

- **Welcome everyone! This is pastor Ethan Moore, and it is Sunday, January 29<sup>th</sup>, 2023. Today is week three of part three of our journey through the amazing letter to the Colossians. I encourage you to have your bible, and you can access my message notes through our church website, trinityvail.com. Thank you for joining us, and let's jump in!**
- **It's summer after my sophomore year at A&M and I'm back home, with some friends visiting the recreation center at the seminary next to our church, when I bump into one of the youth ministry volunteers from when I was in highschool.**
- **Her name is Lynn- she comes over to me, super friendly, asks me how I'm doing... and then, like any good youth leader will do, she says... "SO, ETHAN... how's your walk with the Lord?"**
- **NOW, I had barely stepped foot in a church in two years, so like any self-respecting backsliding Christian college student... I LIED. "ITS Good! Yeah... Good." Am I going to church? "Well, you know, college is super busy, but I make it every now and then... But I am part of a small group of guys that meets at least once a week"... what I failed to disclose is that we met at the Dixie Chicken... REST of that story is that when I did return to my faith about three years later, part of that journey was my memory of Lynn's question.**
- **So let me ask.. "How's your walk with the Lord?" May be hard to answer without a real discussion. Might put on pressure- you don't want to say, 'well, okay, I think? OR... I'm super struggling!'**
- **Perhaps what comes to mind is Jesus' famous statement in John 10:10... "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."**
- **OR, as my Hawaiian Pidgin translation puts it- "The thief, he jus come to bust up da place. But I come that you may come alive inside, and live to da max!"**
- **Abundant life. Life to da max. FULLNESS of life. What does this mean? What does this really look like?**
  - **Not abundance of possessions- material, temporary things. Jesus made that clear, as does the life experience of most believers.**
  - **Not that life is a constant thrill, constant adventure. This can be wonderful, but it's not the reality of life for the vast majority of people.**
  - **Also not some kind of spiritual/emotional high, what may happen at super emotional worship or prayer service. These types of experiences too can be wonderful, but they also can be rare, and they aren't descriptive of ongoing everyday life. IMPORTANT, because when Jesus and Paul talk about 'fullness of life', they are describing something core to us, ongoing, increasingly NORMATIVE... not exception.**
- **When Paul wrote to the 1<sup>st</sup> century church in Colossae, his audience certainly didn't have material wealth, our concept of adventure and thrill would have been foreign to them, and as we'll see in the next few weeks, Paul actually speaks AGAINST the notion that our faith is validated, or truly authentic, through unusual or elite spiritual experiences.**
- **AND YET to these believers Paul proclaimed that IN CHRIST they had been- as a COMPLETED WORK- brought to FULLNESS. THIS Brings us to COL 2:9... Paul begins this thought by driving home consistent theme that In Christ we see...**

† **The fullness of God!**

**Colossians 2:9** *For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form..*

- **SUPER IMPORTANT-** We've covered this extensively over past few months.... So just one observation. Paul is setting up a parallel statement here, and he begins by referencing the **FULLNESS OF THE DEITY..** meaning that **IN CHRIST** we have seen the **FULLNESS** of the nature and character **OF GOD.**
- **NOT ONLY THAT-** Paul continues, saying that **IN CHRIST, YOU** have been...

† **Brought to fullness**

**Colossians 2:10** *and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority.*

- **Note Paul doesn't say... You are 'being brought' to fullness. He says we HAVE BEEN brought to fullness. SO, what does that mean? Well, there's a few different ways to think about this.**
- **First, there is what Christ has already done in us SPIRITUALLY. IN CHRIST, we are...**
  - **Fully and forever forgiven.**
  - **Completely made new.**
  - **We have the fullness of Christ's presence through the Holy Spirit. KEY! Our experience of the spirit will grow over time, BUT WE WILL NEVER HAVE MORE OF THE SPIRIT THAN WHAT WE RECEIVED when we became a believer. WE ARE In Christ, and Christ is IN US... FULLY.**
  - **Fully ACCEPTED by God- Fully LOVED... CHILDREN of God- fully brought into the family of God.**
  - **THESE ARE ALL things that are FULLY TRUE OF US through our union with Christ.**
- **But it doesn't stop there. Paul is purposefully comparing how Christ is the fullness of God with our fullness in Christ. If we ask, what does fullness in Christ look like?... the answer is, LOOK AT JESUS.**
- **When we experience fullness in Christ, we will be**
  - **Loving like Christ. Accepting like Christ. Servant hearted like Christ. Compassionate like Christ. Patient like Christ. Courageous like Christ. SACRIFICIAL like Christ. HUMBLE like Christ.**
- **OF COURSE.. we aren't there yet! As Paul said in Philippians 3... paraphrased...**

