

Colossians 2:6-15     "Baptism: the Circumcision of Christ"  
Jeremiah 9  
Psalm 42

August 7, 2022

Before I read Jeremiah 9,

I want to remind you that Jeremiah is talking about the *church*.  
When he speaks of “my people” – he is speaking about the OT church.

It is perhaps not accidental that Paul will quote Jeremiah 9 near the beginning of 1 Cor –  
his letter to a thoroughly messed up church! (1:31)

Jeremiah is talking about how Israel has utterly failed to draw near to God.  
God’s purpose in the whole of the OT was to bring a people near to himself!

Read Jeremiah 8:18-9:26

All the wisdom in the world cannot bring you near to God.  
All the strength in the world cannot overcome death!  
All the wealth in the world cannot buy life!

What is worth boasting in?

Only this: “that he understands and knows *me* –  
that I am Yahweh  
who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth.  
For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.” (v24)

I’ve been reading a lot from the prophets in our series on Colossians,  
because I am convinced that Paul was keenly aware of the prophetic critique of Israel!

We’ll be talking about the circumcision of Christ.  
So it would have been easy to read Genesis 17 –  
and talk about what circumcision was supposed to be!

But when Paul is writing to the Colossians, everyone knows that things are not as they should be!

Circumcision has failed.

It was supposed to distinguish Israel from the nations.  
The seed of Abraham was to be separate – holy – set apart.

“I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless” – that’s how Genesis 17 starts!

Paul says in Romans 4:11 that Abraham  
“received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith  
while he was uncircumcised.”

A sign points to something else.

The sign of circumcision *pointed* to the righteousness that Abraham had by faith.  
A seal confirms the authenticity of something.

Circumcision functioned as a *seal* – depicting and confirming  
the righteousness that Abraham had by faith.

And so Abraham's descendants were also marked with that same sign and seal.

But Jeremiah says that he can't tell the difference between an Egyptian and an Israelite.  
Because circumcision *by itself* doesn't change the heart.

"all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in heart." (v26)

If all you do is draw a straight line from circumcision to baptism,  
it may *sort of* make sense:

they were outwardly circumcised, but what really matters is inward!  
But that is not Paul's point.

What is missing is the circumcision of Christ!

That's why we are singing Psalm 42.

Psalm 42 was the Psalm Augustine would have sung at every baptism.  
You'll hear a number of connections to Jeremiah 9 –  
the fountain of tears – the desert – the oppression of the enemy...  
weeping where there once was festival.

But Psalm 42 has a distinct refrain –  
one that connects us well to Colossians!

"Why are you cast down, O my soul?  
And why are you in turmoil within me?  
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,  
my salvation and my God."

Sing Psalm 42B

Read Colossians 2:1-19

Have you ever lost hope?

Have you ever reached a point where you just don't think that anything will ever change?

When you read the prophets – like Jeremiah (or like the book of Judges) –  
you realize that there were whole centuries where it looked like  
nothing would ever change!

But then you read Paul – and Paul does not seem to think like that!  
Paul has this resounding hope!

What is Paul's hope?

Let me remind you of what Paul has said so far about hope in Colossians:  
In 1:5, Paul referred to “the hope laid up for you in heaven...”  
which you have heard before in the word of the truth –  
the gospel.”

And then in 1:23, Paul urges you to continue in the faith,  
“stable and steadfast, not shifting from the *hope* of the gospel that you heard.”

What is that hope that you have heard?

In 1:27, Paul says that to the saints (to his holy people) –  
God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles  
are the riches of the glory of this mystery,  
which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

Christ in you, the hope of glory.

What is your hope?

Christ.

And not just – that Jesus is coming back someday...  
(as though he left you here to muddle around until he gets back!).  
But *Christ in you* – the hope of glory.

Not just that *someday* Christ will be in me...

But that Christ is in you *now!*  
And that is your *hope!*

There are many other hopes that will compete with this.

The Colossians were dealing with a sort of Jewish mysticism  
which said that true wisdom and knowledge  
could only be had through the worship of angels (v18)  
and the observance of special days (v16)

And many of the Colossians appear to have been lured away  
or beaten down by this false teaching.

So Paul emphasizes that the full assurance of understanding cannot be had apart from Christ.

Indeed, this is why Paul said last time 1:24-2:5  
that his own ministry is a necessary part of Christ's sufferings.  
Paul is claiming that the apostolic teaching is the only place

where we can find the truth about the mystery of Christ.  
All these false teachers should be easy to spot,  
because they will teach something other than what Paul has proclaimed.

Therefore he says in verses 6-7...

