

Colossians 2v6-15

Think Fresh – 09/05/09

Earlier Dave explained that great passage from chapter 1 of Colossians. We got an awesome view of who Jesus is, and what he's done. We saw that Jesus is Lord over all creation for all eternity. But we also saw that He's the saviour of creation too. He made peace between us and God, taking away our sin and dealing with the offense we caused Him, so that we can be reconciled and welcomed back into God's family. It's mind-blowing stuff!

As he moves on in his letter to the Colossians, Paul takes things on from there. He takes the amazing, world-transforming, heart-stirring truth about Jesus and tells the Colossians that that will change everything about how they live. It's even more important because of those false teachers we were hearing about earlier.

Back in chapter 1v9-12, Paul told the Colossians how he prays for them – just flick back and skim your eyes over it. He prays that knowing God better would lead them to live the right kind of life. And he says that will show itself in three things – growth, strength and joyful thanks, if they really grasping the good news about Jesus. Which is why he then goes straight into the passage we looked at earlier, which is all about Jesus.

The first couple of verses are like a plug socket, where he connects the truths we heard about earlier directly into the lives of the Colossians. Just like in his prayer, he makes the connection between who Jesus is and who they are. And he spends the rest of the letter unfolding the implications of that.

So that's what we're going to do now. We're going to take the good news about Jesus which we heard earlier, and which we've been talking about all day, and hopefully try to really take hold of it so that it changes us. Don't we want to be gripped by who Jesus is, so that it changes us? And don't we want to be sharing the gospel in Freshers week, not because Motsy told us to, but because we're gripped by the truth of the gospel in a real way? We want to know this truth, in our heads and in our hearts too...

Let me sketch you a map of where we're going. Paul makes a very simple point – **Live Your Lives in Him**. We've already heard why that makes sense, but here Paul explains what he means by it, and he warns them about the alternative. Then he gives three MASSIVE reasons why they should stick with Jesus. So, if you like headings, there you go. The first big one is **Live your lives in him**, then three reasons why (I'll tell you what they are when we get there).

Live Your Lives in Him (v6-8)

“Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him,” Paul says. He's doing two things in that sentence. *“Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord,”* means everything we saw in chapter 1. So he's scooping up all those amazing truths about who Jesus is, and then he says, *“continue to live your lives in him.”* **Keep going the same way.** Remember the way you started off, the things you believed? Well live your lives in the same way. There isn't one set of things which gets you in and another which keeps you going. They're one and the same.

Do you ever get a bit bored when you have an evangelistic talk at CU? Do you think “I've heard this. Yeah, the cross is great, but this is a bit simple for me. It's lovely that the non-Christians can hear it, but I've moved beyond the basics”? Do you ever think like that?

If you do, then listen to what Paul is saying because you're in danger. The truth which you accept when you become a Christian is what you need to hold onto as you live as a Christian.

We can slip into thinking that the gospel is just for non-Christians. It's what you have to accept to get you in, but you need something more sophisticated once you're in. The truth is that the gospel isn't just the door you have to walk through to get in – it should shape everything about how you live your life once you're inside. It's the foundations you stand on. It's the roof over your head. It's what the walls are made out of. It's the windows you look through. It's the food in your fridge and the bed you sleep on. Get the idea? Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him.

But what does that look like? What does it mean to live your life in Jesus? It turns out it's the three things he prayed for earlier - growth, strength and joyful thanks. This is what a life lived in the light of the good news about Jesus will look like...

1) Be "rooted and built up in him..." – the roots of a plant are basically its life-support system (I've got an allotment, so I know about these things). It's how a plant gets the water and other stuff it needs to survive. In the same way, we need to be connected to Jesus if we're going to continue living in him. And (to mix the metaphor slightly, but it's what Paul says so you can't argue) it's only in Jesus that we can be built up together, like bricks in a wall. Without him, the whole project will be a disaster.

2) Be "strengthened in the faith as you were taught" – this is what will happen if we're rooted and built up in Jesus – we'll be strengthened or established in our faith. "As you were taught is crucial for the Colossians here. Don't listen to the other lot – hold on to the truth you got from us.

3) Be "overflowing with thankfulness" – it's impossible to continue living in Jesus, to receive the benefits and blessings of being one of his people, and not be grateful. If you're not grateful for what Jesus has done for you, then be worried. All the grace we've been shown should surely make us overflow with gratitude?!

The Alternative

There's an obvious alternative to living your life in Jesus, isn't there. The alternative is to live your life in something else. Try to find something else to make the centre of your life. And that's what Paul warns against in verse 8.