*I haven't arrived at my goal!... but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Listen! I'm not there yet! But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*

- **AND CHURCH-** the prize Paul seeks to win isn't just heaven when we die. Paul says... **God is calling me 'heavenward'.. that's my ultimate destination-** but the **PRIZE, the GOAL, WHAT I'M STRAINING TOWARD, and THAT FOR WHICH CHRIST TOOK HOLD OF ME... is to fully live and experience NOW all that was fully given when Christ called me as His own.**
- **YOU SEE-** The **GOAL OF CHRISTIAN MATURITY** isn't just entry into heaven. It is the **fullness of Christ's character and nature, expressed in our lives, TODAY.**
- **CONSIDER... Have you ever thought about- imagined- what it will be like when we step from this world into heaven? It's easy to see this as the time when we will finally cast off all of our burdens... like a backpacker finally reaching the end of the trail, dropping the pack and collapsing in exhaustion... NOW I CAN REST! Or like an exhausted swimmer in**

*the ocean using their last bit of strength to crawl onto a beach, and discover it's an unbelievable paradise.*

- *TO SOME DEGREE this will be the case...*
- *But Paul's description of the 'heavenward' call of God is that each day in THIS LIFE we are increasingly experiencing the FULLNESS we have already received IN CHRIST... SO THAT, when we DO cross the boundary into eternity, it will be but a small step into the miraculous reality that we will recognize as having ALREADY been our home.*
- *IN FACT, in Ephesians 2, Paul says... let me tell you something about heaven... in your spirit, in your true identity.. you are ALREADY THERE.*

– *The verse continues...*

*in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority.*

- *Simply put, we do not have to fear the powers and authorities that would seek to undermine our experience and expression of the fullness of Christ's life in us. Every power and authority that exists or may ever exists does so at the mercy of God, and they have no power to overcome God's goodness. We are called to RESPECT governmental authorities, OBEY within biblical boundaries, AND to be a transforming influence of God's nature and character in the midst of society and culture- but In Christ we have been freed from the fear of those who temporarily may hold power over us.*
- *NOW- God understands that it is one thing to intellectually understand what we have received from Christ- the fullness that is given us- AND THAT IT IS ANOTHER THING for this knowledge to make the journey down into the reality of our mind, our will, and our emotions- how we think, feel, and act.*
- *And so we hear scripture saying... I want to make sure you really understand- comprehend- what it is God has done together with your faith. You need to understand the fullness of this truth so you may CHOOSE to believe THAT THIS IS THE foundation of your life, THIS is the framework of how you see and approach your day, and THIS is the source to which you continually turn.*
- *To unpack this further, Paul describes three things God has done. It's the truth that In Christ we have been CIRCUMCISED, BAPTIZED, and RAISED.*

✠ *In Christ, we have been... circumcised*

**Colossians 2:11** *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,*

- *Going to trust I don't need to explain the circumcision metaphor too much... suffice to say something was removed. SO, just what is this about?*
- *First, Paul clearly isn't saying the Colossians, or anyone, needs to participate in the physical rite of circumcision to be a believer. He's pushing against that. External rituals have zero power apart from how we respond to God in our heart.*

**Galatians 5:6** *For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love. 6:15 Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation.*

- *In Romans 2 we see it this way... in the context here, when Paul refer's to 'a jew', think of that as meaning 'a child of God.'*

**Romans 2:28-29** *A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. <sup>29</sup>No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code.*

- **So, when Paul says we that IN CHRIST- really BY CHRIST- the believer has undergone a spiritual circumcision, this means something has been TAKEN AWAY. Something that used to be part of us isn't part of us anymore- or better put, something that USED TO BE IN POWER has been emptied of its power.**
- **THAT SOMETHING, according to this scripture, is our FLESH.**
  - **NIV: 'your whole self ruled by the flesh- put off'**
  - **NASB: 'the removal of the body of the flesh'**
- **Been a while since I've taught on this, but THE FLESH is a critical NT concept- It's not morally negative thoughts and actions, although those are a result of the flesh. In its essence, the flesh is everything I am apart from Christ. Here's good description...**

The *flesh*, is the *condition* (mindset, attitude, strategy of living)

Where my focus is primarily on myself; even if it is 'good looking' self, 'well-adjusted' self, or 'socially acceptable' self...

