

Being Full in Christ

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[0 : 00] To give you a bit of a hope and a steer for this evening, you should find a service sheet there, you'll find the reading in there, and you'll find a little yellow sheet that will give you some hope that we're getting to the end of the sermon tonight.

And if you've joined us for the very first time tonight, a big warm welcome to you. My name is James, I'm on the staff team here, and you've joined us on a good night to be here as we explore a little further through this wonderful letter written many years ago to some younger believers by the Apostle Paul.

But let's pray as we start. Father, we thank you for our salvation. We thank you that nothing more has to be done to bring us to you.

We thank you that in Jesus we are full and complete. Amen. Well, when I was at university a couple of years ago, I had this friend called Grant.

Grant was a dear friend, a lovely, lovely guy. Hi, Grant, if you're watching tonight. And Grant went to a church called the Full Gospel Church.

[1 : 07] And this was the conversation that we normally had. Grant, why do you go to a church called the Full Gospel Church? What are you saying? Are you saying that my church isn't good enough and that your church has something more to offer?

And Grant's response would be to that, James, why do you go to St. Paul's? Are you saying that you've got the traditions and that you've got the history and that you've got the full gospel?

And straight away, you can see how a conversation like that might be quite awkward. And obviously, we'd only do that to really wind one another up.

We both dearly loved the Lord Jesus and looked to serve him. But you can see how that would be divisive and how that might be discouraging to someone if they're going to church for the first time. And so, by way of context, where we are in the letter of the Colossians, Paul is writing to a church that he has never met before. And he's urging them to keep on going in Jesus, to not give up on Jesus and on the gospel that they've heard from one of their friends, Epaphras, that Paul has preached through him.

[2 : 24] And why might they give up? What's going on in the background? And there's a bit of confusion. No one's really absolutely certain what the issue is in the background.

But in some way, it looks as though the Colossians are getting influenced by their society or by a particular teacher or by a group of individuals to abandon Jesus.

And these individuals, this group, this society, are looking down on them as inferior. They're saying they're not quite, you Colossians are not quite qualified in the gospel.

Paul is a second-class apostle. He's not the real deal. What you need to do is to embrace some older traditions and embrace the full gospel. And then you'll be the victorious Christian.

And Paul's response to this and what we've seen as we've gone through the Colossian letters so far is that Paul writes to reassure them and encourage them that they do have the right gospel.

[3 : 28] And that he is God's apostle. And that the message that they have heard is complete and sufficient. And Jesus is enough to bring them into heaven.

And this key strapline, the ticker tape that you might see on the bottom of the TV, we heard last week Simon taught us, and that's verse 6 and 7 from chapter 2.

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, and then there's that in fact, continue to live and walk your lives in him.

Rooted and built up, strengthened in faith as you're taught, overflowing with thankfulness. So just as you received, just as you were taught, continue in Jesus.

And this week, Paul unpacks some of the details of what the issue is in the background at Colossians. And our reading tonight in verse 8 really starts with a warning there.

[4 : 31] I wonder if you noticed there, it's emphatic. See to it, watch out, that no one takes you captive. Well, what were the Colossians to watch out for?

We see there, we notice, an empty deceitful philosophy that was based on human traditions. And that was according to the elemental spirits, all the basic principles there of this world.

And so, what these alternatives might have been saying was something like, Mate, you're barely a Christian.

What you need to do to have the full Christian experiences, you need Jesus plus this or that tradition.

You need Jesus plus this or that experience. And then you'll be the full Christian. For some reason, I always go into Australian accents for that chap, but I don't know why.

[5 : 33] And what better way is there to deceive a sincere Christian than to suggest that there is a better or fuller way to follow God?

It's incredibly persuasive, isn't it? It's like that scene in Wreck-It Ralph, the movie. I wonder if you've seen Wreck-It Ralph. He's the video game guy. And then when the arcade gets connected to the internet, suddenly Wreck-It Ralph is loaded, overloaded with all these competing messages.

And because he's so sincere and so lovable, he doesn't know whom really to believe. And so, his temptation is to be led astray. And if we had to step back slightly, slightly behind the scenes in Colossae, what we'd see is a dark, sinister force, the satanic and the demonic, working to deceive sincere believers away from the lordship of Jesus and the salvation that Jesus offers them, if that were possible.

And I say deceive there, because that is really the only power that the satanic and demonic has, of deceit, of lies, and fine-sounding arguments.

