

EASTER SUNDAY - Alive to God

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Preacher: Paul Barker

[0 : 00] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 27th of March 2005. The preacher is Paul Barker.

His sermon is entitled Alive to God and is based on Colossians 2.20-3.17 This afternoon if you go along to the MCG to watch Richmond probably lose to Geelong.

And if you try to go into the members, don't just wear a t-shirt. There's my advice for the day.

Profound message. Don't wear a t-shirt if you try to get into the members at the MCG because you won't be allowed in.

Because if you are a member at the MCG or a visitor with a member, if you're a man, you need to wear a collared shirt or polo shirt or whatever. It's got to have a collar on it. Not quite sure why, but when I became a member a few years ago, the instruction book gave great detail about what you were and were not allowed to wear in the members.

And don't go wearing thongs. You won't be allowed in wearing thongs either. And if you want to go into the long room of the members, if it still exists in the new MCG, I haven't worked that out yet, then even just an open neck shirt won't do.

[1 : 23] You need the tie and the jacket as well. You see, a dress code matters in some places. Even in Australia, a dress code matters. And periodically we get invited to things and it will tell you what to wear.

Neat, casual. Do I have to be neat? And a lounge suit. Well, I never lounge around in a suit. So dress codes sometimes matter.

Even more is the case with a uniform. I remember when I got fitted out for my school uniform when I went to high school and feeling very proud that I'd sort of grown up to the stage.

Now that I'm a high school student, I'm allowed to wear the uniform, although the school made it very clear that the uniform carried great responsibilities about your behaviour, not least to and from school.

Dress codes matter. And the passage that we heard from Paul's letter to the Colossians actually uses the language of dress codes that matter for Christians.

[2 : 22] Well, let me pray before we look at what the Bible's teaching us about this. God, our Father, you've caused all Holy Scripture to be written to make us wise for salvation in Christ.

Speak to us now from your word, we pray, that we will understand how we are to live aright in response to the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

We pray this for Jesus' sake. Amen. We all know that the death and resurrection of Jesus is at the heart of the Christian faith, I'm sure.

We all know that they were historical events for which there is substantial evidence, more so than any other ancient event in world history, despite what periodically various heretics and sceptics try to say and write about in the media.

There is little doubt at all that they occurred. There is little doubt at all about their significance and importance. Christians know that salvation is offered by God through the death and resurrection of Jesus, freely offered to us because Jesus paid the price for our mistakes and wrongdoings and sins, as indeed we've heard already from the children's talk.

[3 : 32] We realise that they're events that didn't just happen, but they carry an abiding significance for believers in Jesus Christ. We know that forgiveness of sins is ours, acceptance into God's family is ours, and a sure and certain entry into heaven at the end of our life is ours because of Jesus' death and resurrection.

What we don't always hear so much about is that the events of Jesus' death and resurrection, the Good Friday and Easter events, are to have a drastic moral impact on our lives now.

Today, tomorrow, the next day, for the rest of our lives here on earth, Jesus' death and resurrection is to make a difference for us. Because of Good Friday and Easter, we are to be different people. Because of Good Friday and Easter, we are to live different lives. The language that's used here, similar to the language we heard on Friday morning from Romans, Paul's letter to the Romans, here in Colossians he uses the same sort of language.

That not only did Jesus die 2,000 years ago in our place as our substitute, but there's a sense in which as our representative Christians were in Christ when he died, was buried, and when he rose from the dead.

[4 : 58] So, in Colossians chapter 2, a little bit before the reading today, in verse 12, he describes Christians as those who were buried with Christ in baptism, and you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

When Jesus died, there's a sense in which we died to our old self. When Jesus was buried, we were buried, and when he rose from the dead, we rose to new life.

We're identified in Jesus Christ. That comes through our faith and trust in him, and it's symbolised in Christian baptism, in the sense that we die as going under the water, dying in our old way, buried with Christ in a sense under the water, and rising out of baptismal water to new life.

That's symbolic. It's real through our faith and trust in Jesus' death and in his resurrection. It's already accomplished. We've already, if we're Christian believers, died, been buried, and risen with Christ.

The consequence of that is what matters most at this point in Paul's letter to the Colossians. That reading began with these words. If with Christ you died, not just if it may be the case, but since you died with Christ, why do you live as if you still belonged to the world?

[6 : 26] Because in Christ, when we die, there's a sense in which we transfer our allegiance. We belonged to the world before we were believers, but in dying and rising in Christ, we now belong to him.

We no longer belong to the world. Therefore, if we're believers in Jesus Christ, we belong to Christ, not the world, why do we keep living as if we belong to the world?

That is, the death and resurrection of Jesus is to make a moral impact on our lives each day. Our lives are to be different because in the death and resurrection of Jesus, we go from belonging to the world to belonging to Jesus and belonging to God.

The regime change from belonging to world to Jesus is to lead to a life change. We ought not to be living as if we belonged to this world.

