

April 14, 2024

“Christ, Our Life”, from the series, *Jesus Changes Everything*

Colossians 2:20-3:4

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Last Sunday, Jonathan kicked off a short two-week sermon series for us that I hope to follow up on and bring to a conclusion... We’re looking at the apostle Paul’s letter to the Colossians... Last week focused on Chapter 1, and the supremacy of Christ... A soaring passage that leads us to think about the eternal nature of God the Son, His incarnation and perfect humanity in the person of Jesus.

If you remember, Jonathan started by asking the question, *what does it mean to follow Jesus?* And then he introduced us to Christ who is supreme over all things... *Today, I want us to look at... in light of who Jesus is, what kind of life with Jesus have you and I been invited into?*

One of, if not the very first hallmark of Christianity that we have to confront... whether you have been a Christian for a long time, or whether you don’t count yourself as a Christian... the very first hallmark of Christianity we have to confront is that humanity lost God... We lost God through sin... We were created to live with the fullness of God and the presence of God... and because of sin, we lost that fullness... We were not made to be empty... but full. Yet, sin’s presence in the world, passed down through history, to our world, and us individually... has left us unable to recover on our own. It has left humans empty. The result... is that all of humanity lives with this deep desire... An ongoing, tangible frustration... an insatiable need to be filled... to have the emptiness subside with fullness.

I have always been fascinated by excellence... People who have devoted themselves completely to a particular craft, or art form, or sport... People who have reached the very peak of their fields... Think of the world’s greatest violinists... who put in thousands and thousands of hours of practice... Or the great filmmakers... you watch these films and you’re blown away by all that it took to bring them together...

Andre Agassi, my favorite tennis player growing up... famously... would hit 5,000 balls a day. Most of you know my son is a pretty good tennis player, I’ve seen high level tennis training... 5,000 balls a day is insanity.

A few weeks ago, in our Sunday school class, Mike McKeon was sharing about Alex Honnold, the great free-climber who does absolutely extraordinary things... I’m not an adventurer, or an outdoorsman, climber... but I find myself fascinated by mountaineering stories and exploration stories, whether its Everest... or deep-sea explorations... I’m fascinated by the pursuit and the dedication...

But, I’m also fascinated by the results... when people reach the goal... when the desires have been met... when the awards have been won... when the recognition and acclaim has been given... *Does the quest lead to the fulfillment that you thought it would?* And, as you hear the stories of many... you realize – that the answer to that question... is a real mixed-bag.

Who Jesus is... how does it change everything? How does it change the way we think about the emptiness that sin has left in the human condition? And, what kind of life has Jesus invited you into, that answers those questions?

Today, we'll look at Paul's words in Colossians 3, but I also want to take us to two other passages in the Bible that I think, in completely different ways, set us up to better understand the life Jesus has invited you and I into.

Remember, Paul writes this short letter to a rather young church in Colosse... He celebrates the fruit of the gospel that is showing up in their lives... but he also writes to try and combat some of the false teaching that was creeping in- particularly the teaching that was attempting to diminish Christ.

Like a number of places in the New Testament, the early struggle focused on the person and work of Christ- and not adding or subtracting from who he was and what he accomplished.

That's why in the last few verses of chapter 2 here, Paul admonishes the Colossians... If Christ has done all of this, why are you going back to these regulations? Do this, don't do that... Eat this... don't eat that?

He says—the danger is that you THINK you are being wise? You think you're going the extra mile by adding these things to the gospel... But in fact, you're just promoting self-made religion... but these things have no value! In other words, we have been given the supremacy of Christ- the firstborn of all creation who is over ALL things... yet, now you are submitting yourselves to all of these lesser things, because you think you're wise. You have been given EVERYTHING in Christ, yet now... you settle for these petty regulations... This is the human way though... It's a form of trying to fill the lingering emptiness that the presence of sin leaves in us.

In fact, as you read the Bible, it is the recurring theme... almost every story is about the panic and anxiousness that sets in—how humanity tries to fill the void of emptiness... Sin, leads us to try to treat ourselves, our problems in ways that will never address the emptiness that sin leaves behind.

