

The Christ-Centred Life

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[0 : 00] Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, you have said that your word is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit joints and marrow, and you have made it able to judge the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

So please enable me to speak your word faithfully today and please cause it to do what you have promised it will. And we pray this in the name of Jesus Christ and for his glory.

Amen. Well, friends, I want to begin tonight, the Bible talk tonight, by just doing some stopping and pondering for a moment. You see, I want you to think back on the week that has just passed.

I want you to think about what you have done, the places you have been, the tasks that have taken up your time, the television that you have watched, the time you have spent on the internet, the people you have spent time with, you know, those that you have talked to or those who have talked to you.

And then think for a moment about the decisions that you have made. They might have been big ones or little ones. And ask yourself why you made the decisions that you made.

[1 : 17] What motivated you? What motivated you? What drove you? Why did you do what you did do? Why did you decide what you did decide?

And how on earth did you make up your mind? Now, I start the Bible talk this week this way because we are starting a new series on Colossians.

And I've deliberately chosen just this little section of Colossians because it addresses how Christians should reply to the sorts of questions I've just posed to you. It gives us a sort of theological framework for Christian thinking and acting.

And it shows us concrete examples of what such thinking and such acting would look like in an ordinary world. Today, we're just going to look at two verses, though. So let's get there, Colossians 2, verses 6 to 7.

So let's get down to work and let's have a look at them together. But in order to do it, you need to open your Bibles back at Colossians chapter 1, which is where we're going to start. You really need, in order to understand Colossians 2, verses 6 and 7, you need to understand what has gone before and what comes after.

[2 : 25] So let's have a look. Open the front page of Colossians. Paul begins with a fairly short introduction. He can have longer ones. This one's pretty succinct. Just verses 1 and 2.

And then he bursts into thanksgiving and prayer. And in verses 3 to 8, he thanks God for the people that he's writing to. And he prays for them. In verses 9, right through to 15.

Again, just stopping to give some joyful thanks in verse 12. God the Father, you see, has qualified this people that he's writing to to share in the inheritance of God's people in the kingdom of light.

But then Paul's sense of thanksgiving just stretches on a little bit. In verse 12, he talks about the kingdom of light. In verse 13, he talks about the dominion of darkness, clearly opposite of that kingdom of light, that kingdom of darkness from which Christians have been rescued.

He talks about the kingdom of the Son whom God loves. And in and through this Son and his work, he says, look, Christians, you Christians have redemption, the forgiveness of your sins.

[3 : 35] Then in verse 15, we move on again. In verses 13 and 14, remember, we heard about the work of the Son, which was rescue and redemption. But now in verses 15 to 20, we hear about the person of the Son.

And the picture painted here in these verses, which we just proclaimed not long ago, is magnificent. This Son of God is supreme. In him, all the fullness of deity dwells.

Through him, all things are reconciled. Through his shed blood, peace has been made with God. But now look at verses 21 to 23.

At one time, Paul says, we were alienated from God. We were enemies in our minds because of our evil behavior. But now, through Christ's death, we've moved from alienation to reconciliation. From being God's enemies to being God's friends. We've been made holy in God's sight. Free from blemish. Free from accusation. This great and glorious gospel is that which Christians heard.

[4 : 45] These Christians heard. And it's the gospel of which Paul has become the servant. He's a minister, you see, of this gospel. And this gospel has Jesus at its center.

Look at verse 27. It is the great and glorious revelation of God, which is Christ in Gentiles. Now, to really understand this, you need to have a Jewish framework of thinking about things for a moment. You see, if you're a Jew, you thought God was for the Jews. And can you see what Paul is saying? He's saying, do you know what is absolutely remarkable? You know what this great glorious revelation of God is?

It is that Christ can be amongst the Gentiles. That even Gentiles can be in Christ. Christ in Gentiles, he says, which is the hope of glory.

And so it is this Christ whom Paul proclaims. You see, he says, as he goes on in these verses, he labors and strenuously contends to present everyone maturing Christ.

[5 : 50] I think that means Jews and Gentiles and anyone else you care to name. Maturing Christ. You see, he wants them to know the mystery of God, who is Christ.

He wants them to know that in Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. You see, Paul's ministry is filled with this. It is filled with Christ.

Christ is at its beginning and Christ is at its end. Christ is in its center. Christ is its all in all. And this Christ is made known where?

In the gospel, in the message about Christ. And this Christ is the one whom these Colossians have received. So friends, that's the introduction to Colossians.

