

Our text last week ended with the verse:

*He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.*

We didn't spend much time on this verse last week and part of that is because of how important it is to the discussion that we move into this week. This verse is the heart of what we are going to be talking about today. You will see today that our section once again begins with a therefore, tying it to what was said previous, and our whole discourse today is built on the FACT that Jesus:

1. disarmed the rulers and authorities
2. and TRIUMPHED over them

So the two big ideas here as we discuss the Christian life, as we search for how we are to live now that we have been *raised with Him in baptism*, are:

1. we are to turn away from the false hope of this world which has been exposed by the light of Jesus Christ.
2. we are to live victoriously, being united to Christ who triumphed over them.

These two things are mutually important. We have been hammering the first one pretty well. Last week, Paul warned of being *taken captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ*. As Paul keeps reminding us, WE NEED TO BE ABLE TO SPOT THAT WHICH IS FALSE. We need to do it by KNOWING WHAT IS TRUE. We need to pursue the truth of the gospel to combat both those things that bubble up from within ourselves as well as those things that come at us from the outside. THE TRUTH OF JESUS CHRIST CHANGE OUR WORLDVIEW.

The second piece, the TRIUMPH, is the source of that change. It is what guides our hearts and minds to recognize what is true and what is false. It is the truth that Jesus not only defeated sin, but caused a ripple effect throughout the whole world. In triumphing over them, Jesus did more than just expose their shame...He also created a new way to live that separate and better than what we experienced before. Jesus did not just call us to die to ourselves and languish there in death. He said we have been made *alive together with Him*.

Paul continues to give warnings today, but these warning are a little bit different than previous ones. These warnings are what happens when we die to the world without also being alive in Christ. These warnings are for those who understand the warnings, but are afraid to grasp the treasure! And while that seems like a pretty stupid compromise, it is one that everyone here slips into now and then. And it leads to

depressing religion. It leads to a relationship with Jesus that is defined by not enjoying anything.

Think about it like going on a diet. I know that many people in the church right now are doing cleanses and other diets that cut extra things from their food intake. So you cut out the sugar, and the carbs, and whatever else is deemed not healthy to the body. This is good, take away the things that the body does not need...but the other important part is that you FILL the body with good food. Because replacing the bad stuff you took out with other bad stuff isn't really going to help (I'm glad I cut out sugar, while you are sitting with a tub of lard). That isn't a win. And so today Paul gives us a picture of what happens when we attempt to cut out the bad, to push back the lies, without also filling ourselves with the new life in Christ. So Colossians 2, starting at verse 16:

### **The short-sightedness of ritual**

*Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.*

The judgment that Paul is talking about is judging their standing before God. In other words, the false teachers in Colossae were basing the salvation of the people on matters of food and drink, festivals, and the keeping of the Sabbath (by their rules). Paul's statement here is less about making any judgment, and more about what things hold the power of salvation. And we know this because of the last statement that he makes:

*These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.*

There is nothing bad about their observance of these rituals, remember these practices were instituted by God. The problem is that they have mistaken the signs and missed the destination. Driving down the road, signs are very helpful. We were trying to find the Point Defiance Zoo a few weeks ago, and there were not good signs. More than anything in the world at that moment I wanted a clear sign that would tell me where to go. Signs are good. But a sign that points at itself is useless. A sign that says, 'look at me, I am a sign,' does not need to exist.

Jesus is right there, the fullness of God dwelling bodily, and they are more interested in the shadow. These rituals were a shadow of the things to come, but the people are so engrossed by the shadow that they do not see the substance of Jesus Christ. Just to be clear, let's look at how these things acted as signposts to Jesus, because it is important to see how God unfolded the mystery of His plan through time, lest we forget how the OT guides our understanding of the new.

The questions of food and drink relate to the ceremonial clean and unclean foods laid out in Leviticus 11, which ends:

*This is the law about beast and bird and every living creature that moves through the waters and every creature that swarms on the ground, to make a distinction between the unclean and the clean and between the living creature that may be eaten and the living creature that may not be eaten.*

God laid out very specific laws about what is clean and what is unclean. He made clear distinctions between that which His people should partake in and that which they should avoid. All of these laws made a clear distinction between purity and impurity. It is like the fruit in the garden. The fruit itself was not forbidden. It was forbidden because God forbade it. The existence of forbidden, unclean, or impure items foresaw the need for a purifier. Pointed to the fact that there was a cleansing that needed to happen. It set the stage for He who would make all things clean in Himself.