Adam and Eve in the garden... scrambling in panic as they lose the fullness of God... Abraham is so panicked he comes up with all kinds of excuses for himself and Sarah, telling lies about who they are because he can't trust God... Peter, panicked and stressed – betrays Jesus... the emptiness sets in, even though he has experienced the goodness of being close to Jesus and seen him for who he is...

There's no grater example of this than in the greatest story from Israel's history... In Exodus 16, the Israelites have been rescued by the Lord- set free from the bonds of slavery in Egypt... the miracle of the Red Sea parting, the rescue for their enemies... and it all begins so beautifully... There is celebration, there is the song of Moses... there is Miriam, Aaron's sister with her tambourine and all the women dancing... It is the feast of victory and salvation – *"Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously..."*

The next chapter, Exodus 16, tells us that the next month... one month after the rescue from Egypt... the people. the whole congregation... grumbled against Moses and said, *“Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full... for you have brought us into the wilderness to kill us...”*

Do you see what’s happening here? It took one chapter... one month for the panic and stress to set in... All that God has done for them... but the emptiness of sin has crept back in—and it has made them delusional?

What do you remember of the Israelites time in Israel? Do you remember meat and bread to the full? Of course not! I remember slavery, and genocide... yet sin has led them to look back and think—THAT was better than this panic and stress that I’m feeling... this lingering void and emptiness that I will fill with anything! Anything that is familiar that will quell the emptiness that I’m living with... And what does God do for them? He begins to provide daily bread, manna from heaven. And water from a rock. It took one chapter for the deep fears and emptiness to be unmasked. The Fear that God will not be there to fill us... to provide for us....

It was the same fear that overwhelmed Peter in his moment of betrayal, *maybe God won’t care for me... maybe he won’t rescue me...* So, let me take control of this situation... Let me find a way to treat my emptiness.

Paul says this is what the Colossians have been tempted by... False teaching has tempted them to begin to focus on the details of control... what you’re allowed to do, what you’re not allowed to do... It’s grasping for control... but... as NT Wright says, *“If you want to do business with God... you have to get beyond grasping for control.”*

Tess Brigham is a licensed psychotherapist who works primarily with millennials – so late 20s to early 40s – I’ve just made the cut... And she has said that in the last five years of her practice working in this age group- she has noticed an overwhelming dominant theme when it comes to the cluster of problems many millennials keep coming to seek help. They say, *“I have too many choices and I can’t decide what to do. What if I make the wrong choice?”* We might think that choices mean options, and options are good... but in actuality choices mean control... or at least a feigned sense of control. And with overwhelming choices comes panic and stress... again, the constant human fear that God will not actually provide or take care of me.

Life following Christ then... cannot give into the very human condition of panic and stress and need for control... Which is our struggle... That we would celebrate the rescue of Jesus from sin... and then just moments later, give into the panic and stress... the lack of control... and say, *“Would that I would have stayed in my previous life! Would it be that I never met this Jesus.. and be led out into this wilderness to die.”*

Instead, it’s Jesus himself that from the very beginning of his life and ministry, was showing us that He and He alone could truly provide for us and fill us with what we desperately need.

In the very beginning of Gospel of John, and the public life of Jesus, we find ourselves at a wedding. Jesus is there with his disciples and his family... His mother, Mary is there. Weddings are a big deal in our time and culture... They can of course vary in size and scope... There are elaborate weddings, expensive weddings, there are quiet weddings, and small weddings... In the culture of Jesus' time and place... these weddings were feasts that lasted days... They were status symbols and cultural extravaganzas... And at weddings, there is feasting... A lot of feasting...

In fact, in Aramaic the feasting is the same word for drinking... So, there is a lot of "feasting" going on... there is fullness and joy taking place. This is like the Aramaic version of an Irish Pub, or a Southern Family Reunion BBQ picnic...

I'm sure there is A LOT of things that happened at this wedding in Cana... But what is the ONE thing that John tells us about? The ONLY THING we know about this wedding? THEY RAN OUT OF WINE! There are a lot of harsh and scary verses in the Bible... But I'd like to submit that Mary's sentence in John 2, might be the worst... "*They have no wine.*"

Why is this story here? Why is THIS what John tell us? Is it that Jesus is about to do a magic trick? Remember, late John will say... Everything I have written here... is for what? SO THAT YOU MIGHT FIND LIFE.