And Paul's answer to all these threats is Jesus. One word, just Jesus. Keep going. Just as you received, just as you were taught, continue in Jesus.

[7 : 08] And I think that at the heart of this false teaching is this idea, particularly in this passage this evening, is this idea of fullness. And that in some way, these folk were suggesting that the Colossians weren't full.

And by fullness there, I'm really talking about a fullness of salvation, of coming into life in the full, of being complete, of feeling completely adequate and assured, completely not worrying about if there's anything left to be done.

And those that were opposing the Colossians were somehow suggesting that they are not full, and that they are some way lacking. And so tonight, we're going to unpack this slightly, what it's going to look like to be the full gospel church.

I've got three headings there. They're not the most profound headings. You'd probably be able to think of something a lot better, given some time. And my first one there is, why in Jesus you have fullness?

And then secondly there, how you have come to fullness. How is the full gospel church going to come to fullness? And then thirdly, what God does to bring the full gospel church into fullness.

[8 : 23] So very three, our three friends there, why, how, and what? So why, our first question there, why in Jesus you have fullness? And we're looking at verse 9 and 10.

And our key point that we're going to pick up here is that Jesus is fully God and fully man. And therefore, we come to fullness. And what Paul is saying in these verses is that in Jesus, you have someone who is uniquely and totally qualified to bring you to God, full and complete, nothing left to do.

Because Jesus is qualified. You have been qualified. You can rest assured. So just look down at verse 9 if you're following along there.

Key verse there. For in Christ all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form. And then he goes on. And in Christ you have been brought to fullness.

And I wonder if I can just ask you, what might you think? What might cause you to look outside of Jesus for fullness, for satisfaction, for salvation?

[9 : 39] And I think, I was thinking about this earlier. I think there's two responses. The first is that you don't think Jesus is adequate. That Jesus is empty.

And he can't fill you. And the second one there is that you think that you are in some way inadequate. And that you're too empty for Jesus ever to properly fill you. And so the question there, is Jesus inadequate? Is he empty as it were? Paul's answer is no, absolutely not. In Christ all the fullness of the deity lives. And Jesus is more able to bring you to God. He's completely qualified. Why? Because he is God. Look at how absolutely emphatic Paul is here. Just look what he says. Verse 9. For in Christ all, that's everything. Everything that God is. All the fullness.

[10:41] All the fullness. He's saying full, full there. It's like absolutely emphatic. And then secondly, you might think that you are too empty for Jesus to fill up.

And that's what you need to do is top your account up with some good works. But look at what Paul goes on to say in verse 10 there. In Christ, in Jesus, you have been brought to fullness. You've been brought to complete salvation. Paul says that in Christ, you're completely full, lacking absolutely nothing.

So I've got my illustration here. I've got this vase. Vase, I don't know how. And I've filled it absolutely to the brim. I cannot get this any fuller. I'm going to prove this to you. I'm going to throw in some water and what we see.

Sure enough, it comes running over. So in Christ, we've been filled. What if I try to add something to that? I could add, this is a cassette tape for anyone who hasn't seen one of those before.

[11:47] Straight away, stuff comes out. A tape measure. Straight away. Straight away. It cannot get any more full. And in Christ, you have been completely filled.

There's nothing left that is to be done. But notice also what Paul says about Jesus, that all the fullness of the deity lives.

How? In bodily form. Why does he say bodily there? Because it's not just that Jesus is fully God and that he fills you, but that he is fully man.

Jesus is uniquely qualified to bring you to God because he knows what it is like to be you. He laughed. He cried. He suffered.

He died. And stepping back, I realize that we are people with bodies. And some of us might think that because of our bodies, we're not worthy to approach God.

[12:48] But Jesus here came in a bodily form and he has brought you to fullness. You're completely worthy. You have been fearfully and wonderfully made and are acceptable to God in your body.

And so in Jesus, we've been brought to complete fullness because Jesus is full and complete. And so the gospel church is the full, complete church in Jesus and they have been brought to fullness. But why does Paul say that in Jesus, I have been brought to fullness? So how do you come to fullness in Jesus? Why can Paul say this so emphatically?

And we're going to look at verse 11 and 12 here. And what we're going to see here is that the full gospel church is the church that is in Christ by faith.