**Introduction: Walk in Him...Just as You Were Taught (2:6-7)**

*<sup>6</sup> Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, <sup>7</sup> rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.*

This word "received" in verse 6, refers to their reception of the apostle's teaching.

They will only grow and remain steadfast in Christ  
if they hold fast to what the apostles taught.

Paul had said in 1:23  
that he is concerned that the Colossians may be led away by these false teachers.

Paul is telling the Colossians – make sure that you continue to listen  
only to those who preach what we apostles preach.

Don't listen to all these new-fangled preachers who would lead you astray.

And then Paul reminds them of who they are in Christ!  
He already told us in chapter 1 who Christ is – and what Christ has done.

Now he turns to the question:

Who are you?  
NOT – who *were* you before Christ.  
But who are you *in Christ*?!

**1. In Him the Whole Fullness of Deity Dwells Bodily – and You Have Been Filled in Him (2:8-10)**

*<sup>8</sup> See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits<sup>[h]</sup> of the world, and not according to Christ. <sup>9</sup> For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, <sup>10</sup> and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.*

And in verse 8 he warns them against being taken captive by philosophy and empty deceit –  
human traditions – rather than Christ.

The “elemental spirits of the world” refers to the spiritual powers.

Paul recognizes that the basic world-views that are out there  
are rooted in demonic teaching.

You might think that modern thought is different.

“Modern thought” is scientific – it is based on reason alone –

none of this “demonic” talk!!

So let's leave the word “demon” out of it.

The word Paul uses is *stoicheia* –  
which means “basic principles” or “elemental spirits.”

This is very much connected to the idea of “principalities and powers” –  
“rulers and authorities.”

Don't think of “demons” in the popular sense.

Modern science is very interested in “stoicheia” –  
the basic principles of the world.

Even atheist scientists think that they are getting in touch  
with the *way things really are* when they do science.

That's what Paul's talking about!

Don't think for a moment that you can understand the *way things really are* –  
without Christ.

He is – after all – the image of the invisible God – the firstborn of creation!  
All things were made by him and for him –  
He holds all things together by the word of his power.

And now – in Christ *the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily*,  
In the incarnation, God joined himself to our humanity.

*and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.*

You are filled in Christ.

You are complete in him.

He is the head of all rule and authority.  
He is over the *stoicheia* – the elemental spirits.  
He is their maker and their ruler!

And you have been filled in him!

How?

So he tells them that

## 2. Baptism and the Circumcision of Christ (2:11-12)

### a. The Circumcision of Christ is the Cross (v11)

<sup>11</sup> *In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ,*

You were circumcised – but not with a physical circumcision.  
This is a circumcision made without hands.

As we saw earlier,  
circumcision was sign and seal of the covenant with Abraham (Genesis 17).

And so Paul says that Christ was cut off in his death –  
just as the foreskin was cut off in circumcision.

In other words, circumcision pointed to the reality of Christ's death,  
and was the way in which OT saints prefigured their dying with Christ.

Both their dying with Christ, putting off of flesh – note that the word is FLESH!  
(the foreskin being literally snipped off!)  
But also their being raised with him through faith (v13)

Why do we not practice circumcision anymore?

The reason is simple:  
Jesus Christ IS Israel.

HE is the firstborn son, and his death was his “circumcision” so to speak!  
He was cut off from his people.  
Once Jesus was circumcised—once he has been cut off,  
there is no longer any reason for continuing the practice of circumcision.

Why did God command circumcision on the eighth day?  
Seven is so frequently the “number of perfection”—why not the seventh day?

After all, God entered his rest on the seventh day—  
and man was commanded to rest on the seventh day—  
so why not circumcise on the seventh day?!

This is what the whole history of Israel teaches us!  
Man cannot enter God’s rest on the seventh day.

The whole history of Israel demonstrates that there must be another day! (Heb 3-4)

There is a particular symbolism associated with the eighth day in Scripture.  
It starts with circumcision:  
Abraham and his descendants are commanded  
to administer the sign of the covenant on the eighth day.  
Entrance into covenant with God cannot happen on the seventh day.

The blood of the covenant must be shed on the eighth day.

If you study the sacrificial system of the OT you will notice the same pattern.

Leviticus 8-9 sets forth the procedure for priestly consecration.

Only on the eighth day could the priests offer sacrifices for the people.

In the cleansing of lepers and other unclean persons, in Leviticus 14-15, (Num 6)  
it was only on the eighth day that they could return to the camp.

On the eighth day the blood of the sacrifice would restore them to fellowship.

The eighth day is the day when the people of God may enter his rest.

All the feasts emphasize the importance of the eighth day.

The seventh day is a good and holy day—but without another day—without an eighth day,  
man will never enter God’s rest.