The issue of Festivals was also a large of the Jewish heritage. Festivals were set forth as markers to signify the things that God had done. They were remembrances of His work in the past:

1. Passover was God rescuing His people from slavery.
2. First fruits is the recognition that God is the provider.
3. Pentecost was remembering God's provision and His issuing of the Ten Commandments to Moses. It was about a God who came down to make a way for His people to come to Him.

In Jesus, we have the ultimate act of God coming down, the incarnation, and the fullest expression of unity and provision, as we are adopted into His family and given the Spirit to dwell within us. We are freed from the bondage of slavery to sin so that we may be free in Christ.

The issuing of Sabbath was part of the Ten Commandments, but we see the foundation of it in Genesis as God rests on the seventh day. The Jewish leaders took very seriously the law of God, but in their earnestness, they added to the command of keeping the Sabbath day holy (there were more than 600 laws tied into it). Jesus became a target of this specific observance when he was questioned about picking heads of grain off as He and His disciples passed through a field on the Sabbath. His answer to the Pharisees was:

*The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath. (Mark 2.27-28)*

Once again distinguishing His rule over ALL THINGS including the Law. Jesus was revealing to them that they had taken a sign, a sign that had been created specifically for their joy, and turned it into a measurement by which they might both judge salvation

as well as place themselves above others. As a sign, what does Sabbath point to? Hebrews 4.9-10 tells us:

*there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.*

As God's people we have not only an eternity to rest in His presence because of the work of Jesus, but our lives NOW are free from the burden of works...in the sense that as we said last week, we aren't working to achieve anything. So when Paul says no one can judge us, he is saying that there is no place to judge those whose rest has already been earned. There is no grounds to call dead what Jesus has made alive with Him.

We may not be fighting against the weight of Jewish cultural history, but the modern church has its own systems of shadow-casting. We have our own ways of depending on the ritual rather than the redeemer:

Go to church regularly, avoid whatever lists of things that your pastor has decided should be abstained from, get baptized, take Communion, drop a check in the vase, volunteer somewhere, come to this event, make sure you go to that Bible study... These are not bad things, and Paul's purpose is not to demonize ritual. We better be careful not to throw out God's commands with God's warnings. The issue is making sure that the shadow does not become so dominant that we forget what is casting it. That church life doesn't take the place of relationship with Jesus Christ, it is here to support. We need to make sure that we are not like children who throw their gifts aside to play with the wrapping paper. DO NOT BE SATISFIED WITH THE SHADOW, BE OVERJOYED IN THE SUBSTANCE

Paul warns us of what happens when ritual gets detached from the gospel, he now moves on to what happens when spirituality becomes an end in itself (v.18):

### **The allure of vague spirituality**

*Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.*

He started the first section off by saying *let no one pass judgment on you*, now he says *let no one disqualify you*. So the first seems to say, don't let people's idea of you change the way you view yourself, now he says, DO NOT LET THEM DISTRACT YOU. The idea is here is that off a race. Disqualified means that somehow you did something apart from what you were supposed to be doing. You started before the gun, you left your lane, you cut corners...you stopped running the race you were supposed to run and that got you disqualified. THIS IS WHAT BECOMES OF SPIRITUALITY THAT IS

PROMOTED WITHOUT THE GOSPEL. We are running but we forget why and to where. And he lists 5 things here that draw you away from the race you are supposed to run.

1. asceticism or false humility. We have in us the ability to put on a fake sense of churchiness. I know, I grew up in church. I knew how to flip the switch on Sunday mornings. How to change the way you talk, dress, and act for a few hours a week to appear holy. It is easy to become more about looking holy than actually becoming holy. It is what happens when we want to be part of a spiritual community without the gospel. We do this because we don't believe in the power of Jesus Christ to really change us.

2. the worship of angels. While we may not pray to or through angels or saints, we definitely live as if God is spiritually far from us. And what I mean is, the angel worship existed because the people had a hard time believing that they could actually approach God. They look for a mediator because the idea that they could have direct contact with a Holy God seemed hopeless. As we live our lives, we often live as if the only time we can come into His presence is at Church events. Or the only time we can understand the Bible is when the pastor or some great Christian speaker is presenting it. We don't actually believe that we can have direct, real, honest, open relationship with the God of the universe. This is what happens when we try to set up a relationship with God without the gospel. We do this because we don't believe that Jesus' sacrifice was really enough to unify us with God.