The Colossians had other ideas to choose from. We heard this morning about the false teachers who were trying to lead the Colossians astray. We don't really know exactly what they were teaching. But, from what Paul says here, there are 2 things we *can* be sure of: It was "*hollow and deceptive*", and it wasn't about Jesus. It was BAD NEWS.

The truth is, anything we try to base our lives on which isn't Jesus is a "*hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world.*"

It's kind of like an Easter egg – you know the huge ones in massive boxes? When I was young and naïve, I always expected to break them open and for loads of sweets and chocolates to fall out. But they were always hollow and deceptive – just a thin chocolate shell and a couple of Kit Kats. *On the outside it looks great, but when you crack it open, there's nothing there.* That's how Paul sees these other choices the Colossians had (sort of). *Hollow and deceptive.* And the reason they're hollow is because they aren't based on Jesus – they're based on human attempts to be clever and 'elemental spiritual forces' trying to deceive us. Instead of the Lord and Saviour of the entire

Universe we saw in chapter 1, they're based on imposters. So 'hollow and deceptive' is all they can ever be.

But it's not just the Colossians who had other choices. Think about your friends or family who aren't Christians - *their* lives are based on hollow and deceptive philosophies. Maybe it's the philosophy which says, "*be successful, make lots of money and live a comfortable life surrounded by cool stuff.*" Or maybe the attitude which says, "*you're nothing if you're a nobody. Be famous.*" Maybe your friends are committed to the idea that *no-one can say what's true or false or right or wrong*, and it's unthinkable to claim to know one way or another. Or perhaps it's just the idea that *life has no meaning, so just make sure you have fun while you're here.* I'm sure you can think of a hundred more...

And if we take our eyes off Jesus, we'll start to see their appeal too. After all, we want to fit into the culture around us, don't we? So we pile stuff up. We make sure everyone knows how great we are. We get involved in relationships which aren't honouring to God. And of course we make sure we're not offending people by claiming to have any answers. Before you know it, you've been taken captive.

“Don't do it!” Paul says. Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in Him!

3 Reasons to Stick with Jesus...

So Paul's been explaining that we need to stick with Jesus and continue living our lives in him, and we need to beware of these hollow and deceptive philosophies which could lead us astray. To help make his point and, I think, to help the Colossians to actually do this, he reminds them of three reasons to stick with Jesus. Three realities that come with knowing Jesus. Here they are:

- 1) The *fullness* we have in Christ
- 2) The *new life* we have in Christ
- 3) The *freedom* we have in Christ

The fullness we have in Christ

We heard this this morning, didn't we? "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him" (1v19). There's a deliberate link here. This is the Jesus we've received as Lord. "In Christ, all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and in Christ you have been brought to fullness." Paul doesn't say exactly what he means by fullness. But you can imagine it being what the false teachers were offering. "*Follow us and you'll have fullness.*" I'm sure you know the kinds of things, because people say the same now. "*7 steps to fullness.*" "*Worship like this and you'll experience fullness.*" "*If you have this experience, you'll experience fullness.*" Always something new to experience, some new level to reach.

Think about your non-Christian friends again – where are they trying to find fullness? Exam success? Their prowess on the football field? Is it drink or drugs or sex? Maybe in a relationship, expecting someone else to make them full? Now think about yourself – where are you trying to find fullness? Is it in the same place?

We're full in Christ! We don't need to look somewhere else for fullness, because we already have it if we're in Christ. He's the one in whom all the fullness of the deity dwells in bodily form. The God who created the entire universe, including you, making himself known to us and making peace with us by his blood. And we can have a real, personal relationship with him - a relationship which brings us new-life and freedom (which we'll think about in a second). Where else are we going to

go?! Anyone else you could go to, any other authorities or powers, are all subject to him. As Dave said earlier – we’ve gone straight to the top!

And this is what we’re calling our friends into when we tell them about Jesus and invite them to follow him. Sometimes we can think that the invitation doesn’t really match up with what we have to back it up. We can think it’s like inviting our friends round for dinner and serving boring gruel. But the gospel is the 18 course banquet – it’s fullness! We’re calling them from black and white into full colour!

Where else are you going to go? Continue to live your life in him.

The new life we have in Christ

The next reality Paul moves on to is the new life we have in Christ. And it can only come from being united with Christ.

“In him you were also circumcised with circumcision not performed by human hands.” I’m a bit nervous, because I got into trouble last time I mentioned circumcision in a talk – long story. I’m guessing you know what it is... For Jewish men, circumcision was a mark of being a member of God’s people. But now things have changed (praise the Lord) – we undergo a different kind of circumcision performed on them – this one wasn’t done by human hands. And instead of removing a piece of skin, Jesus removes our sinful nature. But the cost of the operation was huge...