Where I am living out of my own resources; (such as heritage, education, IQ, personality, sense of humor, looks, talents, abilities, etc) In order to deal with life, solve my problems, & meet my needs.

- **BEFORE we entered into faith in Christ, our flesh- the self-life- was all we had. BUT NOW, IN CHRIST, we have a new source of life, A NEW mindset and attitude, that rather than being defined by dependence upon self, it is defined by dependence upon GOD.**
- **AND SO, Paul proclaims- that old person you used to be, that OLD strategy of living and OLD condition of your heart... Your WHOLE SELF that was RULED BY THE FLESH- CHRIST HAS CUT IT AWAY. STRIPPED IT OF AUTHORITY AND POWER.**
- **This is what Galatians 2:20 talks about when we hear "I am crucified with Christ, and I NO LONGER LIVE (I am no longer my source of life), but CHRIST lives in me (by faith, CHRIST is my source of life).**
- **BUT the question remains- if my flesh has been removed from power, why do we still struggle with living by the flesh?**
- **Reminds me of illustration I heard years ago... comparing our flesh to a zombie. Imagine that old person we used to be: Romans 6 (many other) makes it clear that person is no longer who we are, it is powerless and dead- literally, crucified with Christ. BUT, in this life, the ZOMBIE of that old self still follows us around, constantly trying to make us think IT is who we really are. "YOU SPOUSE LET YOU DOWN? Wait.. DON'T BE PATIENT! DON'T FORGIVE! C'mon! Be angry! Get even! Say something snarky, that's your nature!!" This plays out in a thousand different ways.**
- **AND IN THESE MOMENTS- we have a choice to make. WHO DO WE LOOK TO AS OUR AUTHORITY? To which voice do we yield? Upon whom do we depend?**
- **But KEY- these two voices- the voice of the flesh and the voice of the spirit, they are NOT opposite equals. THE FLESH does have a voice, and it is constantly lying to us, tempting us, leading us into pride or condemnation. The voice of the flesh can be VERY LOUD. BUT IT IS NOT WHO WE ARE. It is counterfeit, and apart from our granting it authority, IT NO LONGER HAS POWER OVER US.**
- **The SPIRIT, on the other hand, is also a voice- but NOT JUST a voice- for the Spirit IS WHO**

**WE ARE- IS our source of LIFE. The Spirit is the bond of our union with Christ, and the Spirit is ALWAYS leading us into the life, goodness, freedom, and character of God.**

- **YOU SEE, in those moments of temptation, or reaction, we often think “my choice is between good and bad, right and wrong, to sin or not to sin.” And of course those are choices we do make. But the PRIOR CHOICE, the truly CRUCIAL choice, is the choice between the lying, con-artist voice of our flesh, or the life-giving voice of the Spirit.**
- **The most important choice is not WHAT WE DO, but UPON WHOM DO WE DEPEND.**
- **And so, in Colossians 3 Paul will exclaim SET YOUR MIND on things above- for you died, and your life is now hidden- bound together- with Christ in God!” And in Galatians 5 we hear “So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh!”**
- **And the GOOD NEWS IS that as we increasingly turn to the Spirit, depend upon the presence of Christ in us... the voice of our zombie flesh grows weaker, and the voice of the Spirit grows clearer.**
- **AND ONE STEP AT A TIME, the default of our mind, will, and emotion begins to change from a struggle with sin that we sometimes overcome, to a prevailing freedom, even though we still sometimes fail. THIS IS WHAT NT CALLS SANTIFICATION. TRANSFORMATION. It is the journey into FREEDOM, and FULLNESS.**
- **IN CHRIST, our flesh has been circumcised, and it’s authority is gone.**
- **GOING ON! Paul continues to expand this truth, now proclaiming that...**

