

Fullness in Christ

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Preacher: Chris Lamont

[0:00] All right, we're going to read together from Paul's letter to the Colossians, and we're in chapter 2, verses 8 to 15.

And this is the word of the Lord. See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in Him, who is the head of all rule and authority.

In Him also you are circumcised with a circumcision made without hands by putting off the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of death that stood against us with its legal demands.

This He set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities, and He put them to open shame by triumphing over them in Him.

[1:32] This is God's holy word. So we've been working for a few weeks now through the book of Colossians on Sunday evenings, and one of the themes that we've seen coming through in this book over and over again is the supremacy and the sufficiency, the complete sufficiency of Jesus Christ.

Paul's writing to a church that are being tempted by teachings that are promising things not in line with the gospel.

It's not necessarily that these people are teaching that Jesus should be abandoned or that Jesus is not worthy of praise.

It seems to be more subtle teaching that these people are receiving. It feels as though the false teachers are teaching that you do need Jesus, but you need something else as well.

Jesus on His own is not quite enough. You need Jesus and something else, some additional spiritual knowledge, some extra religious practices.

[2:37] If you really want to experience the fullness of what it means to have life with God. So maybe we read about these Colossian Christians and we shake our head and we go, guys, come on, don't think about it.

But I think the truth is that this is the oldest temptation that there is, that fullness lies somewhere else outside of what God's given to us. Even today in Edinburgh in 2026, it hasn't disappeared. We live in a world that's full of promises, things that are going to help make us whole, things that are going to help us move beyond the basic understanding that we have and achieve something else.

So maybe we think that these messages are for people who are easily dissuaded. But actually, when we think about it, we're bombarded with these messages all the time.

The right relationship is going to make you be able to deliver a better life. The right financial security is going to put you in a place where you can serve the church better. The most fulfilling experiences that you can have are going to make you a whole person.

[3:44] The true version of yourself, the person inside that you know that you really are, that's who you have to be in order to live the life that you're meant to live. And that's how you're going to be able to be fulfilled.

That's how you're able to be the best version of yourself. And the thing is that it's not just out there in the world that these things crop up. Because even inside churches, very often we're tempted to think that, yes, we know Jesus, but there must be something more that we can have.

There must be a spiritual experience that we're waiting to enjoy. There must be something that we can add, maybe through our performance, that's going to make us feel like full-up Christians, completed.

Well, Paul shows us that we do need something. He uses something truly wonderful. Well, everything that we need for our salvation and life with God is found in Jesus Christ.

It's not Jesus and something else. It's not Jesus and human wisdom. It's not Jesus and particular patterns of behavior. It's not good religious traditions.

[4:46] It's Jesus. Now, Paul says the solution to our mentality of and Jesus, something and Jesus is to remember the reality of in Jesus.

We can combat and Christ by remembering we're in Christ. In verses 9 and 10, as Paul puts it, he says, for in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you've been filled in him who's the head of all rule and authority.

So if you were here a couple of weeks ago, we read when we preached through chapter 1, we arrived at verses 15 to 20. We call that sometimes the Christ hymn. And the language here is really similar.

It says almost the same thing. Verse 19 of chapter 1 says, in him the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. So it's almost like Paul's circling back in his argument and getting back to the same idea of Christ's fullness.

But as we're going to see when we look at the passage together tonight, he actually adds something else to his comment there. Something incredible. It's something that I think is really important for us to grasp.

[5:53] So let's first of all look at the verses 8 to 10 and see that Paul tells us, don't let emptiness capture your fullness.

So verse 8 begins, and this is a warning. He says, see to it, that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.

So Paul says, see to it. That means be on your guard, beware, pay attention. Don't assume that because you're a Christian, you're immune to deception. And notice that the language he uses, he says, takes you captive.

This isn't a picture of someone offering you an alternative truth. That word is about being stolen away, or it's got roots tied to being plundered.

This is ideas that can kidnap you from the life that you're living in Christ, snatched away from the freedom that you have in Jesus. Imagine a pirate ship pulling up beside a merchant vessel and overpowering the crew and carrying away its cargo.

[6:59] That's the kind of idea, I think, that comes across in the language here. And that's what Paul's saying that these false teachers are doing, not with ships, not with cutlasses, but with empty philosophy.

He says that they're promising treasure, but they're robbing us, robbing these Colossian Christians of what's truly valuable. He calls it empty deception.

He uses the word philosophy. It's not condemning philosophy in general. This is not that Christians should not think big thoughts about the world and ask difficult questions.

It's not what he's saying here, I don't think. He's saying that the problem is the philosophy that Paul's talking about here, the ideas that Paul's addressing, are according to human tradition.