So Paul says that you come to fullness by being in Jesus, in Christ, by faith. And the idea that he is talking about here and that we're exploring is that in Jesus, you have been totally united to him as a Christian.

[14:01] And when God looks at you, he sees his son. You cannot get a cigarette paper between you and Christ and God's eyes.

So I've got my friend here. He's in my pocket. It's this little Lego man. And I take him wherever I go. I go to Jordan. I went to Jordan all the day.

I took my little Lego man with me. I go to South Africa. South Africa. I take my little yellow Lego man with me. I go skiing or something like that. And I take my little Lego man with me.

Wherever I go, my little Lego man goes with me. And that's what we are like in Christ. Wherever Christ is, as we are in Christ, we are.

We are complete in Christ. Let me give you another illustration there. So imagine you've met a certain someone and you think you might like to marry them at some point.

[14:57] And when you get married, it might be a bit of a shock to you, but you might end up getting their rather awkwardly large board games collection.

All that they have is yours, becomes yours. Or it might work the other way around. They might end up getting your rather large, awkward ornamental heart collection.

All that is yours become theirs. And that's what it means to be in Christ. All that Christ is, becomes yours. And all that you are, goes on to Christ.

But the false teaching in Colossae was suggesting that the way you have fullness in life is not by being in Jesus, but by Jesus plus human traditions.

By Jesus plus some sort of experience here. And by traditions there. What they are saying is, you need to work to be right with God.

[16:00] In some way, your salvation is lacking. And you need to top it up with works. But what Paul says is that the way that you have fullness in life is not by works, not by following human traditions, but by being in Christ through faith.

And the issue for the Colossians then, and for us today, is what Paul calls or refers to as flesh in verse 11.

And it's those fleshy bits in my life. And by flesh here, Paul means an attitude that says no to God. I am in charge.

What the Bible calls sin. And it's that attitude, those fleshy bits, that are the awkward bit. And it's this attitude that Paul says causes us to be spiritually dead, cut off from God.

So just look at the end of verse 13 there. When you are dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh. And Paul says that the way that you get rid of these fleshy bits, get rid of this sin, is to be in Christ by faith.

[17:20] And so in him you are also circumcised with the circumcision not performed by human hands, by tradition, by rules. Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off.

When you are circumcised how? By Christ. By being in Christ. And so when Paul says that when you are in Christ, in God's eyes, when he looks at you, all those fleshy bits of your life have been removed.

And what happens is Jesus' perfect life becomes yours. You get his rather large board game collection. His unashamed life, His life that was always pleasing to God becomes yours in Christ. And it's something that no physical circumcision, no human tradition or rule could ever do for you. And what's more, because these fleshy bits of your life that have cut you off from God, have been removed, have been put off, if you have faith in Christ, then what?

Verse 13 goes on. You have been made alive in Christ. You've been brought to fullness of life, complete salvation.

[18:38] And then look at what Paul says happens to us when we are in Christ in verse 12. When you are buried with him in baptism, in whom you also raised through faith in your work, in the work of God, who raised him from the dead.

And the work of God that Paul has in mind here is that God powerfully raised Jesus from the death to life. And so just as God raised Jesus from the dead then, so he'll raise us from the dead physically in the future if you're in Christ by faith.

And then just notice there one last thing. As we are buried with Christ, notice then that it's past tense. It's completed when he died, as symbolized by our baptism.

So we were also raised with Christ. Surprise! Past tense. Completed in the past. So he's talking about being made alive and raised spiritually.

And so the fullness that he's talking there about is a spiritual, heavenly fullness of which this life is only a dim shadow.

[19:54] So you might be sitting here tonight and you might think that life is quite tough at the moment. Exams might be really tough. You might be wondering about furlough or where the next job is going to come from.

You might have lots of worries in life. But the promise of the gospel is that in Jesus you have been raised spiritually into heaven and that you have full assurance of salvation there.

You have fullness of life there. You're living large in heaven. And how does this all happen? In Christ by faith. That as you believe that God is powerful to do in the future what he has already done in the past, raising Jesus from the dead, we are brought into fullness of life.

And what is the big thing that has happened to me in Jesus that has brought me life to the full? And that's our third point there.

What did God do to bring you to fullness of life? And what we're going to look at here is that the full gospel church is the forgiven church.

[21 : 03] And the big thing that Paul highlights here that God has done for you in Jesus to bring you to fullness is that he has forgiven your sins. So just look down at verse 13 there.

