

The Mystery of New Life

This morning we start the third Chapter of Colossians. If we were going to do a simple breakdown of the book, it would be as follows:

Chapter 1: The definition of the Gospel

Chapter 2: Warnings against deceit

Chapter 3-4: The practice of the new life

And so today we move away from what we should avoid, into what we should embrace. We will be talking more today about what it means to be alive to Christ, than what it means to be dead to ourselves. But these two are so linked, as we will see, that you can't truly talk about one without talking about the other. Paul showed us last week what it looks like when you try to die to the world without actually being alive to Christ (works based religion), today he unfolds through a series of stages what it means to be alive in Christ. So He begins in v.1:

What happened (justification)?

If then you have been raised with Christ.

The Christian walk has a starting point. If we are to respond to the work of Jesus Christ in our life, then there was an action that took place that we are to respond to. This initial step, the work of Jesus Christ making you His is called justification. It means that because of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, because of His willingness to die as the acceptable sacrifice for our sins, we are justified. The justice, the punishment that was ours has been fulfilled by Him.

But in the Bible, while we see this legal language, we also see the idea of being raised with Him. And so justification is about more than simply being excused from a sentence, it is also about LIVING A NEW LIFE. Justification is about dying and being reborn. It is about absolute change.

So when Paul starts us off with this little phrase, *If then you have been raised with Christ*, he is, as usual, saying more than what these few words hold in themselves. What I mean is, when he says *if then*, he is not questioning the reality but he is determined to build on what he has already established as reality. And he established this reality in chapter 2.12:

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.

So the idea of justification is one of dying to ourselves, being buried with Jesus, and then being raised to new life through the powerful working of God. This is what we celebrate in baptism. We are not just going through some old ritual. We are celebrating God's faithfulness in doing the work to bring people from their old lives and into the new. We are proclaiming that God is changing people, right now. He is making alive what was dead.

Through the work of the gospel, we have inherited new life. But it is important that we grasp what the nature of this life is. If we take a reading of how the Biblical writers refer to life, we find three aspects:

1. the physical life (how we act)
2. the emotional/intellectual (why we act)
3. the spiritual (who we are)

And this is not just a Biblical concept, this is coming out of the way cultural understanding of life in the Greco-Roman context. When we see Paul preaching the gospel in Athens (**Acts 17**), he quotes one of their own poets Epimenedes: *in him we live and move and have our being (28a)*. In this Paul is doing more than just attaching his God to their words. He is solving the three great questions of life and science:

1. existence – How do we exist? = LIVE
2. motive – Why do we act? = MOVE
3. being – What is the ultimate source of truth? = BEING

This is not much different than the view of life today. Science spends its time studying the human body from a purely physical, existent way: **what are we?** Psychology and other fields, study the mind: **why do we think and respond the way that we do?** Philosophy and spirituality continue to probe the depths of being: **what is the real and true source behind all of this?**

And so what we are about to see Paul call us to action. As he does, he touches on all three of these spheres of life. He call us to new life in ALL aspects of life. Paul is going to be making clear to them how the new life in Jesus Christ is a redefinition of everything that they had previously known. Or as the case in Athens, through Jesus Christ, you finally get the answers to life's questions.

But it is not just enough to see the world in a new way, it is also about living in a new way. We have not been saved from death so that we can sit idle in the new life. In Romans, Paul refers to the transfer from the old life to the new as going from slavery to slavery. What? I thought that in Jesus Christ we were free. We are, but freedom does not

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mean do whatever you want. Freedom means the ability to pursue real life. **Romans 6.18** says:

having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.

So the big idea is NOT that we no longer have responsibilities and obligations, but that we are no longer bound by them. So the things that we die to: ourselves, sin, the law, are not gone, they don't cease to exist, they simply no longer carry for us the weight that they used to. We still live in this world, we just now live with a different purpose. We still have the law, which gives us a glimpse into how God sees the world and how we can glorify Him. We still sin, but sin no longer has the shame and condemnation attached to it. It is still an offense to God that we must work to rid our lives of, but it no longer carries with it the threat of separation from God. WE HAVE BEEN JUSTIFIED. Our standing with God has been purchased. Our new slavery, is to work toward righteousness. As the next verse in Romans describes:

I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.

Some of us have been told that in the old life you had to work to define yourself, save yourself, earn for yourself, and now that you are a Christian you have been freed from the bondage of work...but the Bible says THERE IS STILL WORK TO DO. The Gospel does not make good works unnecessary; it just makes it for another purpose. It makes it a joy. You might think, but cutting the sin out of my life does not seem very joyful...but it will. As you grow in sanctification, the next step of salvation.

What now (sanctification)?

Seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. **Set your minds** on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and **your life is hidden** with Christ in God.

Having been justified, having had our life purchased and our eyes opened, we are now to DO SOMETHING in response. But this doing is not achievement based in the way that we are accustomed. It is not a simple checklist, or a test. And because it is not, it is not something that we are ever done pursuing. What God has called us to in this new life is the TOTAL TRANSFORMATION of our lives. From the inside out we are to work to put away everything that is not of God and fill ourselves with Him. This process of change is called sanctification.

