

Colossians: Alive in Christ | Colossians 2:1-7

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[0 : 00] Let us pray. Father, in this season we remember that in between time when the disciples were waiting.

They had seen your son Jesus go. They were awaiting a promise. They were awaiting your Holy Spirit. And so now, Holy Spirit, we acknowledge you in our presence and ask that you would work among us.

That as the word is read and preached, that it would enter our hearts and change us, Lord. So that we would more and more resemble your son Jesus Christ, Father.

For our good and for your glory, we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. So we're in the seventh. This is the seventh Sunday of Easter. It started.

The Easter season started on Easter Sunday, seven weeks ago. And it concludes next Sunday, which is Pentecost Sunday. In this season, we've been walking through Paul's letter to the Colossians.

[1 : 16] And today we come to the passage on which this whole letter turns. It begins with Paul pointing out in verse 1, How great a struggle I have for you. Now when I think of Paul and his struggle, my mind goes through several paintings that Rembrandt did of the Apostle Paul in prison.

Here's one. You can see the look. Well, maybe you can't see. I can see because I'm right next to it. And you can see the look on his face. It's one of intense concentration, perhaps enlightenment.

One of struggle. And his eyes are focused to the right. I don't know if you can see it because of the contrast. But there's a sword right there on the right.

Not something ordinarily somebody's allowed to have with them in prison. But this is like Paul's name tag, right? Rembrandt would have a sword in paintings of Paul because it was an emblem of his struggle.

It points forward to Paul's eventual martyrdom. But it has another meaning. The sword is just above a letter that Paul is writing there.

[2 : 28] So this is the sword of the Spirit. Rembrandt is showing us that this is the Word of God. The sword is the sword of the Spirit.

It's the Bible. And Paul is wielding it on behalf of the church. This is his struggle. In today's passage, Paul is struggling to protect the church from making a serious mistake.

He's writing to a young, brand new congregation in the little town of Colossa. And Paul knows that as soon as a congregation like this is established, that the devil wastes no time and immediately begins assaulting a church like this.

And what does the enemy like to do? The enemy goes for the roots. The enemy tells lies to try and erode the foundation by diluting them with plausible arguments, as it said in Colossians chapter 2 verse 4, what Deborah read for us earlier.

So, speaking of roots and foundations, let me show you a couple pictures from my yard. This used to be thriving ivy, and it is no longer thriving.

[3 : 42] And if you're immediately wondering, I'm sure, how in the world did Dan manage to kill ivy, right? So when that meteor comes and hits earth and everything is wiped out, ivy will be the one thing that survives, right?

And yet I managed to kill it. Behold, I am the world's worst gardener. See, the soil was getting too wet, right? There wasn't enough sunlight on it.

So the moisture was causing the roots to rot, and the ivy got sick, and it died. Here's another picture. This is in the back of our house.

Do you see how the structure appears compromised at the bottom? It's because that's really bad, actually. So when it rains, there's nowhere for the water to go, and it just goes down into the soil and down to the foundation and erodes the soil from underneath of the foundation, and then you can begin to see cracks above the ground.

And by then, it's unfortunately too late. So, yeah, the easiest way to prevent all of this from happening would be for it to not rain, right?

[4 : 55] That would solve my problem. But it's always going to rain. It's always going to rain. You can't escape the climate. And so what you have to do is just protect the roots, protect the foundation.

In the same way, Paul's audience had a faith that was built on a solid foundation. But immediately, the structure of their faith is being subjected to the cultural climate around them.

And it was inescapable. One of the things that their culture, the culture of the Colossian church, was telling them that wherever you look, there are powers at play.

If you're experiencing love, then it's because Aphrodite is at work. And if you're experiencing prosperity, then it's because Mammon is at work.

And if the Roman army is conquering Britain, it's because Roma is overpowering Britannia. And if this worldview is constantly raining on the faith of the Colossians, and if the Colossians aren't careful, then the foundation of their faith will begin to erode.

[6 : 07] And then eventually, over time, it will seem completely plausible for them to say, yes, Jesus is Lord, and if I want to experience love, then I should probably get Aphrodite on my side.

Yes, Jesus is Lord, but if I want to make some money, I should probably get Mammon on my side. And then their faith becomes Jesus plus something else.

And to our ears, it might sound a bit absurd, but to them, it would have felt completely plausible because they were swimming in a culture that allowed that to seem possible.

In the same way, we swim in a culture that allows for all kinds of plausible-sounding reconfigurations of the Christian faith. One big philosophical tenet that our culture clings to is expressive individualism.

This holds that each person has a unique core of feeling and intuition that should unfold or be expressed if individuality is to be realized.

[7 : 18] Until I do that, until I pursue the things that satisfy me and help me become who I truly am, I cannot be happy. This is the culture we swim in.

It's the culture our children swim in, right? It's time to see what I can do to test the limits and break through. No right, no wrong, no rules for me.

I'm free. Let it be observed. That's not quite what Jesus said. As a matter of fact, it's the exact opposite.

Jesus said in Luke chapter 9, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it.

But whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. So if something in our culture, that's a lie. Opposed to the gospel. Opposed to what Jesus says is true.