The language Paul uses in chapter 3, which we'll see in a minute, includes language of what we wear. The analogy is perhaps like this.

[7 : 38] In our multicultural society of Australia, we often wear, and some of you are people in this category, clothes from different ethnic origins. So people who come to Australia from different countries will periodically wear clothes from the original countries.

It enriches our life and our multicultural life in Australia. There's a sense in which we, as Christians, no longer belong in this world. We belong in heaven, where Jesus has risen to.

But we're to wear heavenly clothes now on earth. It may make us stand out. It may make eyes turn. But so be it.

We belong in heaven, and we're to wear heavenly clothes even now on earth. So let's see how Paul explains that in these verses of chapter 3.

The first thing, and the first command, really, at the beginning of chapter 3 is this. If, as has been the case, you've been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above.

[8 : 43] Verse 2 says the same thing, but in different words. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. Christians on earth are to be heavenly minded.

We're to seek the things of heaven, we're to set our minds on the things of heaven. Not just a sort of, you know, your mind wanders all over the place and occasionally might think of heaven, but we're to set our mind on heaven.

We're to fix our focus and our concentration on heavenly things. That is, not just a sort of airy-fairy idea of life after death, but heaven where Jesus now is, having risen from the dead.

See, Easter Day makes all the difference here. Our focus on heaven is a focus on the risen and ascended Lord Jesus Christ. That's to be the direction of our life as Christians.

It's a living focus because he now lives. That's where we're to set our minds. So the effect then for Christians is that we belong where Jesus now is.

[9 : 48] We have in a sense risen with him to heaven. That's where our citizenship is, to use an expression from elsewhere in the New Testament that the Apostle Paul uses. We belong in heaven, but we live on earth.

But we're to live the heavenly life on earth. We're to wear the clothes of heaven on earth, even before we arrive in heaven at the end of our life. Paul goes on in verses 3 and 4 of chapter 3 to say, For you have died in Christ when he died on the cross.

Our old self died with him. And your life is hidden with Christ in God. So we've not remained dead, but we've risen to a new life because Christ rose.

He's now hidden in heaven with God. He's unseen in a sense on this earth now. But as verse 4 goes on to say, When Christ, who is your life, is revealed, then you will also be revealed with him in glory.

Referring to the day when Jesus returns, gathers all his people, and takes them publicly home to heaven for eternity. Now maybe this sounds a little bit airy-fairy.

[11 : 00] Just sort of ideas about some strange place up in the sky, heaven where we might belong. They often say that people who are too heavenly-minded are of no earthly use.

Certainly not a Christian or a biblical view. We are to be thoroughly heavenly-minded so that we are of earthly use, in fact. If we belong to heaven, we're to wear heavenly clothes even on earth.

Paul now gets down to the nitty-gritty of what that means day by day on earth. Firstly, he says in verse 5, Put to death, kill off in you this list that follows.

Whatever in you is earthly. That is, whatever in you belongs to the world and doesn't belong to Jesus, put it to death. He lists a few things. Fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which is idolatry.

The first four of those are mainly, not exclusively, but mainly bound up with wrong sexual practice and motivation and lust. And the last is much broader than that, general greed for things, for money, for possessions, for material goods.

[12 : 12] Greed is idolatry. It's the worship of things rather than the true and living God. That's a sample of earthly things. They are the values of our world. They're not the values of God and of Jesus Christ.

And if we as Christians believing in his death and resurrection belong to him, then we don't belong to the world. We're not to adhere to and live by the world's values, but rather by God's values.

So we're to put off, put to death, take off, strip away these things of our old life, the world's life, as Christian people. There's a second list in verse 8.

This time Paul says, get rid of them or put them away, put them not just to one side but totally away from you. And this list of five things has anger, wrath, malice, slander and abusive language.

Anger and wrath together are about short-tempered, often selfishly motivated responses to people. Malice is a general term of evil desire and word and action against somebody, whether or not we may think it's justified.

[13 : 25] Slander is to speak ill of someone, either using lies or gossip or innuendo. Abusive language is more generally just foul talk, obscene language, putting other people down rudely and so on.

And verse 9 begins with another thing to the list, lying to one another in any circumstance or situation. They're all part of the world's values.

They're part of the clothing of the world. Verse 7 says, these are the ways you once followed when you were living that life. It's part of the old life, the clothing of the old life that you put to death when you died in Christ.

You've risen to a new life, don't wear the old clothes anymore. It's like somebody who's now a grown adult still wearing their school uniform. It's a bit incongruous, a bit silly.

We've grown now, become believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. We ought not to be wearing the clothes of an unbelieving world. We don't belong to the world, we belong to Jesus Christ.

[14 : 32] Now the trouble is, of course, old clothes are very comfortable. You know, we like to sort of slouch around in jumpers and cardigans that have lost their elbows because they've been worn to fit us and shoes that have got holes in them even if they're chewed by the dog because they're still fairly comfortable and so on.