The false teaching and the surroundings in Colossae at that time, they promised fullness. And they said that the way to be right with God was by doing stuff, doing religious stuff, by obeying the rules. They were saying that having Jesus was not enough.

But Paul says here that's exactly the opposite of the gospel. That's the exact opposite of fullness. You see, Paul says the thing that makes you less is exactly that, that you don't have the ability to keep the rules and traditions.

And that's why you need Jesus. So I wonder if you've had any lockdown resolutions or maybe projects. Maybe when you started lockdown, you may have read those blog posts on how to use lockdown well and that kind of thing.

[22 : 17] I think my favorite one that I tried was vegetarian. And I thought of it in the morning. And I went to Lill in the afternoon. And I was eating a steak by the evening. I've got absolutely no self-control to be able to do these rules and these challenges that I set myself.

And the picture that Paul gives us here is that life is a book. It's a ledger of credits and debits. And I'm not an accountant, so please don't judge me.

That if Christ, if the life was that book, then it would be all debts, all IOUs, everything where you have broken the rules.

So I've got my book here. Imagine this is the book of my life. And you can see it's completely filled with debts and IOUs. I'll just read some of them for you.

So I've got one here. Bit my brother in the middle of the back during a cricket match. That's one demerit. When I was age 13, I forgot to do my homework.

[23 : 21] That's two demerits. Age 15, bunk school to go surfing. That's probably about six points against me. And the uncomfortable news is that if I do good stuff, I'm not going to get any of those points back.

It's all IOUs. It's all debts, all stuff that I have done wrong. And so if you try to be right with God by rule keeping, by human traditions, you're not going to end up free from them.

That's not going to bring you fullness of life. It's only going to put you more in debt. But what does Paul say? He says in the gospel, in his gospel of grace, that as we trust in Jesus, all our sins, all the stuff that we have done wrong in life, that makes me feel guilty or inadequate, that goes in the letter. And all of that gets forgiven. So what does God do? Just look at the start of verse 14 there. He cancels the charge of legal indebtedness, which stood against us.

Literally, he wipes it absolutely clean. But it's not just that he wipes it clean. He obliterates it. He wipes the memory of it off the face of creation.

[24 : 41] So I've got this book here. I'm slightly embarrassed to admit I've got it. It's called The Housewife's Handbook. I've read it. My mates mocked me for it. But it's taught me one thing.

And that is the universal cleaning agent for everything in life is bleach. Just bleach it. Bleach will obliterate and kill and wipe clean everything.

Guys, if you don't know how to clean, just use bleach. That's the rule there. And in Christ, your sins have been bleached clean. They've been absolutely obliterated.

But it's not just that that sin goes away. It doesn't go nowhere. But what does Paul say at the end of verse 14? He takes it and he nails it to the cross.

So that ledger goes to the cross there. And what happens is my book ends up completely clean, completely bleached. No sins left.

[25 : 39] I'm completely forgiven. And the full gospel church is the forgiven church. And so by nailing that sin to the cross there, he means that the record of sin is obliterated by Jesus' death.

And because Jesus has paid the price of all those rules and traditions and all those things that I've got wrong, those rules and traditions no longer count.

They can never be brought against me and against him again. And so Jesus has triumphed over them. And that is the last power of Satan, the last ability that Satan had to harm us.

The power to deceive and accuse us has been removed because Jesus has died, taking away that legal indebtedness. And he has fully cancelled every accusation that could ever be made against me.

And so verse 15 reads there, And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle over them, triumphing over them at the cross. Jesus is completely in charge.

[26 : 52] No one in this creation or in heaven above could ever harm you or take you away from Jesus. So in conclusion, well done, you've made it. The good news about Jesus, Jesus promises us life to the full.

And what's it going to look like to be the full gospel church? In Jesus, we have someone who is fully God and fully man, who brings us to fullness and brings us to God.

In Jesus, how do we come to fullness in life? Well, the full gospel church by being in Christ by faith.

And how has God brought you to fullness?

Well, the full gospel church is the forgiven church. And no one can bring any other accusation against you. Let's pray as we finish. Father, we thank you that we have been brought to fullness in the gospel.

We thank you that our salvation is full and complete in Jesus. Please help us to continue walking in Jesus, rooted and built up.

[28 : 00] Please help us to watch out for those who try to trick and deceive us and pull us away from Jesus. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.