If we’ve trusted Jesus, as the Colossians had, then we died with him. Or, rather, our old, sinful self died with him, and baptism symbolises that. The good news is that we were raised with Christ too! But we’re raised to live a new kind of life, a different kind of life. His death becomes ours, and his new life becomes ours too. It’s a new life which will go on into eternity, but it starts now, as soon as you’re a Christian. So, if you’re a Christian, you’re old, sinful self is dead and buried, and you’re living this new life.

Is this how you think of your life as a Christian? Do you feel like you’re living a new life, or is it just more of the same? Does the fact you’ve been buried and raised with Jesus have any effect on your life?

This new life means we have new choices. We might still feel the influence of our sinful nature lingering around, but ultimately it’s dead. So we don’t just have to what it says - we can choose to live God’s way instead. Romans 8 is all about this: “*You, however, are not controlled by the sinful nature but are in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you*” (v9). Later on in chapter 3, Paul talks more about this – what it looks like to put off the sinful nature, and what to replace it with. He says it’s like taking off old, tatty clothes, and putting on new ones. They can choose to put on things like “*compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.*” But we can only take off our old clothes because Jesus has undone the buttons. Or, to go back to circumcision, he’s cut it off...

So if you’re a Christian, you have this new life. Are you living as though you do? Or are you clinging on to your minging old clothes? Are you clinging to attitudes or habits or maybe even relationships which are comfortable, but which don’t really fit with the new life we have in Christ? Do you do things or say things to fit in with other people at point where your new life in Christ should really be making you stand out? Or will the only thing which marks you out in Freshers week be a CU hoody?

This is never going to come from man-made philosophies. Jesus is the only one who can bring us this new life. So continue to live your life in him.

The freedom we have in Christ

I think the last two build up to this one. The third reality which should keep us living our lives in Jesus is the freedom we have in him.

“When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ.” We were cut off from God and as powerless to change things as dead bodies are. But in the middle of that hopeless, sorry mess, God reached in and made us alive with Christ. Here’s the crux of what he means by that: “He forgave us all our sins.” Jesus death paid for our rejection of God completely. And it happened in two ways, which you can see in those last couple of verses...

First, he cancelled the “the charge of our legal indebtedness” or “the record of debt” which stood against us and condemned us. His death legally took care of our sin. Imagine your sin written down. In big capital letters: ENEMY OF GOD. That would be enough. But, underneath, every rebellious, sinful act or word or thought you’ve ever had. That’s the written charge which stood against you.

But God has taken it and nailed it to the cross. But not just yours – mine, and Nay’s, and Dave’s and Motsy’s and every Christian who has ever or will ever put their trust in Jesus. And as Jesus died, he paid the price we should have paid. He made peace with God, and the charge was cancelled. It was completely dealt with, and so the written record of our wrongs has been taken away. There’s no more legal case to be brought against us. We’re completely free, but only through Jesus’ death.

And there’s a second way Jesus dealt with sin. As he died, he disarmed the powers and authorities. He took the weapons out of the hands of the devil. Because our sin is dealt with, the devil can’t hold it over us. While our debt was unpaid, he could wave it in our face. *God can’t love you, you’re not worth it. Someone like you doesn’t need God, you’re better off without him.* But Jesus has disarmed the devil and all his helpers, so he can’t do it any more.

Do you feel guilty?

Guilt can paralyse Christians. We all mess up, we all fail, and we all fall short. And those mistakes can make us feel useless – useless to God and useless to other people. The enthusiasm and the edge me might have had fizzles away, and if we aren’t careful we just fade into being mediocre.

But we shouldn’t ever get to that point, because it’s not real. If you feel guilty, *if this is you*, then know that you have nothing to feel guilty about. Yeah, we have things to be sorry about, and we should never make light of sin. But it was **all** nailed to the cross and paid for by Jesus. Don’t let guilt paralyse you and take you out of the running. When Satan tempts you to despair about your sin, remember Jesus and remember that he’s waving an empty gun in your face. He’s been disarmed!

We’re free! Because of Jesus we’re legally free, and we’re free from the taunts of the powers and authorities who would hold this over us. But it’s only because of Jesus! Despite what the world might say, you won’t find this freedom anywhere else. So continue living your life in him.

So there are three reasons, three realities which should keep us living our lives in him. In Christ we have fullness, we have new life and we have freedom. But it all goes back to who Jesus is, and what he’s done. He is the only one who can make these things a reality for us, and so going anywhere is ridiculous. And so “just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue living your lives in him!”