Often such clothes though are unseemly and morally in the language of this passage it's the case. My grandfather is 97. He was 97 a couple of weeks ago when I spoke to him the other day he said, I'm nearly 98, you know.

Well, he's got 11 and a half months to go but at that age who's going to argue I guess. He doesn't like to have new clothes because he doesn't think he'll get his money's worth out of them.

But he's been thinking like that for 20 years or more. And so he wears things that are almost sometimes like rags. The flies in the trousers are gone and there's a safety pin that holds it together.

The braces sometimes don't work as effectively as they should. I remember my father telling me that in the last couple of years he took him shopping to get some things and as he was queuing to buy something the braces broke and everything fell down.

[15:49] Well, we can be a bit like that wearing old clothes that have become rather unseemly. Where to put them off morally is what this passage is talking about. Get rid of them.

We don't wear these old clothes of the world's values because in Christ we don't belong to the world we belong in heaven and rather we're to put on heavenly clothes instead.

See what the end of verse 9 says in this passage where now the language of clothing really comes into its own. You've stripped off the old self with its practices. We've taken off or we ought to have taken off those old clothes.

Paul's saying put them to death. Get rid of them. Burn them in the incinerator. Whatever you do to such old clothes. And verse 10 we've clothed ourselves with the new self when we rose in Christ. Now that language is something that's already happened. We are already a new person in Christ. So therefore we've now got to clothe that new person with the appropriate clothing.

[16:50] The clothing that belongs to God and belongs to heaven not the clothing that belongs to earth. Even though we live on earth we belong in heaven. And this clothing sometimes stands out.

It's not necessarily the clothing of the world. Paul describes it in verse 12 and 13. Again five things to start the list. This clothing is compassion kindness humility meekness and patience.

And then a couple of added things in verse 13 bearing with one another in love and forgiving one another. That's the clothing that we are to wear heavenly clothing. Of course we're not talking about material cotton and shirts and shoes and so on.

We're talking about the clothes of character. Heavenly clothes that will last forever. All of those things are words used at various places in the New Testament to describe Jesus Christ.

There are places where he is explicitly described as compassionate kind humble meek patient and forgiving. They are the clothes of Christ that you and I are to wear because of Easter Day.

[18:02] Because we believe in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead on this day nearly 2,000 years ago we are to live different lives here and now. The life of heaven has begun for Christian people.

Our life in a sense is in heaven where Jesus now is. We're to live a heavenly life on earth and that means a life of Christian character.

See our world is not all that often compassionate kind humble meek and patient. There's an element in which people are now boastful about our compassionate response after the tsunami but very quickly reverts to lives that are relatively lacking in compassion kindness meekness humility patience and forgiveness and the crowning part of this heavenly outfit love verse 14 which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

It's that piece of the outfit that brings all of the other things together love but not the sort of sappy sensual romantic emotional love that our magazines and soap operas try to parade before us.

A love that is characterised by Jesus Christ. a love that is robust generous costly sacrificial full of action and not just word.

[19:27] That's the love that we're to put on. See what verse 12 says at the beginning clothe yourselves with all these things as though each day as we open the wardrobe before we think about what shirt or trousers to wear think about putting on compassion kindness meekness humility forbearance patience forgiveness and love.

The clothes of Christ to be worn here and now and in a sense like somebody from another country who in Australia might wear their national outfit sometimes in the street or for a particular occasion and maybe even stands out in a crowd these clothes will stand out in our world as well.

They're not our world's clothes fundamentally though there's aspects of them that are seen from time to time. They are heavenly clothes and we're to wear them here and now on earth because we belong in heaven.

They're Jesus clothes and we're to wear them now. We're not to wait just for heaven. Easter Day has an impact now as we look forward to that final glorious perfection but we dress ready for the occasion here and now.

How do we get the power to change? How do we get the strength to put on those clothes? This passage tells us that we are being renewed in knowledge in verse 10.

[21 : 01] That is the change of clothing comes about as our minds appreciate the knowledge and truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. As verses 1 and 2 said, set our minds on heavenly things.

Thinking has an important role before we put on these clothes and live the character of Christ. And as verse 16 says, let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.

So God has entrusted his word, the Bible to us for moral reasons. As we read the scriptures, as we're renewed in knowledge of the truth of the gospel of God, God's will change to reflect more and more the character and image of Jesus Christ.

Don't dismiss God's word, the Bible, as though that's just for academics and for thought. It's for practical living, so that we become more like Jesus in our character and in our behaviour.

It's a great joy to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, the high point of the Christian calendar. We ought to celebrate it with sincerity and joy, knowing that heaven is guaranteed for us.

[22 : 09] But it is a great responsibility as Christians to proclaim the resurrection because it has an immediate impact morally on our lives on earth. That we are to be clothed with the clothes of heaven now, for we belong in heaven where Christ now is.

In Christ we no longer belong to this world. Amen.