3. going on in detail about visions. It is tempting to make God's presence more real by going on about how He has spoken to you, desiring to have a part in the revelation of the Spirit. God can use extraordinary means to reveal His truth to us, I don't want to discount the fact that God can and has worked through personal revelation. At the same time, some of us spend far more time reveling in the things that are unrevealed than the things which clearly are. We focus on the extraordinary revelation, rather than the fullness of truth that God has given us in His Word and His Son. It is what happens when we want to have direct knowledge about God without the gospel. We do this because we are not content with the revelation of Christ.

4. puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind. So not only do we fake humility, but we do it to mask the pride that wells up inside of us. One of the terms I here most often to describe Christians or the church is elitist. This is where those comments about being judgmental come from. And we want to believe that it is because God has set down very clear laws and that we are just trying to obey Him and uphold His law, but if we stop for a moment and let down our guard, I think we can admit that having a relationship with Jesus Christ, having been given the treasures of heaven, the riches of Christ, that this does build within us a sense of conceit. It does make us feel better than those who don't. It makes us feel like we have things figured out. We see it in the disciples, the book of James condemns it, and Jesus went two to two with the Pharisees for this very thing. This is not a new thing, and as Paul says, this pride is without reason. It comes from a place of mastering spirituality without the gospel. It is

what happens when we pursue spiritual growth without the gospel. We do this because we don't actually believe that Jesus death was necessary for our sin.

5. not holding fast to the Head. As we have seen, this is the error that leads to the rest. All of the previous disqualifications hinge on the fact that somewhere along the line we let go of Jesus Christ to hold onto something else.

1. We fake humility and the perfect Christian life because we forget that His sacrifice freed us from the need to be perfect.
2. We use other things to bridge the gap, because we forget that at the cross we were cleansed and presented blameless.
3. We spend our time trying to add to His revelation because we have forgotten that Jesus is the image of the invisible God.
4. We become prideful because we forget that the death of Jesus was and still is our only hope.

In order to grab after these other things, we have to take our hands off of the savior. When we let go of the cross, we are led away from the life that He has called us to.

We get judged and convinced by shallow ritual, we get disqualified by falling into spirituality that is detached from the gospel, and worst of all, we add to the work of Jesus Christ, nullifying what He has done (v.20)

### **The false promise of Abstinence**

*If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations—“Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch” (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.*

We are definitely convinced by tradition and religiosity, but more than anything else, we are convinced by our own need to be in control. We as a people are driven by our ability to do. When it comes to God, we want to believe that we are part of it because of something we have done (or because of something we have not done, which is the case here). That somehow because we abstained, *Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch*, that we are somehow cleaner than those around us. It is to believe that God chose us because we were more worthy, more lovable, more savable, more righteous, more something. Like somehow God looked down like He was picking teams and said, that guy would be great to have. But that is not how it is. God said, that person is MINE and I will make them worthy, lovable, savable, righteous. And He does this by giving us new life. A life that is defined by Jesus.

There are a lot of things that appear good. There are a lot of ways that we can fool other people into thinking that we are good Christians. *but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.* It is not that hard to convince another person that you have it together, but Christianity is not about other people. It is about the worship of Jesus Christ...and Jesus can see your heart. Jesus sees not only what you do, but the motives behind it. One of His greatest condemnations on the Pharisees was the fact that they were whitewashed tombs. That they perfected the appearance, the shadow, the words, but that they really didn't care about the substance. That they were more concerned with the judgments of men, the practice of spirituality, and mastering all of the rules, to care that God Himself was standing in front of them. We are sidetracked by the same things. It is why we must die. Daily.

When we die to the world, it does not mean that we no longer live in the world. But death IS the great separator. To die to the elemental spirits of the world means that you no longer play by the broken rules of a broken world. YOUR DESIRES CHANGE. Everything changes. So we interact with the same world as those who do not have Jesus, but this world should not look the same to us as it does to them. OR, as another pastor put it:

*If [a person] does not believe that Christ died for HIS sins, and that all of HIS hopes are built on that great savior, HE will not cleave to Him in love and dependence. If HE does not so cleave to Him, HE will not draw from Him the life which would mold HIS character and stir HIM to run the race. If HE does not run the race, HE will never win nor wear the crown.*

May we act because we have Jesus, not because we think that our actions will lead us to Him. May we accept His invitation and feast on Him.