

Free in Christ

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[0:00] What a great promise, right? When Christ comes, we'll be able to enjoy the benefits Thank you, Manuelers.

Appreciate the reminder of that song. Imagine running, running on a treadmill, and your steps are relentless.

Sweat is pouring down your face. You push the speed control higher and higher, convinced that somehow, the faster you run, the better you'll perform.

Just a little faster, just a little longer. And finally, finally, you realize that all of the effort that you've expended is not accomplishing anything.

You're just going round and round and round in circles. And no matter how much effort you expend, the ground beneath you never changes because the treadmill goes nowhere.

[1:30] And so you're exhausted. Not from the distance that you have run, although the miles you put in in that treadmill are excessive, but you haven't really accomplished anything because the treadmill is all about self-effort without any progress that is accomplished.

That's where Jesus meets Nicodemus. That's where we kind of meet Nicodemus in our story, the story that we find in John chapter 3.

Nicodemus has come to Jesus one night and he wasn't a reckless sinner. He was one of Israel's finest, a respected teacher, a Pharisee, a member of the Sanhedrin, an elite part of the ruling class in Israel, part of that elite class of religious leaders there in Jerusalem.

Nicodemus, Nicodemus, for all intents and purposes, had arrived. He'd accomplished. He had fulfilled the obligation. Yet beneath the robes of his reputation was a man still running, tired, tired by the treadmill, the treadmill of performance, and had brought him to the very brink of wanting to give up.

Then Jesus, he looked into his heart. He peered into the spaces of his heart and he makes this definitive statement that we find there in John chapter 3.

[3:11] He says this, Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. In that single sentence, Jesus dismantled the illusion of Nicodemus' self-righteousness.

In that single sentence, Nicodemus was reduced. Reduced to one who is performing, but performing with absolutely no benefit.

Nicodemus, he didn't need to run harder. He didn't need to keep having more effort. Nicodemus needed fundamentally a new life.

He needed a new heart. The problem wasn't Nicodemus' effort. The problem was Nicodemus' condition, his nature, his status before the Lord.

He was fundamentally flawed. Only the Spirit of God could give him, give Nicodemus, what he really needed. Not effort, but a new birth from above.

[4:24] Nicodemus' treadmill isn't unique. It's the kind of treadmill that all of us often find ourselves on. It's the kind of treadmill that leads to constant effort and the kind of wearing out that we find in Nicodemus' life.

In Colossae, false teachers were calling believers back to the treadmill. They were calling them back to obligation. They were calling them back to duty.

Do more. Deny more. Experience more. And then you'll be more spiritual, they would say. But Paul would sound the alarm of the gospel and he wants them to know, let no one pass judgment on you.

Those are Paul's words. Let no one pass judgment on you. Let no one disqualify you. Let no one drag you back into the shadows.

Into the shadows of routine. The shadows of performance. But rather, understand the substance that is available to us in Christ.

[5:36] You see, every human effort to reach God apart from Christ becomes a treadmill of empty religion in motion, but no arrival.

No arrival. So Paul urges those in Colossae to step off the treadmill of self-effort and to stand in the finished work of Jesus Christ.

The gospel does not say run faster. The gospel says run to Jesus. So this morning, as we look at this passage, we're going to see the benefits of running to Jesus.

Of getting off the treadmill of human effort in recognizing all that Christ has accomplished for us in his son. There's only two points this morning.

The first point is this. The first is, the verdict has been given so don't let anyone pass judgment on you. There is a verdict.

[6:43] That verdict has been announced. It's been given by Christ. So don't let anyone pass judgment on you. Let no one pass judgment on you. We pick up our passage this morning in Colossians chapter 2 beginning in verse 15.

It says this. He disarmed, speaking of Christ, he disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in him.

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

We left off our time together last week and speaking about the victory that has been purchased for us in Jesus Christ. What God has done for us through him.

And we saw that Jesus is preeminent. That he disarmed rulers and authorities. That he literally undressed them as it were. He stripped them of rank and he made a public spectacle of them.

[7:56] The picture that we get from these words is a triumphing commander who is parading those who have been captives, those who have been conquered, those who have been humbled through the streets and Jesus who reigns is the one who is over them all parading these powers and putting them to open shame, public shame.

