

The Great Put-On

Colossians 3.1-17

4.8.18

Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. ³ For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.

⁵ Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. ⁶ For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience, ⁷ and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. ⁸ But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. ⁹ Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, ¹⁰ and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him-- ¹¹ a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.

¹² So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; ¹³ bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. ¹⁴ Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. ¹⁵ Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷ Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.

Today is a one-off sermon...i.e. NOT a part of a larger series. We hope to begin a new series (April 22nd) God willing. Today is a kind of follow up to last week's sermon called "The Jester" (that's available online) and in THAT sermon, we spoke of the bizarre revolt against God and against reality, a rebellion engaged by every human being who tries to find security, significance and (ultimate) satisfaction OUTSIDE of God... every tower we build to fortify the illusion that "I am in control!" and that "it all depends on ME"to find Life outside of God.

And when God sees these projects (in whatever form they take), He recognizes how ridiculous they ARE... like dehydrated water, like a train/locomotive trying to propel itself through the Everglades ("I wanna be free!")... God sees with crystal clarity the absurdity of our revolt and He answers OUR foolishness by a Jester ...Jesus Christ is God masquerading...and His resurrection is

itself, an upset, an unexpected, comic revenge...a mockery of death, a taunt against our final enemy: God has defeated death BY death... God mocks our mockery and fools our foolishness (1 Cor 3.19).

And we ended the last week's sermon by introducing a topic we'd like to unpack a bit more this morning: how the resurrection of Jesus Christ becomes, for those who believe it...it becomes a new logic, a new wisdom/rationale for approaching life, self, others and God.

Today, we find the Apostle Paul USING this new logic; he's applying the historical event of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ to the daily life of the Christian. He's saying "Because this happened...and because of what it means, WE CAN LIVE DIFFERENTLY...we can actually change and be transformed...NOT simply in our behavior and habits...BUT our heart and motives; our character can be changed ... a new you IS possible."

And I know that sounds like a diet a commercial but it's true...it's central to the Christian outlook on life. The resurrection of Jesus Christ guarantees a renovation...a renewal of everyone who receives the Gift and eventually a renovation of everything... Here's how it works:

- 1) Where the renovation takes place
- 2) How Easter guarantees this renovation
- 3) How to Participate In the Great Put-On

The passage is clearly about where we're all living... It's amazing to think that these ancient people in (what we today call Turkey) whose lives were SO very different from ours and yet...their humanity was basically just like ours...And even though they had no electricity or mass-media and lived in a very different world...still they had "issues"...similar to ours! Several arenas of activity and life are highlighted in this text.

For instance ... the ARENA of our appetites...and we find (like they found) these appetites are very difficult to manage. Our appetites IN THEMSELVES remind us that we're really NOT as "in control" as we think!

The arena of our desires and longings are highlighted in v. 5: "immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire and greed, which amounts to idolatry." Paul uses a word here used some 40 times in the New Testament and here it's translated "desires" but the more literal translation is "over-desires" and he sort of ties it to the words "greed" and "idolatry".

He's saying whenever desires and appetites get the better of us...whatever those desires may be...they then become like idols. They promise to support us but like dumb statues they themselves have to be carried...Good things like food, sex, work, achievements, hobbies, popularity: "If I eat this WHOLE sleeve of Thin Mints from the Girl Scouts I know I'll feel better..." OR "If I really succeed at work, I know I'll feel good about myself (or if I preach a great

sermon!)...” These over-desires that promise life always demand our support...we have to carry them and sacrifice for them – they can’t carry us!

A second arena in vv. 8-9 has to do with our words: “But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth and do not lie to one another...”

Here again – our use and ABUSE of words exposes our lack of control. Jack Miller used to ask people to do the now-famous “tongue exercise”: for one-week pay meticulous attention to every word that comes out of your mouth. Totally avoid grumbling/complaining gossip, exaggerating, judgments, insults, angry words, criticisms, bragging, self-justifying, excusing, blaming, sarcasm etc.

And you may be thinking, “Ah! I got this... I have a secret weapon: duct-tape!... I’ll just be silent for a week!” BUT that’s not enough...you have to take every opportunity to build up and encourage those around you (that’s the other side of this exercise) (v. 16) “Let the word of Christ richly dwell among you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God...”

Listen to your OWN words...how the tongue is an indicator of your heart and you can’t control it: (James CH 3) “But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison.” And THIS is where we live (and where the ancients lived – our common humanity seen in our desires and our words).

And then a third arena – the heart and our relationships (vv. 12-13): “a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other...”

