

Filled In Him

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[0 : 00] Thank you, Emily, for serving us this morning. Here is Colossians chapter 2, starting at verse 8 and running down through verse number 15.!

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 the 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 debt that stood against us with its legal demands.

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

[1 : 10] Father, we are grateful for the privilege of having your word. We are grateful for the privilege of gathering together, both to worship, to sing, to celebrate your goodness and your grace to us, and also now to sit under the preaching of your word.

Would you please help us as we continue in this worship gathering? Would you help me as I continue in worshiping by preaching your word? Would you clear my mind and settle my heart and help that those things that you want to say to us come out this morning as we look at this wonderful text from Colossians chapter 2 together?

Would you help your dear people, the people of Steadfast Church gathering here together this morning, would you help them as they sit under the preaching of your word to listen carefully and discerningly to test whether these things are so?

Father, would you help us not only to be hearers of your word, but doers of your word? Would you help us to believe those things that you say about us, the things that you say are true?

We ask that you would help us as we continue now. In Jesus' name, amen. Do you ever sit with other followers of Jesus, and as you listen to them talk, it's like everyone else is in a group chat that you are not part of?

[2 : 52] Or, to use another illustration, like everyone else is talking about the finale, and you are still watching season one.

They sing, and their worship seems so sincere. They pray, and it sounds like they're having a conversation with someone who they really believe is right there with them.

They talk about the scripture, and it seems alive. And the worst part isn't the difference that you feel between yourself and other followers of Jesus.

That's not the worst part. The worst part is that you've been a follower of Jesus for long enough to feel embarrassed about that difference that you feel. And so you nod along during small group, and you keep showing up, and you make yet another plan to pray more, read more, be more consistent, and the cycle starts all over again.

Because here is what we do with that feeling of inadequacy. We tend to treat it like a problem to solve.

[4 : 24] Like that deficit that we are feeling is real, and that the answer is more spiritual discipline, more knowledge, more effort, more anything.

Because that feels spiritually responsible, doesn't it? It feels like you're taking your faith seriously then.

Paul writes to the Colossians because someone is offering them more.

Christ plus, a Jesus supplement, a higher knowledge, a stricter form of self-discipline, a deeper religious practice, richer spiritual experiences.

Who wouldn't want those things? Paul does not respond with, here is how you get those things.

[5 : 32] He says, you already have him. Let's remember what Paul has just told the Colossians in chapter 2 and verse 6.

Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him. What does walking in Christ look like?

It looks like being rooted in him and built up in him, like a tree with deep roots, like a house that is built on a firm foundation.

It looks like being established in the faith, like having a verdict that has already been handed down. It looks like abounding in thanksgiving, like a cup that just keeps overflowing because you just keep dumping more into it. This is not how you get into Christ.

[6 : 38] This is what life in Christ looks like. I wonder if we believe that. Paul is not giving them a how to get there.

He is describing what it's like when you're there. But there is a problem in Colossae, isn't there? There is an influential teaching. There is a compelling alternative. There is a plausible argument. And there is a congregation that is starting to wonder.

Paul's response becomes even more urgent in verse 8. See to it. See to it. 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.

Captive. This is a military term. Think about spoil. Think about plunder. Think about being carried away by force.

[8 : 02] Paul's warning is not, you know, guys, there's some stuff that I've heard floating around town. I'm a little concerned about it.

You probably shouldn't dabble in that. No. Paul says, in effect, someone is hunting you.

Don't be taken captive. This urgent warning is so necessary because the predator does not look or sound like a villain.

Their teaching is based on well-established religious tradition. And so it sounds reasonable, even wise, spiritually mature.

Who wouldn't want those things? But Paul describes this teaching as empty deceit. Do you see that in your Bible?

[9 : 16] Empty deceit. It makes truth claims that it cannot back up. Why? Because it is limited by natural understanding, and it is pursued through elemental spirits, beings that are not Christ.

Paul's indictment at the end of verse 8 is sharp. None of this is according to Christ. None of this is according to Christ.

It is incompatible with Christ and his cross. Christ. The Colossians are being hunted.

The hunter wears the camouflage of wisdom. And the teaching is not some kind of harmless theological curiosity. The teaching is spiritual captivity.

Christ plus a Jesus supplement. This feels like you are taking your faith more seriously.

[10 : 30] And that's the trap. Spirituality through better habits, leveling up through some kind of secret knowledge, maturity through angelic mediators.