✠ **In Christ, we have been... baptized**

**Colossians 2:12a** *Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ... ,having been buried with him in baptism*

- **As we saw in ACTS- baptism by immersion of confessing believers was the consistent practice of the early church. In evangelical culture we talk about ‘the sinners prayer’, and ‘asking Christ into our life’, but for the first several generations of the church baptism itself was the confession by which a person confirmed their faith and entered into the community of faith.**
- **But as important as the act of baptism was- and is- Paul’s emphasis here goes to the heart of the confession and faith baptism represents. As you may know, the word ‘baptize’ literally means to IMMERSE- to make one with, to bring into UNION.**
- **AND SO in baptism we see the miracle that through FAITH IN CHRIST we DIED WITH CHRIST, the flesh is stripped of power, the OLD has gone, and the NEW has come! And our NEW LIFE, our NEW SOURCE OF LIFE, will bring with it, in increasing measure, a new WAY OF LIFE. In Romans 6, Paul describes it like this....**

**Romans 6:1-7** *What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? <sup>2</sup> By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? <sup>3</sup> Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? <sup>4</sup> We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. <sup>5</sup> For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. <sup>6</sup> For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— <sup>7</sup> because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.*

- *In Christ, we have been circumcised.*
- *In Christ, we have been baptized. Just as we have been joined with Christ in his death (the OLD HAS GONE) so also we have joined with Christ in His resurrection - the NEW HAS COME.*
- *AND THAT leads to the third, and greatest truth of what has ALREADY HAPPENED TO US through faith in Jesus...*

✠ *In Christ, we have been... raised!*

**Colossians 2:12b** *having been buried with Christ in baptism...in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.*

- *CHURCH! We are people of NEW LIFE. HOPE. We are people of RESURRECTION.*
- *SOME DAY- God will exert his power to give us literal, new, resurrection bodies that will never decay.*
- *ONE DAY, 2000 years ago, God exerted his power when he raised Christ from the dead.*
- *AND THE MIRACULOUS PRESENT TENSE of the New Testament is that IN CHRIST we have already received the resurrection power of God, as our power for life today.*
- *We will come back to this when we start into Colossians 3- but we'll close with this...*
- *We often talk about the centrality of Christ- and we should. Colossians is an exaltation of Christ's completed work, his continuing presence, and the implications of this for how we live.*
- *But through the lens of the NT, we can't talk about the centrality of Christ without remembering the..*

✠ *The centrality of the community of Christ*

- *One of the biggest differences between the culture of 1<sup>st</sup> century biblical world and our culture today- a difference that profoundly impacts how we interpret and apply scripture- is our concept of SELF.*
- *Our culture is his HIGHLY individualistic. When we think of 'self', our concept is PERSONAL.*
  - *Personal freedoms. Personal choices. Personal identity. PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST.*
- *But for the 1<sup>st</sup> century world to whom all of the NT was written, the primary concept of SELF wasn't personal, it was COMMUNAL. FAMILIAL.*
- *Freedom to be a community. When I made a choice, my first thought wouldn't be how this impacted me, but how it impacted those around me. My identity wasn't based on my performance, but on my relationships with other people. AND MOST IMPORTANTLY FOR US, my relationship with Christ was not something I primarily thought of PERSONALLY, but a great gift I experienced as an integral part of my faith COMMUNITY.*
- *SO, when we hear Paul say "YOU were raised with Christ through YOUR faith"... I hear, the primary point is that I was raised with Christ through MY faith.*
- *But when we take into account the critically important lens of CULTURAL CONTEXT - we will hear Paul saying "YOU ALL, in relationship with one another, were raised with Christ through YOUR FAITH YOU SHARE AND EXPERIENCE TOGETHER, as a family of faith.*

- **OF COURSE, our faith is individual. BUT THE PRIMARY NT CONCEPT OF HOW WE EXPERIENCE AND EXPRESS OUR FAITH, and COME TO FULLNESS- is NOT just personal and individual, it is COMMUNAL and in relationship with others.**
- **This brings deeper meaning to Paul's example of CIRCUMCISION- Under the old covenant, circumcision didn't just symbolize a person's relationship with God, but their ENTRY INTO THE COMMUNITY OF GOD.**
- **Likewise, Baptism in the early church wasn't just a personal confession of faith- it was a public confession of entering into the REDEEMED COMMUNITY OF FAITH.**
- **And RESURRECTION- it's not just about ME going to heaven when I die- it's the miracle that through faith in Christ I have NOW BEEN FILLED with the very TRINITARIAN and COMMUNAL LIFE OF GOD, which places me in union with every other person- for all time- who has also come to faith in Christ.**

*For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form- and in Christ you – **ALL OF YOU TOGETHER- as a loving, forgiving, redemptive family of faith-** have been brought to fullness.*

- **May it be said of us**