

Living as God's New People Part 1

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[0 : 00] Thank you, Rob, for leading earlier, and well done for making it to night. It's getting a bit darker, isn't it? We're definitely heading into winter. I shouldn't have said that, but I've gone there. Great.

And a big warm welcome if you're joining us for the very first time tonight at St. Silas in person or online. My name is James. I'm on the staff team here, and I'm going to give us a bit of a steer through this passage this evening.

So hopefully it should be encouraging. And just to give you a bit of a hope, there's some points there on the sheet. So if you could keep your eyes on the passage there and then maybe follow along in the points, that would be helpful.

Let me pray as we begin. Well, we've sung that we long to see Jesus high and lifted up, shining in the light of his glory.

And Lord, we recognize that one day we will return if we are trusting in Jesus in that glory. Speed our hearts and our minds to that glorious day tonight.

[1 : 04] Let us look forward to that day tonight as we consider these words in this passage. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. And Colossians is a great letter for us to be in because it's written to a people who are living in a pluralistic world with lots of competing voices both within the church and out with the church.

And these voices are all claiming to have the secret to fullness. And fullness, we mean there completion, meaning in life, salvation, living life to the full language there.

And you can see if you are someone who's keen about the Christian faith and maybe has just come to the Christian faith, then this might be quite exciting to you, quite tempting. It could be quite confusing.

All these promises of fullness. Who doesn't want to have fullness? Who doesn't want to be living the victorious Christian life? And what these voices are saying is, Oh, mate, Jesus is a good start. But if you really want fullness, a full experience of God, full assurance of salvation, fullness in life, then what you need to do is, yes, have Jesus.

[2 : 24] But you need, add on this experience. Or Jesus plus keep these rules. And then you'll have fullness.

Then you'll be qualified. You need to do stuff, D-O, in addition to your faith in Jesus. Jesus plus something. And it seems quite tempting.

I mean, you're not giving up on Jesus. You're just adding on a little bit extra. You're just hedging your bets a bit. What's so wrong about that? But Paul says, throughout the letter of the Colossians, No.

You either have Jesus alone, or you have nothing at all. Jesus is all. And you can see why it would be tempting.

Because if you do stuff, if you've got stuff you can take off, then you can measure your progress in the Christian life, can't you? You see, so much of the Christian life is invisible.

[3 : 27] Paul says it, doesn't it, here in this passage. Your life is now hidden in Christ. And so, if you're keen, wouldn't you want to see a bit of progress in the Christian life?

And I think this has been brought home to me as I've trained for ordained ministry, as I've become a vicar, as that, I mean, I preach the word, I pray, but I don't know what's going on in your heart.

I don't even know if you are a Christian. Maybe you are. Maybe God's word's working in you. I don't know. I trust, and I pray, and I hope for an invisible growth within you.

And that's perhaps why building projects are so popular with vicar, because they can see stuff happening. They can see progress there. And the kind of thing that these voices or alternative

gospels may have been saying was, Jesus plus, do this.

Only eat these certain foods. Jesus plus, do have these experiences. Do support these right causes. Jesus plus, do have a nice family and a good job.

[4 : 36] Be successful. Jesus plus, do sleep with whoever you want. do keep a regular Bible reading habit. And the promise is that if I have Jesus plus do this stuff, then I'll make progress in the Christian life.

Then I will have fullness. But Paul says, no, Jesus alone. Either you have only Jesus or you have nothing at all.

And it's this way of thinking of Jesus plus doing stuff to be right with God that depends on our own efforts to be right and to make progress. That Paul calls the basic principles and elemental spiritual forces of this world that are the marks of all religions and pagan idolatries.

And it's a spiritual thing because they draw us away from Jesus. And Paul writes to reassure the Colossians that everything they need for salvation is done.

D-O-N-E for them in Christ. And the way that the word done is spelt in Colossians is F-U-L-L. It is full.

[5 : 52] You are full and complete in Jesus. And it's this basic earthly, outward, visible, tick box, deceptive religion that adds on to Jesus and denies Jesus that Paul says they have died to in last week's passage in verse 20 of chapter 2.

And in our passage this evening, Paul says to them, instead, the Colossians have been raised with Christ into the heavenly realm as God's holy, hidden, and united new people in Jesus.

And although God's people are hidden in the heavenly realm in Jesus, in Christ, Paul says you can nevertheless still see them because they have certain distinctives in how they live.

They live a heavenly way. And we're going to look at some of those distinctives this evening and in the next couple of Sunday evenings at St. Silas we're going to be looking at them. So we're going to look at how those distinctives relate to our relationship with God in Jesus as his holy people with other Christians.

We're going to look at those tonight and then we're going to consider at home and at work and then in the world. And so the points that are going to give us a bit of steer through our passage tonight is where new people in Christ are hidden heavenly people verses 1 to 4 and new people in Christ are holy people verses 5 to 7 and then new people in Christ are united people verses 8 to 10.