Therefore Jesus Christ was circumcised for us.

On the cross, he was cut off.

Darkness fell upon him—so that the light of a new day might dawn upon us!

And in his resurrection, that new day dawned.

And this is why Jesus was raised on the first day of the week—the eighth day!

But how do we receive this circumcision of Christ?

**b. Your Baptism Connects You to His Death and Resurrection (v12)**

*<sup>12</sup> having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.*

Paul thinks of your baptism as the means by which you have been joined to the life of Christ.

The union of God and man in the incarnation

is where all the fullness of deity dwells bodily.

But then *you* have been filled *in him*.

How? – through your circumcision!

But your circumcision is not a circumcision made with hands.

Your circumcision is called baptism!

Just as Christ was circumcised (cut off) in his death,  
so now in our baptism we are buried with him.

Baptists often think of immersion as the meaning of burial –  
but that is a very western European view – because when we get buried,  
we are usually immersed in dirt!

But in the middle east, burial was usually done in a cave or rock chamber  
(like where Jesus himself was buried).

Jesus was not immersed in dirt.

He was *inserted* into the tomb.

And that is very much the picture that Paul uses here.

We have been buried with Christ in baptism –  
we have been *inserted* into Christ's own death and resurrection.

Our old man is put to death.

But just like Jesus – we don't stay dead!

Paul also says that in baptism we are raised with him through faith.

In baptism we trust not in the water--for the water cannot save.

In baptism we trust not in ourselves--for our own experience cannot save.

In baptism we trust in the powerful working of God,  
for the same God who raised Jesus from the dead,  
promises to raise us to newness of life in him.

Notice what Paul says in verse 13:

"And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh,  
he has made alive together with him,  
having forgiven you all trespasses."

You were a sinner.

You were dead in your sins,  
and as Paul puts it, in the "uncircumcision of your flesh."

In other words, you were unclean.

You needed that eighth day cleansing of the blood of the Lamb.

Your flesh was the controlling principle of your life.  
You walked in wickedness, as a slave to sin,  
an enemy of God as Paul put it in Colossians 1:21.  
But now, you have been circumcised.

Your old life has been cut off.

Your old self has been killed,  
crucified with Christ on the cross.

This is the reality to which baptism points.

And Paul says that baptism is the circumcision of Christ,

where he trims away the body of the sins of the flesh.

Not that the water of baptism does this all by itself.

But rather that the water of baptism is the outward sign of this new reality.

If you have been baptized,

then this is the reality that God promises to you.

You have been crucified with Christ,

your old sinful nature has been washed away.

How do you think about your own baptism?

Paul tells you that your baptism is a past event which has present implications.

Your baptism points you to the washing away of your sins.

But maybe you were baptized as an infant and can't remember it,

But whether or not we felt anything,

whether or not it was a dramatic experience,

Paul says that in God's eyes,

baptism is our being united to Christ in his death and resurrection,

that just as he died for our sins, and was raised from the dead,

so now we have died TO sin, and have been raised in newness of life.

Because baptism is not merely a matter of getting wet.

In the New Testament baptism includes both the outward sign of water,

and the inward reality of the working of the Holy Spirit.

Our baptism is to function as the moment in time

that we were joined to Christ and to his church.

We are to look back to our baptism as a reminder of what we have become in Christ.

If you have been baptized,

then you have the promise that you have been made alive (v13)

and your sins have been forgiven.

But also notice HOW you receive all these things.

You are raised with him *through FAITH* (v12).

Simply getting wet will not suffice.

All of the blessings which Christ offers to us in baptism can only be received by faith.

We must believe in the working of God,

that he is able to do what he has promised.

We must trust in his saving grace,

that just as he raised Christ from the dead,

so also he will finish the work that he has begun in us.

Are there times when you feel like giving up?  
Are there times when you are bombarded with temptation,  
    when your temper is flaring,  
        your kids are making a mess,  
        your spouse is being insensitive to you,  
            and you just want to get out of there?  
Are there times when you feel that sin is too powerful?  
    times when you believe that there is no way to keep up your struggle against sin?

In those times, remember your baptism!  
Remember how you have been joined to the life of God!

Martin Luther, when he was tempted by sin,  
would often say,  
    "Satan, you have no power over me,  
        because I've been baptized--so I belong to Christ."  
Your baptism is a concrete reminder that you have died to sin.  
Your baptism is God's way of showing you that he has washed all your sin away,  
    and has defeated all of the enemies which attack you.

Look at verses 13-15

### **3. God Made You Alive with Him (2:13-15)**

#### **a. Forgiveness (v13)**

*<sup>13</sup> And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses,*

Paul is still talking about this circumcision of Christ which we have received in baptism.