Of course, he did this in demonstration. It says, of the fullness of deity that dwelled in him bodily. That component of Christ, that fullness of who he was, his deity just shone through.

And that's why Paul says, don't let anyone pass judgment on you. This Greek word is the word judgment. It's this legal standing, this decision that's been made.

Why don't let anyone pass judgment on you? Well, because the verdict has been passed. The verdict has been given. The announcement, the judgment has been carried by Christ.

Going all the way back to verse 10, we see the things that Christ has accomplished. He says, you're complete in him. Then he says, you were circumcised in him, which is a picture of this new covenant relationship, what Christ has accomplished for the sake of his church.

[9:21] He says, you were buried with him. There was a death that happened in Christ. We died to the old way of life. We were buried. But we were also made alive with him.

He didn't just leave us in our death, but he allowed us to enjoy the benefits of that newness of life. You were forgiven in him. That debt was canceled. You are triumphant in him, he says.

All of these conditions that are pronounced over the believer who has faith in Christ because of the work that Christ has accomplished, this victorious work on our behalf.

So, let no one pass judgment on you. Don't let anyone pass judgment because that verdict has already been announced by Christ. You're forgiven.

There's peace. There can be relationship. There can be fellowship with God through his son, Jesus Christ. All that has been accomplished for us in him. Paul will continue to declare this truth in Galatians chapter 3 verses 23 to 25 where he says, Now before faith has come, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed.

[10:42] So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came. In order that we might be justified by faith. But now, faith has come.

We are no longer under the law, but under a guardian. All of these descriptions that the apostle Paul is using is to describe the condition that we had before we believed, before we were people of faith.

There was an obligation that we had to the law, to the moral demands of that law, and because of those moral demands, we were enslaved. We were bound.

The apostle Paul says we were under guard by the law. But now because of Christ and because of faith, there's been a release. There's freedom that we enjoy.

You are in Christ, and so you're no longer under this law. You're no longer under this master. There is freedom that we enjoy, but it's not a freedom without a law, per se.

[11:49] It's a freedom that binds us to love, to Christ. Paul was not an antinomian, as it were. Paul was not one that was against the law. It was that the law had been fulfilled, and so because the obligations of that law had been fulfilled in Christ, now there is a new condition that's on our hearts.

It's a law of faith. It's a law of love. love. This ritual pointed to this picture, this picture of Christ.

Paul continues, he says, in verse 15, 16, he says, therefore, let no one pass judgment on you with regard to food or drink or with regard to festivals or new moons or Sabbaths.

These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. All of those who were under the law, all of those who were under that old covenant condition sought to meet the conditions of that law by their own power.

Conditions that the apostle Paul spells out when he talks about food and drink, when he talks about new moons and festivals and Sabbaths. Certainly there were conditions that bound the hearts and lives of those who were under that moral obligation of the law.

[13:13] Those clean and unclean foods that they were allowed to partake of if they were clean and were supposed to put away if it was unclean.

The detail of those foods and the number of them, it's an extensive list. Pigs and camels and badgers that they were unallowed to eat.

rabbits and sea creatures, those whose fins in scales, eels and shrimps and lobsters, they were forbidden to eat.

All of the intricacies of the law, it's almost too difficult to even sort out. It was all a result of the condition of the burden of that law.

And partly, God had a standard to draw attention to his holiness. God had built those standards to draw attention to his character.

[14:19] He was a holy God. And there were foods that were against his nature. God wanted them to be distinct. He didn't want them to participate in the pagan rituals that were entrenched in that day.

there was food and drink, but also festivals. All these festivals, Passovers, that they had to fulfill.

Day of Atonement, the Feast of Booze, the Feast of Weeks, the laws of feast and new moons, every new moon that came, every Sabbath practice. And even there were entire years, the Sabbath year, they had to fulfill and put away work for an entire year.

All of these were just a shadow of the substance. All of these were rituals to perform. All of these were burdens to carry. But Jesus came to give freedom.

Jesus came to give life. Jesus came to fulfill the obligations of those burdens So the people would be free. Particularly as it relates to the Sabbath.

[15:32] The Apostle Paul, as we know, we find back in the law in Exodus chapter 20, we find, remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath to the Lord, your God.

