

Introduction:

A. This morning, Palm Sunday, we stand at the threshold of Holy Week, when we mark the passionate love of Christ for us as proven in his suffering, death and resurrection in order that we might have everlasting life. Those of us who have put our faith in Christ have new priorities. Paul writes in **Col 3:1-4**, *“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”* That is the Christian life.

B. When Paul wrote this letter he was concerned that the Colossians were being influenced by false teachers who said that if they really wanted to have a full religious experience there were certain things they should do. Some said they had to submit to strict religious rules. *“Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!”* Others said that they could have transcendental experiences, perhaps with unseen spirits. So in **Col 2:8-10** Paul warns them....

We cannot find more spiritual life anywhere than we already have in Jesus Christ. Never go looking for ways to supplement your relationship with Christ. You're walking into a trap.

C. Now, with the fact that Christ has brought us to the very fullness of God, he tells us how this was possible. **When we understand what Jesus did for us we won't go looking for spiritual highs anywhere else. Vv.11-13....**

**I. IN CHRIST, GOD GAVE US A NEW WAY TO BE TRUE TO HIM
(2:11-13)**

- A. Beginning with Abraham, 2000 years before Jesus, God's people were commanded to indicate their loving loyalty—their covenant bond with God—through the ritual of circumcision. In return, God would bless them with his loving presence and blessing. Circumcision, which involved cutting away a small piece of flesh from a man's body, was a symbolic promise not to live controlled by sinful desires but by love and obedience to God. The problem was that the ritual didn't actually change hearts.
- B. Listen again to **v.11....** Christ, in his death, gave himself up in a kind of whole body circumcision. It wasn't a symbolic ritual. It was an actual death blow to the flesh. And remember, "*all the fullness of Deity*" was in him "*in bodily form.*" Jesus, the Son of God in the flesh, took all our sin into himself and then gave himself up to be cut off in death. In that extraordinary sacrifice Jesus solved the problem of our two-timing hearts—of hearts that we would never—*could* never—give over to God by ourselves. Now, if we make a covenant promise to God, we can keep it!
- C. Now in v.12 the act changes from circumcision to baptism. It's as if Paul is asked, "*How was Jesus circumcised for us?*" and he replies, "*Through a baptism of death and resurrection.*" **Vv.11-12....**

Do you remember when Jesus was baptized by John the Baptizer in the Jordan River at the beginning of his ministry? All the other people being baptized were doing so as a symbol of repentance and readiness for the Messiah. But **Jesus' baptism was a kind of living prophecy of his coming death, burial and resurrection, which was his real baptism.** And when he went through that true baptism

during Holy Week all of us who put our faith in him were *in him*. Just as you might say that all a man's descendants are in him long before they are born so we were in Christ long before we were born again. In order to circumcise our hearts—to rid us of our “*whole self ruled by the flesh*”—Jesus was crucified and buried *with us in him*.

- D. How do we enter into this death and life baptism of Jesus?
V.12: “*You were raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.*” We not only believe that God raised Jesus from the dead but that God offers to include us that resurrection as well. **To believe that is to have it.**
- E. The Bible teaches that every Christian is to be baptized so that we might give public testimony that we know and have received what Christ did for us. If you haven't been baptized, now is the time!
- F. We are also now able and expected to live a baptized life, which is what Paul spoke about in **3:1-4...**

Now listen to **vv.13-15....**

II. NOW NOTHING HINDERS US FROM BEING RAISED TO NEW LIFE WITH CHRIST (2:13-15)

- A. **V.13** begins by reiterating the two deadly problems we had: our sins and our uncircumcised lives. One problem was our countless sins against God which condemned us. Our second problem was our uncircumcised lives; that is, our inborn disloyalty to God, our refusal to enter into a covenant relationship—a treaty of love—with him. Thus we were rebels against him, determined and destined to ignore the God-blessed life. Our sinning would never stop.
- B. So what does **v.13** say God did? “He forgave us our sins.” Because Jesus took our sins on himself and paid the penalty

for them. **God forgave us our sins because he didn't forgive Jesus for our sins.** Our sins didn't just go away. They went on Jesus, and there died with him under the judgment of God.

- C. In order to forgive our sins, God had to deal with his own indictment against us. We were indicted for our countless sins and for our rebellious hearts. *Illus.:* I remember hearing about a criminal court case where the defense lawyer objected to the presence of the Ten Commandments on the courtroom wall, saying it was prejudicial against his client. Right. Exactly. That was our problem, too!

But v.14 says, "*having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.*" When Jesus was nailed to the cross, the charges against us were also. When he died, they were erased.