So maybe that's a reference to Jewish Christians putting Old Testament emphasis on new Christians coming in. We'll maybe see a hint of that in a little while.

[7:59] And he says this philosophy is according to the elemental spirits of the world. So that phrase has taken up a lot of ink in a lot of books of people trying to work out exactly what they're saying here.

But Paul's chief concern is not about the philosophy itself, rather the one that it's not. Because he says it's not according to Christ.

Whatever the precise combination of ideas and thoughts and alternative arguments, the cultural influences maybe that lay behind what these Colossian Christians are being taught by false teachers, its source and its standard are not Jesus.

They're pirate copies of the real truth. And counterfeits are dangerous because counterfeits resemble the real thing. Nobody tries to pass off a piece of paper with like 10 pounds and a

squiggle on it as real money.

You have to make it look like the real thing. And I think this is what we're getting here. People are saying things that are convincing because they look as though they could be truth. Fundamentally, they're worthless.

[9:11] Why is it that these Colossian Christians were tempted by ideas that were eventually and ultimately empty? Why is it that human beings are tempted at all by emptiness?

Well, is it because we find it hard to believe? For us even tonight, do we find it hard to believe that God has already given us everything that we need as Christians in Jesus?

Because this is the oldest temptation that there is. This is the oldest temptation that we can read about in the Bible. You think back to the garden, the serpent came in and he said to Adam and Eve, he didn't say God doesn't exist.

He didn't say something completely different to what they already knew was true. But he said, is that really what God said? And he said, you'll be like God's.

He presented an argument that seemed to be in line with the truth. And even although ultimately it was a lie, the temptation that there was something more, something beyond what God had already given to them.

[10:14] And we've been listening, human beings have been listening to that same lie ever since. So we can see it all through the Old Testament where the Israelites would follow God, they would obey God, be obedient to him, worship him in the way that was right, and things would go well, and then they would fall away and they'd be culturally influenced by the people around about them.

So we're not, I'm not trying to say that we are, today in Edinburgh, we're going to melt our gold and we're going to make a golden calf. But we have to be careful that we're not tempted to stray away from the truth of the gospel that's presented to us.

We can be convinced that the things that we need in our lives, that accompany, that are blessings from God, are things that we need in our lives in order to have a full life, to be a full Christian.

What do I mean by that? Well, I mean that it's easy for us to convince ourselves that what we need to do is work really hard in order to build financial stability so that then we'll be able to live our life for Jesus.

Or what we need to do is seek really hard, to find the perfect partner so that we can then feel settled and then we can live our lives and devote ourselves to the church.

[11:31] We can tell ourselves that we're really ready to commit in generosity, in relationship, in service, once we're settled and once everything has been put in place.

Of course our works matters. Of course our work's really important. But there's a world of difference between receiving these things as precious gifts from God and thinking about these things as the missing ingredient that's stopping us live our life for Christ.

And we can do the same thing with our spirituality as well. So we're often tempted to think we need to, we come to church and we don't feel on fire in our hearts.

When we sing, sometimes we come in and those words are not speaking to us like they have in the past and we think there's something missing, I've lacked something. God's not with me today.

That's not the case.

When you're in Christ, you have everything you could need. God is always present, even when our hearts don't feel warm towards him. So what's the answer? Well, the answer for Paul is to look to Jesus because in verse nine he says, for in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.

[12:45] So this is the same thing, very similar words that Paul uses in chapter one. The whole fullness of God dwells bodily in Christ. The eternal son of God truly became man and he became man in the incarnate Jesus.

There's no other mediator who can bring us to God. There's no spiritual fullness to be found beyond him. But then, so we've heard that before in chapter one, verse 19, but then this is the thing that Paul adds and it's something astonishing, I think.

He says, the whole fullness of God is in Jesus and then he adds, and you have been filled in him. So that fullness, the fullness that dwells in Christ is the fullness in which we live.

So what's Paul not saying? Paul's not saying that because the full deity of God dwells in Jesus, that we will become gods. That's not what he's saying at all.

He's saying that in Jesus, in Christ, we lack nothing that we need for our salvation and for our reconciliation with God the Father. We've been brought into the richest of relationships with God

through the one in whom all the fullness of God dwells.

[14:03] And notice too that this is past tense, something that's already happened. If you're a believer, you have been filled in him. So it's not a prize that you might attain if you work really hard.

If you become a sufficiently proficient Christian, even although you feel tonight incredibly weak spiritually, you might struggle with doubt.

You might look around the room and see all the better Christians than you are. You might see, you might be walked in with doubts, even in your mind as you're walking in the door about Christ, about who God is, about what he wants for your life.

But you can rest assured that your ability to feel spiritually full is different from God's assurance that you are spiritually full through Jesus.

