions. But Paul tells us that our fullness comes in Jesus Christ. Nothing else fills the God-shaped space lacking in the human soul except Jesus.

Paul adds, “Christ is Head over every power and authority.” That includes oppressive governments – even places like North Korea, where people are killed for being Christians. It includes spiritual darkness, personal addictions, and corrupt systems. I think I told you the story before of talking with someone who was addicted to alcohol. He couldn’t leave it alone, and said he turned to it because he saw demons. After a description of the frightfulness of these demons, I brought up that Jesus is King of kings, and Lord of lords – He has power over the demons – and pointed out that the biggest demon this friend had to wrestle with was turning away from the tall boy in his hand.

Sometimes people don’t like hearing the truth. Here’s the good news about this, though. We aren’t just surviving. If you’re wrestling with some power or authority, you shouldn’t be just surviving. Because you are filled – we’re filled – with the power and presence of the risen Christ!

A New Identity

Next Paul tells us:

In Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through your faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead, (verses 11-12).

Some of the Colossians were previously Jews before becoming Christians. Circumcision was a mark of identity for the Jewish people. It was a physical reminder to them that they were God's people. Paul explains that Christ brings a new kind of identity – not based on ethnicity, law, or human activities – but on the transformation of the heart.

This identity – our identity as Christians – is sealed in baptism. Baptism reminds us of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. When we are baptized, we die to sin and are raised to a new life with Jesus. It's not just a Church ritual – it's a public statement by the person being baptized – in the case of adults, or by the parents of a child in the case of infants – that they belong to Christ now. And when we have those kids who get baptized as infants, they go through a process of confirmation once they get to junior high school age, so they can fully take possession of their faith. In the same way, our new identity in Jesus Christ marks us as alive – not because of anything we have done – but because we have been raised from death with Him. This is the heart of the Gospel. We were dead. But now, we live!

God Made You Alive

Notice what Paul tells us next, "When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins," (verse 13). Friends, I hope you know that in the core of your being today – that God made you alive. Notice the tense – "you were dead" – not just sick. Not struggling. Dead. And it's in the past. But God didn't leave us there. He didn't wait for us to clean up our lives.

At just the right time, He intervened. He sent Jesus to the cross, and three days later, rose Him to life again. And in Jesus' resurrection, we have the promise of our own resurrection. God resurrects us, too. Not physically yet, but He already has spiritually. And He forgave ALL our sins.

In this world, where people try to "find themselves," reinvent themselves, or earn acceptance, Paul shows us something really important. Our life doesn't begin when we figure it out. Our life begins when Christ raises us from death to life.

The Canceled Record

What we find next in the epistle lesson is a courtroom image. Paul says, "having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; He has taken it away, nailing it to the cross," (verse 14). Now pay

attention here. Our sins formed a legal document against us in Heaven. Like a long rap sheet. But Jesus didn't just forgive us and leave the record intact.

He canceled it. How? He took it upon Himself, nailed it to the cross, and from the cross in John 19:30, Christ declared: "Tetelestai." That's a Greek word – "It is finished" – or "Paid in full." It's one of the most beautiful words in the Gospel, in my opinion. To think that God wrapped in human skin would take the nails for my sin – all the stuff I've ever done and will ever do – wow! He's amazing! And He does it for you, too!

Our culture is obsessed with "canceling" others. You know, if someone mistreats you, or says something you don't like, you write them off. That's what "cancel culture" is, and I'm guilty of it, too. What we find here in the Bible is that Jesus cancels sin – not people. In another place, Paul tells us, "There is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus, (Rom. 8:1). If God through Jesus Christ crucified and resurrected has canceled our debt, why do we so often keep living like we still owe it?

Victory Over Evil

Paul goes on, "And having disarmed the powers and authorities, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross," (Col. 2:15). On the day Jesus was crucified, the cross looked like defeat. I mean, His disciples all ran off and hid. But it turned out to be a victory parade. Jesus disarmed Satan, sin, and death. He didn't just win quietly. He triumphed publicly.

This verse is especially relevant today, in a time when we see rising violence, global injustice, and spiritual confusion. Jesus' victory on the cross isn't just some theoretical concept. It's the real deal. It's the defining Truth of the universe. God loved us so much that He sent His own Son so anyone who believed in Him wouldn't die, but have eternal life (John 3:16, paraphrased). That's us today, friends! We have much to be thankful for! We don't have to fight for victory, we don't have to try to earn our way into Heaven by doing as many good deeds as possible – other religions think that way – Jesus already won the victory. And we're living because of it!