And he says that he has made you alive in Christ and forgiven all of your sins.  
HOW?

    because he has done two things:

- 1) he has wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us,  
        nailing it to the cross (v14)
- 2) he has disarmed principalities and powers,  
        making a public spectacle of them and triumphing over them in the cross. (v15)

Listen to how Paul says this in verse 14:

He made us alive with him, having forgiven us our trespasses...

#### **b. Cancelation of the Record of Debt (v14)**

*<sup>14</sup> by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.*

What was nailed to the cross?

The Romans had a practice of placing a notice on each cross,  
declaring the crime for which the person was being crucified.

Paul says that the record of debt that stood against us was nailed to the cross.

When Jesus was nailed to the cross,  
he paid the record of our debt.

Think back to Jeremiah 9 – and the whole problem of the OT!  
Israel has “forsaken my law that I set before them, and have not obeyed my voice.”

That record of debt stood against Israel.  
And it’s not as though the Gentiles had done any better!

Christ, in his sacrifice on the cross,  
has fulfilled the righteous requirements of the Law,  
and since he has been perfectly obedient,  
now his righteousness is imputed to us.

God considers us righteous because he looks at us  
through the death of his Son, Jesus Christ.

This means that the Law can no longer condemn us,  
for there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

### c. Disarming of the Powers (v15)

*<sup>15</sup>He disarmed the rulers and authorities<sup>[i]</sup> and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.<sup>[ii]</sup>*

But not only has Christ removed the curse of the Law,  
he has also disarmed the principalities and powers.

Remember back in verse 10 we learned that we are complete in Christ,  
who is the head of all principality and power.

Principalities and Powers were two names which the Jews gave to various orders of angels.

The Colossians were facing a heresy which was trying to get them to worship angels,  
and was emphasizing spiritual experience over the content of the gospel.

Principalities and Powers were angelic orders  
which supposedly controlled our daily lives.

Paul here insists that these "angels" are mere idols--  
false gods who have been overthrown through the cross.

What happened at the cross?  
We all know the story of the death of Christ,  
but what was going on behind the scenes?

Ever since the fall, Satan had taken over the authority which Adam was supposed to wield.

That is why Satan is called the prince of this world by Jesus.

Sinful people had established all sorts of idols,

    all sorts of false gods to worship.

Before Christ came,

    God's authority on earth was sharply contested.

God had set up Adam to be his human king,

    to rule over all things for the glory of God, and the good of man.

But now everything was turned to chaos.

The Devil had established his kingdom on the earth,

    and David and his descendants had not been able to establish

    the kingdom of God on earth.

So God now sent his Son to establish the kingdom of God.

This is what Jesus was doing on the cross.

Jesus was destroying the power of the devil,

    and for that matter, of all the idols who had ever reigned in human hearts,

    and was making a mockery of them--a public spectacle--in the cross.

Odd way of doing it, eh?

In his death, he was despised and mocked,

    and yet as he hung there on the cross,

    Satan's foolish hopes were being beaten to the ground.

If Christ had come with the glorious hosts of heaven,

    he certainly could have destroyed Satan's power,

    but he would have destroyed all of humanity along with the devil.

The only way to destroy Satan,

    without destroying all of humanity,

    was to undo the curse --

    was to remove the handwriting of requirements which was against us.

And so in redeeming his people,

    Jesus Christ destroyed the power of Satan and all his followers,

    and made a public spectacle of them in the cross.

You have been claimed by Christ as his own,

    through the circumcision of Christ,

    namely, baptism,

    where he snipped away your old life,

    and gave you new life and the forgiveness of sins.

When you were an unbeliever,

    you were a slave to sin.

You had to sin.

You had no other options.

You were a rebel against God,

and there was nothing you could do that would please him.

But now, you are in Christ.

His life has become yours.

You are clothed with his righteousness,

and his Holy Spirit even now is working his grace within you.

You don't have to sin.

When you are faced with temptation,

you have the ability to stand firm.

Not because of anything you have done,

but solely because Christ has made you a slave to righteousness.

Sin is utterly inconsistent with the Christian life.

We ought to hate our sin,

be disgusted by our sin,

and seek any possible way to rid ourselves of the things that God hates.

This is what our baptism points us to.

Our baptism points us to the new reality that is ours in Christ.

We are no longer sinners.

Yes, we sin—more often than we would like to admit!

But Christ has not redeemed us simply that we might sin *less often*.

Christ has redeemed us so that we might be set free from sin.

That is what he has begun in your life, and in mine.

In your baptism he has promised that he will give us new life

and the forgiveness of sins.

So let us believe his promises!