So Paul writes in **Rom 8:1**, "*Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*" And later in **vv.33-34** he asks, "*Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.*"

- D. We faced one more terrible problem: Our Accuser, Satan, and all his "authorities and powers" are bent on our death and destruction. Satan's weapon is not a pitchfork! He has that lethal double-barreled weapon to use against us: our sin and our uncircumcised hearts. He uses our sin and guilt to accuse and intimidate us. He sets deep within us a sense of the inevitability—even the acceptability—of our sins. He teaches us to minimize them on the one hand, and

then fiercely accuses us before God on the other hand. **His other weapon is to play on our disloyal, uncircumcised hearts by his constant temptations to continue sinning.** We're suckers for his lies about sin being o.k. and God being unreasonable.

But when God forgave our sin and canceled the charges against us by nailing them to the cross, Satan and all his powerful forces were *disarmed*. No matter how powerful they are, they have nothing with which to defeat you because those were there only effective weapons. Oh, they can bluster and threaten, torment and attack—and they do, like a roaring lion—but they have no weapons that can harm you. You're bullet-proof!

Illus.: Martin Luther had some epic struggles with Satan. Once in a dream he was visited at night by Satan, who brought to him a record of his own life, written with his own hand. The Accuser said to him, “*Is that true? Did you write it?*” The poor terrified Luther had to confess it was all true. Scroll after scroll was unrolled, and the same confession was wrung from him again and again. At length, the Evil One prepared to leave, having brought Luther down to the lowest depths of abject misery, when Luther realized his emancipation and said, “*It is true, every word of it, but write across it all: ‘The blood of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, cleanses us from all sin.’*”

- E. Not only did God disarm them in their desire to destroy you and discredit God, but “he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.” We cannot read the story of Jesus’ death without being shocked at the public spectacle of it. The most debasing, demeaning punishment known to man. Horrible suffering made public. The wages of sin never higher. Shamed in every way possible, and

then watched, insulted and taunted. *“He saved others but he can’t save himself.”* Talk about being made a public spectacle!

Surely in those dark hours Satan’s *powers and authorities* celebrated. But when Jesus gave up his spirit, did they even notice the curtain of the temple tearing? Did they realize dead saints were joyfully walking the streets of Jerusalem? Were they even listening when the terrified Roman centurion exclaimed, *“Surely he **was** the Son of God!”*

When it came to public spectacle, God turned the tables. The heel of Christ was poised above the head of the old Serpent. A cosmic ambush was in the making. God used Christ’s **weakness** to defeat the mightiest of enemies. Instead of the high dignity always associated with majesty we bow before the blood-soaked **shame** of Jesus’ crucifixion. To achieve his greatest victory, Christ succumbed to **defeat**.

The lethal weapons of the enemy against us were already buried with Christ. God had silently stolen away the keys to death and hell from the belt of Satan. A heavenward procession of the redeemed was beginning. The faithful saints of the Old Testament would see that their Redeemer lived. With Jesus’ last words, *“It is finished!”* the eternal plans of God the Father, Son and Spirit, were complete, ready for the resurrection and Christ’s ascension to the right hand of the Father, and the shouts of the angels, *“He has done it!”*

The shame and degradation of Jesus’ death would not be met in heaven by the shocked silence of the Father but rather *“God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of*

Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Did the dark powers have the slightest premonition that one day countless, redeemed saints would sing the praises of Jesus Christ all over the world and that even they themselves would be forced to bow before being banished to hell?

What’s more, “He made a public spectacle of **them**, triumphing over them by the cross.” Paul draws on the mental picture of a great Roman Triumph, a victory parade in which a Roman general was welcomed home after defeating a foreign enemy. Part of that mighty procession was the parade of the vanquished, stripped and captive, some going to their deaths, with all their weapons and armor in carts for all in the jeering crowd to see.

We have a hand in their public humiliation. They are publicly humiliated when we are **no longer cowed by their accusations**, and even celebrate our salvation by confessing what once we were. They are humiliated when such former weaklings as ourselves **pray against them with power and faith**. They are humiliated when **they cannot frighten us with death or blackmail us with our past**. They are humiliated when **we put a cross in our church**, when we **sing joyfully of Christ’s death**, when we **speak of our death as a home-going** and the grave as a gate. They are humiliated when **we are baptized** to celebrate our own death and resurrection in Christ, and when **we come to the table of the Lord** in the presence of our enemies, where we remember again that his blood and body are cleansing and health for our souls. **They are humiliated when I preach so, and when you say Amen!**