On it you shall not do any work, or your female servant, or your son, or your daughter, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gate.

For in six days the Lord made them and rested on the seventh day. Then, therefore, the Lord God blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

We find this principle of rest that's built in to the law. This principle of rest that actually even goes back to the pattern of rest that's built right into creation.

That in six days work was to take place and on the seventh day there was to be rest. This timeless principle, this rhythm of work and rest was meant to be the cadence by which those who lived according to God would follow.

[16:42] But it was a yoke. It was a yoke that the Apostle Paul draws attention to. And Paul will say in Colossians, he'll say, don't let anyone pass judgment on you with regard to Sabbaths.

Why? Well, because as Paul will say, these are just a shadow. These are not the substance. This is not the observance that God came to fulfill.

These observances were just the shadow, a symbol, not the reality, the outline, but not the actual image. They were not meant to be permanently binding, but to direct the attention of those who followed them fixed, this fixed standard of Christ to help them understand that Christ was the end of the law.

Christ was the fulfillment of the law, not the duty of carrying these burdens on their own. Just like the blood of the bulls and goats, they were not the once for all sacrifice that was needed.

Not the repeated sacrifices over and over again, but recognizing this picture of Christ, that Christ came to complete, to complete and fulfill the law.

[18:04] So, the shadow had become substance. The gray had become this brilliant color. And that's why Paul will say, don't fall back into the weak and basic principles.

You find in Galatians chapter 4, verse 9, now you have come to know God, or rather have been known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to become once more?

You observe days and months and seasons and years. I'm afraid that I may have labored over you in vain. These things have been fulfilled, the obligations have been met, Christ has come.

We find in Hebrews chapter 10, it says, for sins the law has, excuse me, for sins the law has but a shadow of the good things to come, instead of the true form of the realities.

It can never, by the same sacrifice that are continually offered every year make perfect those who draw near.

[19:27] Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered since the worshiper having once been cleansed would no longer have been conscious of his sins?

If Christ has cleansed you, then why do you continue to offer sacrifices? That cleansing has happened, it's happened through Christ, and so there's no longer a need for us to continue to sacrifice as we find in the Old Testament law.

So what do we make of this Sabbath principle? In Matthew chapter 12 verses 5 to 8, Jesus says, have you not read in the law how the Sabbath, the priests in the temple profane, the Sabbath and are guiltless?

I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. And if you have known what this means, I desire mercy and not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the guiltless, for the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.

Jesus draws attention to the power of the Savior, the power of Christ himself, that he is the Lord of the Sabbath, that he is the one who has fulfilled the Sabbath obligations, and he is the one who now offers rest to those who are in Christ.

[20:56] As Jesus will say, my yoke is easy, my burden is light, enjoy the rest that I have to give to you. So Jesus fulfilled the obligation of the Sabbath, Jesus fulfilled the obligation of those new moons and rituals and feast days, and because he's fulfilled it, the verdict has been written.

That verdict is that you are forgiven, that you are righteous, that you are one who is enjoying the benefits of all that Christ has come to accomplish.

So not only has the verdict been given, so we don't need to pass judgment, we come also to recognize your bondage has been removed, so don't let anyone disqualify you.

Your bondage has been removed. Don't be disqualified. Verse 18 of chapter 2 says, let no one disqualify you insisting on asceticism, on 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.

Don't be disqualified. Don't be those who run the race and run it in a way that will ultimately lead for your disqualification. This word to disqualify is to deprive.

[22:30] It's to encroach upon another's interest. It really has the idea of condemnation. Don't run in such a way that you're going to be disqualified or condemned.

Make sure you're playing by the rules, the Apostle Paul would say. There's an illustration of one who is an ultra marathoner.

This ultra marathoner who ran this 50 mile race back in 2023. And they were one of the top performers. They were able to finish in third place.

And in April of 2023, this 47-year-old Scottish woman, ultra marathoner, she was able to finish third overall.

And her recorded time was seven hours, which was an incredible accomplishment. Seven hours for 50 miles and worth of race. However, when the officials reviewed her GPS tracker, they noticed something impossible had happened.

[23:35] In the middle of the race, somehow, for two and a half miles, she had run 35 miles an hour. Of course, she had ridden in a car to accomplish that objective.