Here again – where we ALL live ...everyday...and where we are constantly exposed as failures! It’s so hard to forgive...and it’s really NOT something we can fake... because people can tell...and when you TRY to look humble and TRY to seem forgiving but your heart isn’t “IN IT” (as we say) it just comes across ALL wrong.

If you try to look kind, it comes across as being condescending/paternalistic...If you TRY to show humility, it just looks fake and repulsive... If you try to come across as gentle it just feels ...insulting...

And forgiveness: how do you MAKE yourself forgive when someone has really wronged you and done real damage? You can’t just manufacture forgiveness or ANY of these virtues...and the harder you try, the more artificial and self-conscious you appear.

And one last arena...in case we left anything OUT in verse 17: “Whatever you do in word or deed...” Paul is saying, “There’s NO quadrant of your life that can go unaffected... It all must be renovated.”

Now...if you’re not looking for help by now...either you're living in complete denial and have NO self-awareness OR you’ve given up and...you're sort of resigned that you’ll NEVER change... BUT Paul is saying that the Resurrection of Jesus DID something that makes change...liberation from these inner motives, thoughts, words and behaviors a real certainty.

The passage begins in a way that’s meant to give the reader pause, “Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ...” and you may have heard that the wording has the force of “since” – i.e. since you HAVE been raised with Christ...” BUT IT’S ACTUALLY EVEN BETTER THAN THAT!

Paul uses what modern grammarians call “a First Class Conditional Clause” i.e. the “IF” anticipates a positive answer...So it’s like “since”...BUT you have to go through the paces in your mind: the reader says, “If I’ve been raised...and...come to think of it...I REALLY HAVE BEEN RAISED WITH Christ!”

And Paul goes on to describe that all God’s people were somehow IN Jesus Christ when He lived, died, rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. “I was IN Christ... He was representing me...all He did is credited to me as if I ACTUALLY DID IT MYSELF!”

When He obeyed...it’s as if I actually obeyed and I get the reward ... When He cared for people and fed the hungry and healed the sick – I WAS IN HIM and HE REPRESENTED ME SO THAT I GET THE CREDIT.

When He was punished for sin...it was as if I was IN HIM paying my penalty ...as if I was ON that Cross and as if I endured the full justice my sins deserved.

When He rose...I was IN Him...He represented ME as if God the Father was declaring: “I accept T.J. and death will not have the last word over him... He is already raised in My eyes...innocent/righteous in My eyes!”

And when Jesus Christ was received into the very presence of God the Father...He carried humanity into heaven and I am represented BY Him...as if I am already there... God has declared it by raising Jesus Christ from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus Christ proves that it’s a done-deal.

The way to participate in this RENOVATION on a daily basis NOW is to ask myself, “Where is my LIFE?” and then to answer (as it says in v. 4) “When CHRIST who is our life!”

My life is NOT in MY WORK... My life is NOT IN my LOOKS...or these cookies...or in being married... or in the success of my kids... or in the recognition of my peers... my life isn't even IN how I feel about myself... "CHRIST, who is our life!" I can stop saying, "If I could only _____ then I'd be complete."

When He rose, when death could not hold Him, the grave could not keep Him from rising again – then I was raised and accepted into the very presence of God IN CHRIST – my JUDGE has become my Father. He forgives me – He likes me (John 17.23). I'm THERE already because Jesus Christ is there and HE REPRESENTS ME – Christ who IS my LIFE. My life is hid with Christ in God.

The person you see before you is messed up beyond what you know and beyond what I know... but there is a NEW version of me ("T.J. 2.0") a new self... free to be all that God made me to be. And that destiny...that God has declared and destined me to be a new person who is "being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of Him who created" me.

And that destiny (and no one can keep me from it...not the devil...not other people...not even myself) that destiny IS the motivation I have IN THE PRESENT to go with the renovation. I'm not obeying to make God like me (He already DOES) or to get Him to reward me (He already HAS) or to prove how thankful I am (I can never be thankful enough!)... It's not to feel better about myself (my life is not IN my self-image) or to get YOU to like me (my life is NOT in YOU).

The reason the Christian is obeying ...is changing...is going along with the great renovation plan is because it's our destiny... Like it or not...I am going to be perfectly loving and morally beautiful so ...let's go with it...let's try on these new clothes...put on the new self... It's where we're headed...and when I see that, it makes me want to be faithful to my wife...the thought influences and transforms all my desires...makes me generous and weakens greed (my life isn't in stuff!)

In other words, when I see that I am represented in Christ – that my life is IN HIM... then, little by little, my new self begins to emerge...and it's not because I'm afraid to get caught...or because I'm looking for public recognition; not based on fear or shame or competition... but on security... that Christ IS my life!