[8 : 21] But like the Colossians, our faith can slowly become Jesus plus something else. In this case, this is just an example, Jesus plus self-fulfillment.

I'll never forget a conversation I had with a friend of mine. He, if you had seen him, this happened a few years ago, if you had seen him in church, you would have said, that's the guy that really loves Jesus, right?

He's standing there singing with his arms up, like singing his heart out. And yet one day, he decides to leave his wife and his family for a woman he met on the internet.

And on the phone, he gave me the whole story and summarized it all by saying, I just don't want to miss out on my last chance for happiness. That's a lie straight from the devil, isn't it?

And yet he was able to hold the two together. Jesus is Lord. I need to do this for happiness. Because to him and to many in our culture, a culture which says, pursue happiness at all costs, a stardom marriage is our illegit thing, that all feels plausible.

[9 : 31] It feels plausible. Plausible. And we mustn't believe that all of us are not guilty of the exact same thing.

We are. To our Christian faith, I, we, are constantly tacking on things our culture says about money, about our bodies, about success, about truth, about productivity, about busyness.

So what are we to do? How are we to protect ourselves? What does Paul say? He says, therefore, as you received Christ Jesus, the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith, just as you were taught.

Now we can reverse the clauses and say, walk in Jesus in the same way that you received him, or live in Jesus. in the same way that you received him. So what does it mean to receive him?

Well, if you look at this passage in the larger context, especially what comes later in this chapter, I believe he's talking about our baptism. In your baptism, you were marked as Christ's own forever.

[10 : 51] So Paul says to live in that reality. let your actions be determined by your belonging to Jesus. In the middle of the film, The Lives of Others, one of the main characters, a famous actress in East Berlin, is on the verge of making a very bad decision.

Bad both morally and relationally. She knows it's bad. But just before she goes to do this thing, she ducks really quick into a restaurant.

Now, also, in this restaurant, there happens to be the Stasi agent that has been spying on her for quite some time. And unbeknownst to her, she has changed his heart.

She has won his admiration. And he knows, because he's been spying on her, what she's about to do. So he approaches her. He's trying to stop her from doing this.

And upon approaching her, she says, do we know each other? And he says, you don't know me, but I know you. Many people love you for who you are.

[12 : 07] She says, actors are never who they are. He responds, well, you are. I've seen you on stage.

You were more who you are than you are now. Not great. On stage, you were more who you are than you are now.

And when he reminds her of her identity, in this case, an identity that was forged through artistic expression, she decides not to make this really bad decision.

She acts according to who she really is. Now, I would suggest that at your baptism, you were most truly who you are. In that, in your baptism, you were given your true identity.

You were marked as belonging to our Lord, Jesus Christ. And your life in Christ is to conform to that moment when you were marked.

[13 : 07] So how do you live in the manner that you received Jesus? Well, you remember your baptism. Remember your baptism. Remember the vows that you made.

Remember that you have renounced the devil and all his works. You've renounced the vain pomp and false values of the world. You've renounced the sinful desires of the flesh.

Remember that you have turned to Jesus Christ and accepted him as your savior. Remember that you have promised to follow and obey him as Lord. Remember that you are sealed by the Holy Spirit and baptism and marked as Christ's own forever.

You were marked as Christ's own forever. You are Christ's own forever. Do you want to keep the torrents of our culture from washing away your foundation?

Do you want to keep your roots healthy? Then as you received Christ the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

[14 : 23] Next week we'll have the opportunity to remember our baptism when baby Juniper is baptized. And when she's baptized, she's going to receive a book. We give a book to all of our babies, our children who are baptized.

It's called At Your Baptism. This book is instructional for us as adults. It teaches us how to remember our baptism. So I'd like to end our time together by reading that book together.

You are baptized because you belong to God and to God's family. Your baptism is a time to see and hear God's promises. At your baptism, God tells you that for you, Jesus Christ came into the world.

God sent his son, Jesus, into the world to become human, like us, but without sin. For you, he lived and showed God's love.

While he lived on earth, Jesus was a healer, a teacher, a friend, and so much more. For you, he suffered the darkness of Calvary and cried at the last, it is finished.

[15 : 46] Jesus showed his great love for us by dying on the cross. The Bible tells us that Jesus' death takes away the sin of the world. For you, he triumphed over death and rose in newness of life.

But death was not the end. Jesus came back to life. Now we can live each day with God's power. When we die, we can live with God forever. This is something that we celebrate today, the ascension of our Lord.

For you, he ascended to reign at God's right hand. When Jesus left earth, he returned to heaven. He talks to God the Father about us and sent the Holy Spirit to be with us all the time.

All this he did for you before you knew anything of it. He lived, died, and rose for us because he loves us. We don't have to do anything to earn his love.

And so the word of Scripture is fulfilled. We love because God loved us first. We see God's love for us through Jesus. Jesus shows us how to live so that we can love God and other people.

[17 : 02] Now when you think about your baptism, remember that God loves you. Remember that you are part of God's worldwide family. family. No one can ever take these promises away from you.

Let's pray.