Paul's concern is that they would walk away from fullness, chasing after fullness. The Colossian problem is not rejecting Christ outright.

It is deciding that Christ might not be enough. Paul counters this teaching.

But let's notice together that he does not counter it by directing them inward. But back to what is completely and finally true about Jesus Christ.

Look at verse number 9. For in him, the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.

[11 : 50] Notice that Paul does not say Christ has the fullness of God. Or Christ holds the fullness of God. Or Christ possesses the fullness of God.

He says all of the fullness of what God is dwells bodily, completely, fully in Jesus Christ.

With no leftovers. Something happens in our home when we have leftovers.

And it's less common now because there's just two of us. But something happens in our home. And maybe this happens in your home as well. When you have some leftovers, there is this moment where you need to decide, how big of a container do I need to put the leftovers in?

And sometimes, you know, you choose the right container and it fits perfectly. The lid goes on. It's great. You put it in the fridge. Nothing gets stuck up to the lid.

[12:59] You know, all of that. Sometimes you choose something that's just a little too small. And now you have to decide, what am I going to do with what is left over from the leftovers?

Maybe you're just going to eat it, you know, have second dinner or whatever. Maybe that's what happens. Or maybe, like me, sometimes, when we make some tuna salad at our house, I put it in a little bit.

I'm like, well, there's quite a bit of tuna salad left over. And then I give it to Lois in her lunch the next day. And I'm like, what was I thinking? This container is too big. There's hardly any tuna salad in here at all.

All of the fullness of God dwells in Jesus Christ bodily, completely, fully, with no leftovers.

In him, the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily. Now, Paul is firmly Trinitarian. He is not collapsing God and Christ into one.

[14:08] But please hear this. He rejects any notion that there is a dose of deity that can be discovered in another form or through any other means other than Jesus Christ.

Verse 9 echoes Paul's earlier teaching about Jesus back in chapter 1, 15 through 20.

But I want you to notice that this time when Paul talks about Christ, he makes this personal for the Colossians. Look at verse 10.

Look at how this glorious truth about Jesus becomes personal for the Colossians. Verse 10. And you have been filled in him who is the head of all rule and authority.

You have been filled in him. Not you will be filled if you do the right things consistently.

[15:42] Not you can be filled. if you know the right things deeply. You are complete in him.

The influential Christ plus teachers are not offering an upgrade.

They are peddling a counterfeit of something that you already have. Don't walk away from fullness chasing after fullness.

Notice how Paul stacks up completed realities onto what he has already said. Verse 11. In him also you were 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.

Verse 11. Paul mentions a circumcision not made with hands. The Colossians understood circumcision.

[17:16] It was the mark of belonging to God's people. They understood it and they knew they didn't have it. They're Gentiles.

And perhaps the influential teachers are even saying you don't have it and you need it. Paul counters.

You already have what circumcision pointed to during your baptism when you went under the water you were buried with Christ. Cut off.

And when you came up you were raised with Christ. Every verb he uses here is in the past tense.

You weren't upgraded by some kind of a supplement.

you were dead buried and raised again with Christ. The gospel is not a self-improvement story.

[18:20] It's a death and resurrection story. God did this for you already in Christ.

you are complete in him. Paul backs up.

I think we call this a three-point turn. Is that right? He backs up and then he's going to come at this one more time. Verse 13. And you if you're taking notes this is not the first time he has said and you note those in your notes and you he's going to back it up and he's going to come at this one more time and make sure that nobody misses the point.

And you verse 13 who were dead in your trespasses! alive together with him having forgiven us all our trespasses by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands this he set aside nailing it to the cross.

Did you hear that in the hymn that we sang just before this? Nailing it to the cross. You were dead.

[20:04] You were not struggling. You were not just behind. You were not merely spiritually immature. You were dead. But God made you alive together with Christ.

He forgave you all your trespasses. Notice that word all again in our text. Not most of them all of them.

How? How did God do this? Jesus tells a story in Luke chapter 16.

We looked at this story last summer. There's a manager and he is about to lose his job. and he is concerned about losing his job because he wonders what am I going to do when I don't have this cushy job anymore.

And so he says here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to do something so that when I am no longer employed there are people who will take care of me because they owe me one.

[21 : 16] And so he visits each of his master's debtors and he slashes their debt. Do you remember the story? You owe the master a hundred?

Quickly sit down and write fifty. He slashes their debts. God didn't do that.

He didn't slash your debt in half. He didn't defer your debt to later like a college loan that you will need to start making payments on someday.