Sanctification is a mutually dependent process. While justification, being made right before God and having our heart made alive is done fully and entirely by the Holy Spirit, the work of sanctification is done as we work through the power of the Holy Spirit who now dwells within us. So the reality is that it is still fully done through the power of God, but we have been instilled with and trusted with this power to use it. He has changed us and made us able to live, move and have our being in Him.

Paul calls us to act on this change; to recognize that we have been made new, and must live new so that we may grow in Him. He gives us three ways to do this: Seek the things that are above, set your minds on things that are above, and to understand that our life is hidden with Christ. As we said before, these three aspects of the new life relate to their biblical/cultural understanding of all life. These three directives point to the ways that our physical, emotional, and spiritual level have all been made new.

Seek the things that are above.

Paul tells us to seek the things that are above. Seek is such a perfect word. To seek means to pursue something without really being sure that you will obtain it. To seek is to act out of desire rather than out of duty. And seeking does not have an end point. The idea that we seek implies that we continually act out of a desire for the thing that we pursue. So how do we seek the things that are above?

We change our actions. We actively seek in our life the things that God has revealed to us. As I said before, when God changes our heart, and places the spirit in our lives, it allows us to see the world, at least partially, as God sees it. This is how we are freed from the bondage of this world...we are no longer constrained by the limited rules of engagement that it sets for us. Rules that the limited human mind write, promise us everything and deliver to us nothing. God's gift to us is to allow us to see past this to the things that are above. In His Word, He reveals to us how the world was created and how he created human beings to function. THIS IS HUGE. This means that when we see God's wisdom laid out, what He is telling us is this is how people in the beginning, when I created them and called them good, THIS IS HOW they were made to be. The laws of God, His descriptions of men, women, marriage, sexuality, parenting, work, leisure... these are not suggestions. These are not dead rules. This is God saying, as your creator, this is how you work.

We will be happier and more fulfilled people by doing this. I truly believe this. It is an entirely anti-intellectual statement to say that as we act against our desires, deprive ourselves of things we want, have our sin revealed to us in a deeper way, that we will be more joyful. It is absurd...but it is true. We have been trained to think that our natural self, that animalistic nature within us is our true selves. People feed that animal, they give into it, they nurture it, because they believe it will free them from the bondage that

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we all feel in these earthly bodies. But the truth is this, that animalistic nature is nothing more than our sin. It is the result of the Fall. Our true self, the most fulfilling life imaginable, is found by reading God's Word with the enlightened presence of the Holy Spirit.

So the big questions of life: Who are we as human beings? What are we created to be? How are we to act? are answered fully in the new life. The question each of us has to ask ourselves is: do I act differently than those around me? If there is no difference between yourself and those who have not been made new, then either new birth doesn't work, OR the Holy Spirit is not in you.

Set your minds on things that are above.

But why do we act? That is revealed in the second imperative: set your mind on things above. To set our minds on things above is to have our view of what is ultimate, what is lovely, what is good, become more like our Father in heaven. But how is this different from seeking?

Well, they certainly aren't as detached from one another. There is a reason why Paul lists them back to back the way he does. We seek the things above by pushing back against the false truth and pursuing God's truth, **EVEN THOUGH WE MAY NOT FULLY UNDERSTAND IT**. It is an act of submission. To set your mind on the things above is to allow your heart and mind to be sanctified by God. To allow these things to no longer just be God's truth, but to be truth. These two things are always happening in conjunction with one another. We fight against our sinful flesh to replace it with God's truth, and in it we see more of who we were created to be...and the more we see the joy of Christ in our life specifically, the more we will be convinced that He truly is the loving God that He claims to be. The more we will find joy in following Him... And in that the more we will conform our actions.

This idea of setting our minds above is not some sort of spiritual divide from reality. Instead, it is both informed by, and for the purpose of living life. Far too often, the things that are above get left there. We keep the things above in the spiritual realm, and thus they never affect the physical. But the reality of the gospel is that Jesus Himself did not stay above, apart from us. **HE DWELT AMONG US**. He came to earth and suffered very real, physical pain for us to have this new life, to even be able to set our minds on the things above. And this should cause us to rethink how we have segmented our own lives. When we set our minds on the things above, it is not just so that we can, for a time, exist on some higher plane. It is so that we can have a stronger relationship with the Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer of the world. Sanctification is nothing more or less than finding our complete and utter motivation for this life in the person of God. As He increases in our lives, we must decrease.

So the big questions of motive: Where is our fulfillment? How can we find joy? What SHOULD drive our actions? are answered fully in the new life. The question each of us has to ask ourselves is: what am I doing to intentionally set my mind beyond the things of this world? If the answer is nothing, I can tell you it isn't happening. It does not just occur.

Your life is hidden with Christ in God.

The third statement of Paul is not so much something that we need to do, as much as it is something that we need to understand. He says, ***your life is hidden with Christ in God.*** This certainly ties closely to the statement , you have been raised with Christ that he began with, but adds to it a level of mystery. To say that we are raised implies that we have it; to say that it is hidden implies that we don't. And both of these describe sanctification.