Because it rests on the fullness of Christ and being united with him. So Paul's not saying that because we dwell in Christ, we have fullness and therefore we have no worries.

[15:10] That's not what he's saying. And he's also not saying that because we have got fullness in Christ, there's no room for growth for us as Christians. But he's saying that we don't need anything else in order to complete what Christ has already begun inside us.

The answer to any feelings of spiritual inadequacy that you might have tonight, it's not to find something to add to Jesus. It's to see more clearly the Jesus that you already have.

And then as if Paul's anticipating the question from the Colossian Christians asking him, how can you say that we've been filled in Christ?

This is our second point. Paul tells them they've been cut off and raised up. So we look at verse 11 together. Paul says, So maybe when Corey was reading through that, we got to this bit about circumcision and you felt like it came completely out of the blue.

But I think the central idea is actually pretty amazing. So Paul takes the Old Testament sign of circumcision and he shows us that even although that for centuries, this was the covenant marker of God's people, the sign of God's people, it was always pointing to something greater than itself.

[16:37] The Old Testament teaches us that. God commanded all the males of the children of Israel to be, he told Abraham they were to be circumcised in their flesh.

But God in the Old Testament, even in the Old Testament, even although this was the sign, he called his people to be circumcised in their hearts, to turn from sin and to love the Lord their God. Deuteronomy chapter 30 verse 6, it promises that the Lord himself will circumcise the hearts of his people so that they will love him and live.

So this physical sign pointed beyond itself to something deeper, to a deeper work of God. The minor surgery was always a sign of a coming heart surgery.

And now Paul says, that promised reality has arrived in Christ. How? Well, because Christ was cut off for us.

[17:44] Jesus was circumcised on the eighth day, like all Jewish boys would have been. But I don't think it's referring to that here. I think this is about his death. Because at the cross, on the cross, Jesus was cut off.

His body was given over to suffering and to death for his people. But his death, it wasn't an example of love. It wasn't an unfortunate circumstance of human events.

He died as our substitute. He died in our place. He bore the judgment that our sin deserved. He entered into death so that those who belonged to him might be delivered from sin and brought into new life.

The physical sign of the old covenant had pointed forward to this great work of God by which his people would be cleansed and set apart for him.

And now, in the death and resurrection of Jesus, the promised saviour has arrived. We don't need to add the old covenant sign of circumcision in the flesh to the circumcision of the heart, which is made real in Christ.

[19:00] The reality to which that is always pointed has come true. And Paul makes something else clear. This circumcision is made without hands. So being brought into new life is not something that we can accomplish for ourselves.

This is a hands-free operation. It's God at work. You need God to do for you what you cannot do for yourself. And then Paul continues in verse 12.

He says, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God who raised him from the dead. And notice the repeated words.

He says, with him, buried with him, raised with him. Paul is describing our union with Christ, our union with Jesus, directing attention to the powerful work that God's done and that we receive through faith.

And when you think about it, what a contrast he has here in the context of his letter to these false teachers who are giving empty messages to the people of the church in Colossae.

[20:05] The false teachers are saying there's something more that you need to achieve or something more that can be achieved. But Paul's telling the Colossians that their salvation rests on something that God's already done.

And there's incredible reassurance for us in that because our salvation rests on God's promises and not on the changing temperature of our feelings.

Some days when you feel strong in your faith, other days you feel distracted, discouraged, weak. Some days your sins come right up before you and you can see them so clearly and you feel the weight of guilt.

But you see, your feelings matter, but they're not the foundation of your faith. The foundation of your faith is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and God's promise that those who trust in him are united to him.

We've been cut off from the old life in Christ's death, raised up to new life through his resurrection. And then Paul's got something else extraordinary to tell us.

[21:14] So thirdly, Paul tells us the debt is paid and the enemy is disarmed. So in verses 13 to 15, Paul gives us three pictures.

He talks about dead people being made alive, debts being cancelled and enemies disarmed. Verse 13 says, and you who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses.

So Paul reminds the Colossians of what they were before they knew Christ. Spiritually, they were dead. Dead people don't need a better philosophy for life.

Dead people need resurrection. And that's what God has done. God made alive together with him. The end of, in the middle of verse 13 says, God who raised Jesus has made you alive in Christ when you put your faith in him.

He's brought you from death to life. He's forgiven your sins. He's reconciled you to himself. And notice that Paul says, God's forgiven us all our trespasses, not just the respectable ones, not just the ones that were willing to admit to each other in church.

[22:34] Not all except the one that still haunts you, the thing that you did a long time ago when you can't sleep. All of them, everything, every wrongdoing, forgiven in Christ.

And then in verse 14, Paul helps us see the reality of what this means. And it says, by cancelling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands, he set this aside, nailing it to the cross.