Every trespass, every failure, every sin, he nailed it to the cross. there is no outstanding balance. You are not on a payment plan because God tracks no debts for those who are in Christ.

[22 : 32] My brothers and sisters, that feeling of spiritual deficiency that we named at the beginning of this sermon, that is not God's assessment of you.

That's the lie that the record of your debt still exists. Your debt is canceled, nailed to the cross of your Savior, Jesus Christ.

I'm so glad that Paul does not respond to this predatory teaching with here's a better plan. Instead, he declares, you are already full.

that feeling of being behind, that sense of spiritual deficiency that you feel when you're sitting around with other followers of Jesus, that is not a diagnosis.

That's a temptation. A temptation that lures us either to add something to Jesus, or to doubt our standing before God, and both of these paths lead away from Christ.

[24 : 10] And both are answered in the same way, by remembering that you are complete in him.

Where do you feel most spiritually deficient? Maybe, maybe it's in prayer. Maybe it is in your knowledge of scripture.

Maybe it is in parenting. Maybe it is in forming healthy relationships. Maybe you feel deficient in your emotion in worship, like you're just going through some kind of emotions.

Maybe you feel deficient in your consistency in spiritual disciplines. When you treat that deficit as a problem to solve, you are walking away from fullness, chasing after fullness.

fullness, you will do exactly what the Colossians were being tempted to do by the influential teachers.

[25 : 34] You'll go looking for something that can close the gap for you. more knowledge, more discipline, more intensity, more something, and functionally you will be living as though Christ is not enough, as though his death and resurrection left something undone that you now need to step in and try to finish.

and eventually, as the cycle continues and your failures begin to pile up, you may conclude Christ's fullness sufficient for others, probably not for a person like me.

My brother, my sister, since you are complete in him, you can repent of believing that you need to figure out how to get closer to God.

the problem is not that you're not doing enough. The problem is that you think doing more will somehow be the solution.

When you feel spiritually behind, when you feel that gap, that deficit, don't ask what do I need to do before you ask what have I stopped believing is true.

[27 : 27] Don't ask what do I need to do before you ask what have I stopped believing is true.

Prayer, knowledge, spiritual disciplines, all of these right and good, necessary, but the test is motive.

Are you motivated to become more complete or are you motivated because you are already complete in him? Because you are in Christ.

When God looks at you, he sees someone that he raised, someone that he forgave, someone that he made alive, someone that he filled with Christ.

This is not about your achievement. This is your identity. Maybe the whole idea of being complete in Christ sounds really appealing, but you have never come to Christ.

And the deficit that we've been talking about, the gap between you and God, you feel that too. And you've been trying to close that gap in some way.

[28 : 54] More effort, more self-improvement, more trying to be enough. Here's what I want you to hear. The record of debt, all of your sin and failure.

God won't defer it. He won't reduce it. He won't slash it like the manager in the parable. He will cancel it by nailing it to the cross of Jesus Christ.

Come to Jesus. Trust in Jesus. Call upon the name of the Lord Jesus and you will be saved. This is the promise of Scripture.

Paul closes this portion with a wonderful picture. It's a victory parade. Look in verse number 15. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in him.

[30 : 11] Those elemental spirits that Paul mentioned earlier. The rulers and the authorities that the Colossians are being persuaded. You need to appease these angels.

You need to navigate these angels. you need to ascend up into higher and higher, more elevated experiences. Paul says nonsense. Those elemental spirits, those rulers and authorities, they are disarmed.

They are defeated. And they have been defeated in the most ironic way. Through Christ's death death on the cross.

He triumphed over them. He shamed them. I think this is my only favorite use of the word shame in all of scripture.

Christ shamed them in his victory parade. follower of Jesus, you are not fighting for a victory.

[31 : 22] You are standing in victory in Christ. And so when that voice comes, and I expect that it will come for all of us, that voice that says you are behind, you will never ever be enough, you're not measuring up, you need more.

Christ may be enough for others, but he will never be sufficient for someone like you. Don't argue with it. Don't make a better plan to compensate for your deficiency.

Not before you point to your risen Savior, Jesus Christ, and you boldly declare the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily in him, and I am complete in him.

We anticipate the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. And until then, as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him.

The gospel is not where you start. It's where you stay. Is the gospel enough?

[32 : 55] Oh, my beloved brothers and sisters, the gospel is enough. How can you be so sure? Because Christ is all. Let's pray.

that