Paul writes in another passage that we're more than conquerors because of Jesus (Rom. 8:37). If you get a little free time this afternoon, grab your Bible and read Romans 8:18-39. It's powerful stuff! Jesus is the Greatest. Nothing compares to Him!

Shadows Or Substance?

Paul says, "Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ," (Col. 2:16-17). In those days there were a lot of people practicing religious legalism. Like the Pharisees. They had this outer appearance of being holy. They had special rules, diets, calendars that they followed. And Paul was one of them before his conversion.

Paul says these are nothing but shadows. Jesus Christ is the substance. Church, don't ever let anyone guilt you into thinking that following a ritual – or even holding to a particular view on things – makes you somehow more spiritual. True spirituality is found

in relationship with Christ, not in rigid rule-keeping, or sticking to a rigid way of seeing things. A classic example regarding this from American History is slavery.

There were Christians in the North who were opposed to slavery, because of the brutal treatment of Black Americans. And there were Christians in the South who viewed slavery in a positive light because they believed based on how they interpreted the Scriptures, that it was a-okay to keep people in slavery because of the color of their skin. We have hot button issues today that the Church wrestles with, and sometimes splits over – it's nothing new. What we need to keep in mind is that because we have relationship with Christ, it doesn't mean that we throw out discipline and rules – what it does mean is that grace is the foundation – not guilt.

Holding Fast to Christ

Our lesson today wraps up with Paul saying:

Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you. Such a person also goes into great detail about what they have seen; they are puffed up with idle notions by their unspiritual mind. They have lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow, (verses 18-19).

Some in the Colossian church were really impressed by mystical experiences and harsh disciplines. In a nutshell, Paul tells them, "Don't be fooled." Spiritual elitism leads people away from Jesus Christ. True growth comes from staying connected to Jesus, the Head of the Body. It's like the old parable Jesus told about the vine and the branches. He's the vine, we're the branches – we have to stay plugged into Him.

Over the years, we've seen a lot of famous Christian leaders fall – not because of lack of knowledge, but because they lost connection to Christ. They became celebrities instead of servants. I think of that one pastor, another televangelist, who during COVID, was interviewed and asked about flying around on his private jet, and he got mad and smacked the lady who asked him the question. How many people do you suppose he could have reached for the Gospel if he flew on a standard airline? He could have given his testimony to people he didn't know – and may have brought someone to Christ. Instead, he wanted to travel alone on his private jet. We have to stay humble, stay rooted, and stay alive in Christ.

Choosing the Living Christ

This year the headlines feel heavy. Wars, climate crises, political upheaval – it's tempting for us to shut down emotionally and spiritually. But the message of Colossians 2 is "Don't let death define you. Christ has made you alive!" So here are a few ways we can live this out, in practical terms.

First, live rooted. Spend time daily in God's word and prayer – regular Scripture reading and prayer is life-giving soil. Second, live free. Don't carry the burden of past sins. They've been nailed to the cross! Another way is to live aware. Be alert to false

teachings – we’re seeing them pop up, literally, all around Sidney – and also spiritual fads, and cultural idols. No matter how good a president may be, he – or she – cannot save a single soul. Only Jesus Christ can do that. We should also live thankful. Gratitude is proof that we know we’ve been rescued. And finally, we need to live connected. Stay united with the body of Christ – the Church – because through it, we grow together.

Paul wrote to people just like you and me, who had received Christ, and he tells them to live in Him. Now, I hate to say this, but feel we need a little disclaimer before we wrap things up this morning. Friends, it is possible to believe in Jesus, but live like you’re still dead. There’s a lot of people out there, who think they’re following Jesus. But they’re following a white-washed, cultural friendly, flag-wrapped version of Jesus. A Jesus that glorifies America is not the Jesus of the Bible. So don’t let the world, or the devil, squeeze you into this way of thinking. Don’t let your past sins dictate your present hope. Don’t let anyone disqualify you! God has made you alive. Now live that way. The cross was your death certificate – and your resurrection birth certificate.

Prayer: Gracious God, Thank You for making us alive in Jesus Christ. Help us live rooted in Your Truth, full of gratitude, free from guilt, and aware of Your victory. May our lives reflect the fullness we’ve received in Jesus. In His strong name we pray. Amen.