Paul's using the language of financial debt here, a huge bill that you can't possibly pay. The creditor's got every right to demand payment from you, and you've got no way of meeting that demand.

There's a picture of our guilt before God. We failed to love God with all our heart, with all our soul, mind, and strength. We don't love our neighbours in the way that we should.

We sinned in the things that we've done, in the things that we've said, in the things that we thought. Even our desires go after wrong things.

[23:42] We're guilty. We can't simply erase it by promising to do better. Sometimes we might feel that we can work through it, through our performance.

But, as if we could go to God and say, look, God, I'm really sorry, I'm going to try really hard not to do this anymore. And then we might think that God would say, okay, because you've worked so hard, I'll let it slide.

Maybe we would find that attractive for ourselves. We would hate that if we saw it in other people because that's not justice, that's injustice. And we want a God of justice to rule over us.

But listen to the words that Paul uses. He says, God has cancelled it by nailing it to the cross. I think there's a couple of different images here.

A written bill of debt, so like the written bill that you have to pay. A written bill of debt, a written bill of debt, and then a titulus. You're allowed one Latin phrase per sermon.

[24:46] That is just a Latin word for a placard that would be, that would carry a guilty person's name and the crimes that they'd committed. They would carry, a prisoner would carry it, so if they were being crucified like Jesus was, the prisoner would carry it with their name, the thing that they did, and they would carry it to the cross.

And then it would be hung above them as they died. This is who they are and this is what they've done. He's saying that when Jesus went to the cross, he carried the titulus with your sins with him. Do you remember that they hammered, they hammered a placard over Jesus and it said, King of the Jews. And the, your sins, your crimes were fixed to that cross too.

only, your crimes weren't nailed to a cross, they were hammered into a man. On the cross, Jesus, the God man, he dealt decisively with the debt that you owed but could never repay.

And he did it by bearing the punishment for your sins in his own body. Look, if you're here tonight and you're looking for something to deal with the deepest problems between you and God, you need to get this.

[26:06] We're all guilty sinners. We can't pay off the debt of our sin through our behaviour. We can't do it through years of perfect church attendance, by serving more faithfully, by giving the church more of our money.

We can't do it by trying to become a better person. Those might be good things, those are good things, but they can't atone for sin, only Jesus can do that.

And what Paul's saying in these verses is that only Jesus can do it and Jesus has done it. And just think about what that means for our conscience.

The guilt that you're carrying about your past sins, the sin that you keep turning over and over in your head, the one that you keep returning to and you think to yourself, God can never possibly forgive me for this because I come to him and I know I'm forgiven and then I just do it again.

How could God possibly continue to forgive me? Well, the answer is not to deny your sin. The answer is not to excuse your sin or to make peace with it and accept it as part of who you are.

[27:18] But the answer is to confess it honestly and then bring it to God. Look to Jesus and come to him because when you're in Christ, all your sins have been dealt with at the cross.

You've got to repent of your sin, of course, but you're not called to pay for what Jesus has already paid. In Romans 8, Paul writes, there's now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Not less condemnation, not postponed condemnation, no condemnation at all. And the last thing, in verse 15, Paul gives us one more picture, another surprising image.

He's disarmed the rulers and the authorities and put them to open shame. This is Jesus by triumphing over them in him. So in the ancient world, victorious Roman generals would march back back into their cities celebrating the conquest, but they would bring with them the enemies that they defeated and they would parade them before the watching crowds and they would say, look, their power's broken.

They've got no hold over anybody anymore. Everyone can see that this is not a threat. Jesus didn't ride to victory in a chariot with a weapon, but on a wooden cross.

[28:54] At Calvary, just when it looked like the forces of darkness had won, when Jesus was betrayed and arrested and mocked and stripped, condemned and ultimately crucified, it seemed like his enemies had silenced him.

But behind the visible events that were visible to us, God was accomplishing something that no one could have imagined. And through the death of Christ, God was defeating the very powers that held his people in bondage.

The cross wasn't an interruption to God's plan. It was the decisive means by which God accomplished his ultimate victory. The powers that held sway over your life have been disarmed. Their claim to rule over God's people has come to an end. It's been broken. Christ triumphed over them. We know, don't we, we know that this doesn't mean that evil has disappeared from the world. Satan's no longer active or that Christians now live without temptation, without suffering. Of course, we know that's not true, but we live in the age between Christ's first and second coming.

[30:07] And so we continue to wrestle against sin. We face temptation, we endure suffering, we battle spiritual opposition. But even when we do, and we do, we remember that victory is secured in Jesus.

There's no spiritual power that can reinstate that debt that Jesus has paid on the cross. The one who rules over every authority, the one who died for us and rose again, he gives us freedom.

[illegible]