One long thanksgiving, I think, that runs from verse 3 all the way through to the end, to chapter 2, verse 5. One Lord exaltation in the gospel of Christ.

[6 : 52] One long exaltation in the person and work of Jesus who's made known in the gospel. And that brings us to verses 6 and 7. But before I look at them, I want to just look briefly at what happens after 6 and 7.

So look at verse 8 all the way through to 418. In 2.8 to 418, we have what is, I think, the main body of the letter. Now, I told you that he only had a very short introduction, but he's got a very long thanksgiving.

And that runs for, you know, a chapter and a bit. But now, after he says verses 6 and 7, he says some other things. It is the main body of his letter. Now, this is sort of the heart, not the heart of it, but really the core of it.

Let's take a quick skim through it. Look at verses 8 to 23. Paul's talking about false teaching. You see, what he's saying is if Christ is at the center of the gospel and Christian living, the first thing you need to do is avoid all threats to living with Christ at the center.

Anything that threatens you, any teaching that threatens you, threatens to take Christ out of the center, is wrong. And then look at 3.1 to 4.1. He talks about the practicalities of Christian living.

[8 : 03] And first he looks at Christian living in general. Then he looks at Christian living in some of our main relationships. Now look at chapter 4 verses 2 to 6. He talks about prayer and witness.

And then finally he closes off his letter with various greetings, plans and instructions. So there we have the book in outline. It has an introduction filled with the glories of Jesus.

It has a main body which is filled with instructions how to think and act as a Christian. But in between these two halves is the heart of the book.

It's the thing that really gives its tick. In between these two halves is this heart of the book. And that's where we're going to spend the rest of our time tonight.

Now let me just outline what Paul says and listen carefully. You see Paul's about to reveal the heart of Christian living. Paul's first words are, so then.

[9 : 04] Now did you hear it? Paul's telling them that what he has had to say now depends on what he has already said up until this point. You see what he's about to say in verses 6 to 7 looks back to what he's already said about Jesus and the gospel.

Can you hear what he's saying? The heart of Christian living looks backwards. Where to? It looks backwards to who Jesus is and what Jesus has done. And then it looks forward to what needs to be done in our lives and in our thinking.

Look at the next words. He says, as you received. So then, as you received. Now let me tell you that receiving things in Paul often means receiving traditions and teaching handed down by others. I don't think that's what's meant here. No, I think he means receiving Jesus himself. So then, as you have received. And you can see that by the words that follow.

So then, he says. So then, as you've received. So then, as you have received Christ Jesus as Lord. Now we already know what Paul means by this, don't we?

[10:07] We've already seen it. In that declaration of faith we made earlier on. He means that Christians have received Jesus as. Think of some of the things we said in that declaration.

The supreme son that God loves. The image of the invisible God. The first born over all creation. The one through whom and for whom everything was created. The one in whom all things hold together. The head of the body, the church.

The mystery of God. The one in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. You see, this is what Christians have received. Isn't that phenomenal? Isn't it phenomenal that we Christians have received the supreme son whom God loves?

That we have received the image of the invisible God. That we have received the one who is the first born over all creation. That we have received the one through whom and for whom all things were created.

[11:13] That we have received the one in whom all things hold together. We have received the one who is the head of the body of the church. We have received the mystery hidden from ages past and now revealed.

We have received the one in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Do you ever think about Jesus that way? And your reception of him that way? That is phenomenal, isn't it? That's whom we have received. And look at verse 6. He simply says, Friends, the Christian life is a life filled with continuing on the way that you began.

You don't go on to grander things. There's nothing grander to go on to than that description we've already had. It's about continuing to go on with what you've received.

That is the truth that Jesus Christ is Lord. It is working out just what that means to have Jesus Christ as Lord in every area of your life. In all your thinking.

[12:20] In all your actions. And I wonder if I could illustrate it like this. Here's my one illustration for tonight. I think it's the only one. The Christian life is a little like walking backwards into the future. Okay?

Let me explain it this way. Imagine this is your acknowledgement. This is the event that God did in his son. On the earth. And this is you here.

And you look back at it and you say, I see that which God has done. And you fix your eyes on that and you walk. Backwards into the future.

Constantly peering back, letting that event shape everything that you do. Every day thinking, what am I going to do today as a result of what I see done there? And that is our hope for the future as well.

You see, living as a Christian is life lived actively. It's about responding to Jesus and all that he is and all that he has done. Keeping that in mind and walking into the future.

[13:24] But let's move on. Look at verse 7. Paul is giving us a how. A how you go about continuing in Christ. And he does so by urging the Colossians and us to be rooted and built up. Now, one image is taken from the realm of gardening.