Jesus turns the water into wine... He provides... The panic and stress have set in again... "Jesus, do something... they have no wine! "To not have wine at a feast in this culture would have been disastrous...

The very first miracle of Jesus is people not having what they need... And then the extravagant giving of God comes in... Jesus provides what is needed, and what only he can provide...

Following Jesus then... the one who is supreme over all things... the Lord of the Wine... It is coming to see the mystery of Life with Christ unfolding in our lives. To see him as the anchor... We were made for life... We were made to be full... We were made to feast in the presence of God... We are clamoring for it... we are searching for it in every area of our lives...

Yet... we look for it in all the places that drain life from us. We look for it in accomplishment... We look for it at the summit of a mountain ascent... we look for it in financial security. We look for it in becoming a professional athlete... Or recognized by others and being famous.

We live... as if the wine is always running out... and we are panicked and stressed wondering... who is going to fix this? God, how will you fix this? Where can we find life?? To fill the emptiness that is creeping in?

Paul says in Col. 3, that the life we are searching for... IS CHRIST himself. Christ, is OUR LIFE. ... ON Earth as It is in Heaven...

v. 1 If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

Paul is longing for these Colossians to see that what they are clamoring for... what they are reaching for... they ALREADY have in Christ.

These four verses... for me... personally... are the most meaningful verses in the Bible. Christ has risen from the dead... and ascended to heaven... he is seated at God the Father's right hand... Which really means that he has both accomplished the task of redemption... and is in control of all things... He is Supreme over all things... including your life and mine.... Since Jesus has been raised from the dead and is in heaven.... Our thoughts... our minds are to be set where Jesus is... in heaven? Why?

v. 3 *For you have died, and your life is hidden in Christ.*

Essentially, what has happened to Christ, has happened to you... We died with him.... And are hidden in Christ... Our lives, as John Calvin said, are "*buried under the ignominy of the Cross...*" therefore we may not grumble or complain... because our very lives are bound up in Christ... hidden and secure in Christ.

Paul is saying... don't go back... don't think yourself smarter than you are and add all these regulations.... Don't look back in delusion about your past life in Egypt... You have entered a new age, drinking the new wine of life in Christ. You are hidden in Christ... this is the Christian's new status... this is following Jesus.

v. 4 – *When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*

You see, these four verses contain the totality of the Christian life. Died in Christ... Raised in Christ. Hidden in Christ... secure in the hope that when he returns... you will have eternal life with him.... In the meantime... set your mind on things above, and the reality that his spirit lives in you... leads us to do that. Christ IS OUR LIFE. Our whole LIVES are IN Christ.

Once we begin to receive this... when you have grasped this reality about your position in Christ before God.... Our hearts and mind begin to see the pathways of the Christian life and holiness open up before us.

The giving and receiving of God's love becomes something we bask in more frequently... the giving and receiving of love for one another becomes something we share in all the more regularly... Our knowledge of God and his wisdom begins to take shape in our lives not because we think ourselves wiser... but because we are hidden in Christ, and his spirit is setting our minds on things above.

This is how we are changed. This is how Jesus Changes everything... with you and me.

Think about this... The Colossians were a small group of insignificant, ex-pagans who lived in a third-rate country town... YET... Christ is their life... and they will appear with him in glory when he comes again.

You see, I think so many of us are walking around panicked and stressed... terrified that God will not provide... That God is not leading us anywhere... That he's even abandoned us...

That he has led you out into the wilderness... to kill you. That you are insignificant and without worth, wallowing in your emptiness... Desperate to find fulfillment and purpose in this life.

But that is NOT the case... God has not led you out into the wilderness to kill you... for you to die... GOD LOVES YOU. He has not led you into the many past stories of your life, and current situations, and future situations for you to die... GOD LOVES YOU.

And the proof of that is Jesus Christ... Christ IS OUR LIFE...He has provided you with himself. His perfection. His death. His resurrection. His ascension. His Spirit. And His eternal life... That OUR LIFE will find its fullness when he appears.

And so, for you and I... for the Christian... The continual panic and stress... the continual deep emptiness is filled by Jesus. And as you rest in that truth...The wine never runs dry... And the one who is supreme over all things... will be, forever and ever, through his love... supreme over your life. Giving. Giving. Giving of himself.

Let's Pray.