[7 : 27] And if you want another H there you can use harmonious instead of united. I don't know how precise you are I'm not that precise. So new people in Christ are hidden heavenly people verses 1 to 4.

And the key verses here really are verse 1 and 2 then in our passage. Since then you have been raised with Christ. What? Set your hearts on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand. Set your mind on things above and not on earthly things. And those set your mind and set your heart those are commands that Paul gives. Those are do this do that commands.

Set your heart set your minds on things above. And Paul is strong. He's saying be intentional. Know what you're about. Know where your home is.

And so verse 2 where he says set your mind on things above not on earthly things for you died. That's all the stuff that we've looked at over the past evenings. All the sinful ways of life that we've turned from in Jesus.

[8 : 34] And he's not saying that they'll never sin again but that they are under a new ownership. They have a new allegiance. Sin no longer has a hold on them.

And they are free from sin's deceptions and accusations. Instead they have been raised with Christ. And notice there it's a past action.

It's a past completed thing. You have been raised. It's already been done. Nothing can change your state. And the key thing that I think we should notice here is where you have been raised to.

Look what he says there. Where Christ is. Where you have been raised to. And we see it right at the end of verse 1. Seated at the right hand of God in heaven in glory.

So yes we might be sitting here tonight socially distant with our face masks on and it's not a great experience isn't it? It's pretty sucky.

[9 : 37] You guys are slightly better off than me. I'm slightly older. I'm slightly more overweight. Slightly balding. I wish I was 18 still surfing on the beach. It's slightly sucky being me at the moment.

but as much as it sucks here spiritually we are in heaven. We are in glory with Jesus as we are sitting here tonight.

Our face coverings are off. We're smiling. We're hugging one another. We are even singing aloud. Jesus' praise is there. And one day your physical self is going to catch up with your spiritual self and be united.

And then they'll be with Jesus together in that new creation. That's that day that's coming. And so the application the take home point for us the command at the heart of tonight that drives this whole passage is be intentional about that approaching day.

Be intentional about that approaching reality. It's coming. And we see that verse 4 when Christ who is your life appears then you also will appear with him in glory.

[10:53] And the Bible when it speaks about Jesus' second coming sometimes uses the language of a wedding of a great celebration. Everyone loves a wedding. And imagine you've been asked to be the maid of honor of the best man at your best friend's wedding.

And you've made all your preparations. You've had a haircut. You've put your best suit on. And the bride walks down the aisle and either you're holding the posies or you're holding the ring, whatever. And the vicar takes the bride and the groom through the ceremony.

And as they're about to put the ring on and as the vicar is about to call them a man and wife, you stand up, you run outside, you jump in a pile of mud, you start throwing the mud over yourself, you say, I'm living life to the full.

And you try to come back home and people will think you're an absolute lunatic. you'll never be a best man or a maid of honour again. And the message of this passage tonight is know where you are.

You are spiritually with God, with Jesus in heaven, and you're looking forward to when he returns. And therefore, live every day in light of that coming heavenly wedding day.

[12:06] Put your Sunday best on every day. Be prepared. Be ready. I've got this friend Matthew, and he's always asked to do stuff at weddings.

He basically won't get out of bed unless he's asked to be best man or maid of honour or something like that. He won't do anything else. And it took me a little while to realise why this is. And the reason is because Matthew lives every day like a wedding day.

He basically looks like David Gandy out of David Gandy advert every single day of his life. He's always immaculately dressed, perfect hair, always wearing cologne. He always drinks the best wine, nothing younger than ten years.

He's got great baby chats. He speaks to elderly relatives really well. He knows how to hold an audience. I mean, for the most part, I never get asked to do wedding stuff because I look a bit like a hobo.

I've worn my best jumper on. I've dressed immaculately. This is as good as it gets. Not Matthew. Every day, he's dressed as if it's a wedding day. And the message of this passage is tonight is heaven has arrived.

[13:15] You're spiritually in heaven. You're coming back with Jesus in glory. Live as though you're there now. And so our first point there is new people in Christ are hidden, heavenly people, verses 1 to 4.

But notice that although they are hidden and although they are heavenly and although we don't live by an obvious checklist of do's and don'ts, hidden heavenly people in Christ nevertheless do have distinctives that set them apart from the people around them.

And that is they are distinctive in that they're serious about Jesus. And so that's our second point there. New people in Christ are a holy people, verses 5 to 7.

And the key idea there is put to death anything that pretends to offer fullness in life outside of Christ. And the Bible word for that, for having that attitude of looking for fullness outside of Christ is idolatry. And we see that at the end of verse 5 there is idolatry.

[14:29] And so Paul says be holy, be set apart, be intentional about Jesus. Have a heavenly mindset in everything you do, in everything you say, every single day.

Before I started working for the church I served as a Royal Marine and one of my best mates in the Marines was this guy called Doddy. He was this massive 6 foot 5 Scotsman. He had this massive afro which he'd kind of put his barrier into and that kind of stuff.