That is horticulture. And the other is taken from the realm of building and construction. So you, you know, take what you like at this particular moment. Whichever is your particular thing.

Both are saying in one sense a similar thing. When Paul says be rooted, he's saying be firmly attached to the plant that God has attached you to. That is Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Paul's also saying be built up in him. In other words, continue to let God integrate you like bricks and rocks into the new structure, the new building which is shaped around and centred in Christ Jesus as Lord.

Now, the NIV version that you have in front of you adds these words. It talks about being strengthened in the faith as you were taught. I think that other versions are probably more helpful when they talk about being established in the faith.

[14:32] The faith is probably the true faith once for all delivered to the saints. That is that, that body of teaching that says this is who Jesus is and what he has done.

Of which Colossians 1, those verses we read earlier on and declared together, are one example. The faith probably means that true faith. And if you are rooted and built up in this true faith, then you'll be established in that faith.

Can you see what Paul's saying? He's saying that going on in the Christian faith is not going beyond Christian faith. It is looking back to that true faith revealed in Jesus and grounding yourself in that true faith deeper and deeper and deeper.

That's the way to go ahead in the Christian life. Oh, and by the way, there's one more thing to notice about the words being rooted and established. They are passive words. That is, in other words, God is doing the work.

He roots us in Christ. He builds us up into Christ. He establishes us in Jesus. And where might God do all of this?

[15:42] Well, he does it through true teaching. Now, friends, if I might, you can see that in the text, as you were taught. If I might say so, this is why we here at Holy Trinity Doncaster focus so much on studying God's word, the scriptures.

You see, we, the pastors here, want to teach you. And as we teach you, we expect that God will be at work to root you deeply in Jesus, who is the center of God's purposes.

And as we teach you, we expect that God will build you up into Christ. And as we teach you, we expect that God will establish you in Christ.

For God's word, when taught properly, is about his son. And the gospel of the glorious Lord Jesus Christ will do these things. And finally, look at those final words in verse 7.

Paul talks about overflowing with thankfulness. Now, we've already actually seen him doing it. His whole epistle, up until this point, has been one long overflowing of a thankful heart.

[16:50] You see, he is a thankful, grateful man. And our thankful, grateful hearts, as a result of what he says to us, will flow with good things.

Out of bitter, ungrateful hearts. Will flow bad things. But friends, out of hearts filled with the gospel, will flow good things.

Now, I wonder if I could just illustrate this a little. You see, I've noticed something about my wife.

And if you know her at all, you will have noticed the same thing. Heather fills her mind and her heart with good things.

She sees good things in people where I don't find them necessarily. She notices good things in everything. We've just been away for most of last week, seeing the wilds of Australia and the high country.

And she notices everything good about that world. She's a joy to be around. She sees every bit of good in the grandchildren, the children, everyone. And before long, I start to notice good things as well.

[18:04] I too begin to... Well, that is pretty spectacular, really, isn't it? And I too learn to praise. And I too learn to rejoice in what is good.

Friends, we have been given such goodness out of the benevolent heart of God in the cross of Christ and in the person of Christ.

We know God's goodness. And if we dwell on that, you know what will happen? We will be well equipped to be thankful. And thankfulness will begin to see it everywhere.

And it will flow out of our hearts. And we'll not only be well equipped to be thankful, we'll be well equipped to do good as well. And I just want to conclude today by telling you that in this last year, I've been distinctly disillusioned by something.

You see, in this last year, I've had one of my favourite urban myths destroyed. You know, I love the story about frogs in water. Do you know that story? Right.

[19:06] The one about putting frogs in cold water, and you turn on the heat very, very gently, and you gradually heat them up. But reputedly, they can be boiled alive without jumping out if you approach things this way.

Apparently, it's bunkum. It's not true. Which is very, very sad. I mean, I'm very glad for the frogs, I should say. It doesn't happen.

I'm really more concerned not for the frogs, but for me. Because it's a really good story and an analogy that I can no longer use.

So it is a pity for the frogs. Great news for the frogs, really. But not such good if you want a good illustration for a sermon. But I think we're a bit like that frog.

Sorry, the one that does really die in the boiling water. You see, I think living in the contemporary world is like being a frog in cold water and having the heat turned on.

[20 : 05] Very gently, mind you. You see, if you live in the world of the internet, the television, fiction, movies, you'll gradually absorb their world view.