And in order to kind of get ahead and actually maybe even get back to the place that she had been, she ended up riding in this car for two and a half miles so that she could get back to the spot in the race.

Of course, she admitted later on to her cheating. And of course, as a result of her cheating, she was disqualified. Disqualified and actually banned for 12 months that following year.

The Apostle Paul will direct our attention to the same kinds of consequences when he says for us not to be disqualified. 2 Timothy 2 verse 5 says, Are you competing according to the rules?

Paul will also say in 1 Corinthians chapter 9 verses 24 to 26, he says this, Do you not know that in a race all runners run but only one will receive the prize?

[24:54] So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath but we an imperishable.

So I do not run aimlessly. I do not box as one who beats the air. The Apostle Paul describes this race that he was in and a race that all of us are in but we need to run this race in a way that is according to the rules.

And Paul will use different ways to describe the false teachers and how they were trying to run through self-effort.

We find first they were insisting on asceticism and asceticism is simply the condition of treating yourself in a way that is bad so that somehow you will be able to attain spirituality.

spirituality. This desire of humility and lowliness. This treating your body or treating yourself, depriving yourself of pleasures in order to attain some level of spirituality.

[26:07] They were also worshipping angels. This worship of angels seemed to dominate their attention instead of worship of God. They were those who relied on visions.

It says they go on in detail about what has been seen. They wanted to boast about their experiences of all the special extra visions that they had been able to partake in rather than depending on the revelation of God through his word.

They were also puffed up without reason by their sensuous mind. These individuals who seemed to boast in their accomplishments.

They boast in their spirituality but it was all counterfeit because they weren't holding fast to the head. They weren't those who were depending on the work of Christ alone.

They pursued special experiences. They wanted all of these wonderful revelations Christians. But instead of it leading them to God, it led them away from God.

[27:20] It led them into bondage. You see, healthy churches, healthy people are those who will follow what we find in Colossians 2 verses 1 and 2.

I want you to know, he says, how great a struggle I have for you and for those in Laodicea who have not seen me face to face, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love to reach all the riches of the full assurance and understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery which is Christ.

That's what God has to offer. That's what the Apostle Paul in Colossians 2 is talking about. These hearts that are knit together, this refreshment, this health, this vitality that's taking place, this unity among God's people, this working together that is happening.

As the Apostle Paul will say in Ephesians 4 verses 15, he says, rather speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head into Christ, from whom the whole body joined and held together by every joint which is equipped when each part is working properly makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Love is the way you can tell a church is healthy. It loves the Lord Jesus Christ. It loves and has affection for others in that love for one another does something.

[28:56] It leads to some energy, some effort on their part but it's that effort that's motivated by a heart of love for God and love for one another.

It results in unity. It results in a church that's held together in growing, a church that's actively working out the things that it's been called to.

It's not the church that we find in Colossians chapter 2 verse 20. It says if we, if with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, why as if you were still living in the world, do you still submit to its rules and regulations?

Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch, referring to all things that perish as they are being used according to human precepts, according to teaching.

These things have indeed the 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.

[30:16] All this human effort, all of this innate desire, this energy that we expend to try to put away those fleshly desires that we have and we find that only Christ can come and remove those fleshly desires.

Only Christ is the one who has been able to destroy the works of the devil. Only Christ is the one who has allowed us to experience the freedom that comes as he is killed, he's put to death our flesh and made us alive in the spirit.

So as we think about what Christ has accomplished, as we understand that the verdict has been written, as we seek as those who don't want to be disqualified, we remember what Christ has accomplished for us and we remember the wonder of his work and we praise him.

let me pray. Lord, I thank you for what you have done in Christ Jesus. Lord, I thank you for forgiveness of sins and cleansing.

I thank you, Lord, for the death of our sinful flesh, that you've made us alive in Christ because of your spirit.

[31:42] spirit. And Lord, I pray that you would help us to walk in that newness of life. Not bound by human traditions, not bound by the obligations of the law, but free.

Free because in Christ you have accomplished it all. But of course that freedom doesn't mean that we live any way that we want to. That freedom compels us because of love for Christ to live in a way that's pleasing to you.

And so I pray that you would help us, Father, to live in that very way. That you would be glorified. That you would triumph. In Jesus' name.

Amen.