And he was the guy in charge of us. And I went on operational tours with Doddy. I think I remember Kazevacking him at one point. His mum used to send us care packages and this kind of thing. But I'll never forget his last words to me when I left the Marines. You are dead to me. And in a sense he was right.

He was absolutely right. Because I had left the Marines. I had a new allegiance. I had a new master. I no longer followed orders. And so when Paul commands the Colossians put to death whatever belongs to the earthly nature in verse 5 he is saying you have a new allegiance.

[15:40] You no longer live for and follow after and worship the things and the idols that the world around us looks to for fullness. Sex, money, evil desires, impurity, the idols and fake gods of the world around us.

Instead you are now in Christ, in heaven. You are one of God's new people in heaven. Therefore live as one. Be holy as God is holy.

And that's where you'll find fullness. The other expression I remember Doddy using, whenever we did something wrong, when we got our exercises wrong and we didn't perform as well as we should have, Doddy would say, lads, fill your jumpers.

And what he was saying was that your place is secure. You're on the team. You don't have to fight for a place. Your place is secure.

Now behave and live as a member of the team. Practice your drills and skills. Work on getting those muscles to fill that jump hole. Behave as if you are in that team all the time.

[16:53] It might take a time to fill that jump hole, to develop the muscles that you should, but that's the direction that you're heading in. You have a heavenly mindset.

And so Paul says you're in Christ, in heaven, and therefore live holy lives as you will when you get to heaven. The promise is that yes, if you continue in Christ, you can look forward to the glory of heaven.

But I wonder if you notice the warning there in verse 6, that if we abandon Christ, if we move on from Jesus, if we look for fullness in the idols of this world, then we are in a great danger.

Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. And when we're here on earth, they look very appealing, very appetizing, but ultimately in the end, they end in tears.

Here's how the Puritan John Iton put it, be killing sin, or it be killing you. It's not just that Christians live with the distinctives and ethics of heaven in relationship to God, but also in their relationships to one another.

[18:09] They have a distinct ethic there. So new people in Christ are a united people, verses 8 to 11. And our key verse there is really that wonderful verse, verse 11.

Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian or slave or free, but Christ is all and is in all.

And I wonder if in verse 9, Paul gives them a command. He says, do not lie. Why? Why do not lie? And I think what he is saying here is that lies are part of that old religion.

And lies are the things that threaten the Colossians' unity as God's new people in Christ. And so that list that he gives us in verse 8 there is really a list of stuff that is going to break Christian unity and cause divisions between us.

I'm sure that as you look at that list, some of us here tonight might know or might be going through at the moment the heartache and the divisiveness that lies cause for us, that separates us from people, that stops us to trust others.

[19:32] And so Paul commands the Colossians not to lie to one another. And the alternative voices, the alternative gospels that the Colossians were being tempted to were deceptive.

They were telling lies. And we saw that last week, didn't we, as Ravi unpacked it for us. They made great promises of fullness, but in the end they lacked any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

And not only were those voices, those alternative gospels, deceptive, but they also caused divisions. Christians. They were saying that if you want to be qualified, if you want to be a real full Christian, then you must do what I'm doing.

You must do this or that, Jesus plus this or that. Then if you want fullness, then you must do what I do. And unless you do what I do, you're not acceptable to me.

You're not qualified as a Christian. but because God's new people are hidden, invisible, and because they're heavenly, and because they're qualified, not because of anything they do, but simply by being in Christ, by having faith in the risen Lord Jesus, they are a united people.

[20 : 54] God has made them united with Jesus as the head in one body. And so just look there at verse 11 again. Here in Christ, there is no gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all and is in all.

There's nothing you do or are that will make you more qualified to be a part of God's new people. And there's nothing that you do or are that will make you less qualified to be a part of God's new people.

It rests entirely on Christ. The thing that qualifies you is are you in Christ? Christ is all and is in all. For in Christ, all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form. And in Christ, you have been brought to fullness. He is the head.

So as we come into conclusion, come into land, in the section that we've looked at tonight, Paul has written to reassure Colossians. He wants to encourage them that they are doing well, to keep going, that they have been raised with Christ.

[22 : 10] They've got something to look forward to. Things might be a bit down now, but the future is going to be brilliant. They have the true gospel, the word of truth that he spoke about right at the start of the Colossians.

Nothing can take that away from them. Spiritually, they are in heaven with Jesus and soon Jesus will return and then their bodies too will be in that glorious new creation.

And so Paul writes to encourage them to keep going, to have that heavenly mindset in Jesus, to work on those distinctives because soon they will be in heaven.

And because of this, he writes to encourage them to be a holy, united as God's new people in Christ. Let me pray as we close.

So, Father, we long to see Jesus returning in glory. We long to have that, to be united with Jesus in glory.

[23 : 14] We know that we spiritually are there. We look forward to that day when we'll be there physically. Help us to put our best wedding clothes on every day as we live for and look for and long for the returning of your Son.

In Jesus' name. Amen.