And we will not know it's happening. It will happen so subtly. And before long, we'll be people whose values are not Christian values at all. And whose decisions and actions will not be Christian decisions and actions at all.

Let me explain by giving you one or two examples. I'll go a little out on a limb. The first comes from the world of technology. You see, if you live in the world of Facebook, there is a real risk, which is indicated by research, of being driven to narcissism.

You know what narcissism is? It is that peering at yourself and being fascinated with yourself and preoccupied with yourself and your relationships. The trouble is, though, with Facebook, you don't actually notice it's happening.

You don't notice that you're becoming increasingly self-absorbed. You begin to really, really care about who cares about you, who befriends you, who praises you, who unfriends you, who likes you and the like.

[21 : 28] And before long, you begin to define who you are by the feedback you get on Facebook. And not by Christ. And not by all that he's done for you.

What about the world of movies and the internet? I mean, have you noticed that in this world, in the world that we live in at the moment, wickedness and evil are often painted with some sort of glamour?

Have you noticed that? That is, even the bad guys in our world, in our movies, on the internet, even the bad guys, sorry, even the good guys have got to have just a tinge of badness about them, don't they?

In order to make them real. In order to make them credible. You see, even the bad guys are painted with some sort of glamour in our movies.

And the idea of goodness looks a little dull and unexciting, doesn't it? True heroes are not genuine heroes, as I said, unless they've got a dark side in them that might attract us to them and make them a little more interesting and exciting.

[22 : 39] Because goodness is bad. Well, it's just not attractive. And being attractive and exciting is what is of value in our world.

And I could go on. I could talk about the impact of reality television shows, cooking shows, quiz shows, news stories and the like. Each one of them eats away at us.

They cause us to excuse our conduct. They chip away at our identity. And before long, we're being cooked like the frog in the urban legend.

Friends, what Paul is putting forward here is not prudish. It's radically counter-cultural. He is saying to the Colossians that they are to be counter-cultural.

That is, they are to be formed in a different way and from a different source than the rest of the world. They are to be formed by what God has done in his son in a particular place in history.

[23 : 45] And in this event, this deed, this person, we are to find the things that must dominate our worldview in such a way that every aspect of our being is transformed.

Friends, please understand this, you see. Jesus the Christ is Lord and no other. And he is to shape your life and no other.

He is to dominate your existence, your life, your thoughts, your actions. He is to establish our values, our thinking, our conduct.

He is to be the centre of our existence. And friends, let me tell you, if you soak yourself in the slowly warming water of our prevalent society, it will eat away at you until finally you are totally formed by it.

If you soak yourself in the world of Christ and all that he has done, and that is the water that you swim in, then it will transform you.

[24 : 56] Both will do the work. You just got to make sure which one you've got your head in and your heart in. And the trouble is, these days, most of us have our head and our heart in the wrong place.

And Paul is saying, no, no, no. As you receive Christ Jesus the Lord, so continue. You see, we are to be Christ-centred people. So please hear me on this.

We will be shaped and formed by the things that we root our lives into. We will be shaped and formed by the things that we allow to construct our thoughts and our lives.

Do not let this happen. Except if you put your thoughts and your minds in the right place. The way to not let the world shape you is to avoid thinking that the Christian life is simply about acceptance of Jesus and salvation and that's it.

No, you've heard Paul. Continue in it. The Christian life is about ongoing transformation. Not just a one-off event, but a whole life of events.

[25 : 59] Of constantly looking at what God has done. A transformation that begins in Jesus. That continues in Jesus. That ends in Jesus.

That is centred around Jesus. You see, we are God's Christ-centred people. Jesus is the centre of all that we are and all that we think and all that we do.

Now, Paul is going to spend the rest of the epistle of Colossians spelling this out in some areas of life that we know of. His examples won't be exhaustive, but they'll indicate the right direction to travel in.

They're just the beginning. So I want to close by urging you to listen to Paul's words again. You might look at them in your Bible as I read them. But here's my suggestion. In this series, this will last for about four weeks.

You might memorise verses six and seven. Not hard to do. Not hard to do. Memorise them. You know, put them above your bed, your desk, your computer screen.

[26 : 56] You know, pin them to the back of the toilet door, whichever. Live them. Memorise them. And these are them, God says to us. So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him.

Rooted and built up in him. Strengthened in the faith as you were taught and overflowing with thankfulness.

Let's pray. Father, as we have received Christ Jesus as Lord, help us to continue to live our lives in him.

May we be rooted and built up in him. Strengthened in the faith as we are taught. And may we be overflowing with thankfulness. We pray these things in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.