To be sanctified by God means that you are slowly being worked towards that which you already are. The mystery is being revealed piece by piece, but the fact that it is still a mystery to us does not mean that it has not already been fully thought out and completed by God. So the fact that our life is hidden with Christ means there will be a day that it is fully revealed. There will be a day when it all comes together, it all makes sense, and that which Jesus finished at the cross, will actually feel finished.

The work has begun in us, the new life has been granted, but there is still a ways to go. As Paul says in **Philippians 1.6**:

And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

There is a day coming when all of the little bits of truth that seem fragmented will be completed. It is like we are slowly building a puzzle, and God gives us the next piece when He is ready. So we have this incomplete puzzle, but we have the promise that one day, all of the pieces will be in place and we will be able to see this new life for what it is. This should spur us on in our seeking and setting. The fact that our identity has been transferred fully from enemy of God to child of God gives us the perspective that we need to act now with a view for the future. This life is not simply a speed bump to eternity... it is a training ground for worship. We will spend the rest of our existence in the presence of Jesus, worshipping at His feet; we might as well get started now, **IN THE WAY THAT HE HAS CALLED US TO WORSHIP HIM.** Specifically here, by conforming our minds and actions to His. And so, to steal a bumper sticker phrase:

Think eternally, act locally.

So the big questions of being: What is our ultimate source? How can we know what truth is? Why do I exist? are answered fully in the new life. The question each of us has to ask ourselves is: Do my friends, family, coworkers have any idea that I am seeking something completely different? Can they tell IN ANY WAY that your life has been transformed?

All of these questions, assuring that you have really been born again, is important because Christ is coming again to judge. And those who are His will be overjoyed at His coming. Those who are not...will not.

What then (glorification)?

Jesus' return is the subject of Paul's final statement in **v.4**:

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

In this statement, Paul not only alludes to that day when it will all be made clear, but he shows us what will happen to those who are in Christ. He tells us of the third aspect of the new life: we are justified, we are sanctified, and here we see, we are glorified. When Paul says, we will appear with Him in glory, it is not simply talking about some glorious place that we will be, but that we specifically will be the glory. I don't mean this to say that we will be better than or equal to the glory of Jesus, but that we will be completely what we were created to be. All this sanctification that we have been processing through will in a moment be complete, and we will be in the presence of our God, full of belief.

Which means, until that moment we are ALL still unbelievers.

For some of you, unbelief means that you have never been justified. You have never experienced that heart change where you all of a sudden see your sin. And you see that the only hope of repairing your relationship with God is for Jesus Christ to be your advocate. In this you are ready to give Him your life so that you can have His. His death to cover the legal demands, His Spirit to grow you, and His glory to wash you clean and present you perfect at death. All you have to do is believe it. If you see it, and have the capacity to believe it, you can have confidence that He is working in your life, right here, right now, to bring about new life.

For those of you who are in the camp that Paul is specifically talking to here; those who have already been raised with Christ, you aren't off of the hook. We talk about being sinners, but we don't really get that the presence of sin reveals our disbelief. When we sin we decide that something else will give us the answer to living, moving, and having our being. We trust that some other thing: girlfriend/boyfriend, husband/wife, kids, house,

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job, car, skill, sex, food, even religion, will somehow be more joyful, be more complete than Jesus. It will bring us more joy than some detached religion. We need to repent.

But what understanding this process of justification, sanctification, glorification does for us is help us to understand why we are the way we are. It helps us to not fear that we are not saved, simply because sin still plagues us. It helps us not to feel discouraged when we have not become perfect as others claim OR not growing at the rate that we feel we should be. It helps keep our focus on the things that are above and the things that are to come. It helps us to read our Bibles, avoiding both the traps of spiritual laziness (I don't have to do anything) and spiritual legalism (I have to perfect myself) on the other. It helps us to put the wisdom of God into a framework that even our limited minds can understand, and I will end with a verse to show you how beautiful this is, **1 John 1.5-10**. A verse that can be misunderstood when read from an earthly mindset, but comes alive in the context of what we have talked about today:

*This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. **God is holy and can not be in relationship with sin.***

*If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. **Those who have been raised in Him must now have the responsibility to live in Him.***

*But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. **Jesus cleanses us and brings us back into relationship with God. Once and for all.***

*If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. **We still sin, revealed to us by the truth of the Spirit in us.***

*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. **Though we continue to fail and disbelieve, He is loving and merciful and will continue to accept us. He wants us to come to Him and rely on Him.***

*If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. **When we think that we can achieve without Him, we show that we never had new life to begin with.***

It is beautiful and also terrifying. I have a great fear that many who assume they are His, are not. And I ask that as we come to receive Communion, as we come to be identified with His crucified body, we take a moment to lay our sins out before He who promises to

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cleanse us. And let's take this week to prepare ourselves to witness baptism next week, to experience people standing up and saying, I have experienced this and I want the world to know that my WHOLE life is now redefined by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Benediction: 1 Peter 5.6-11