

Colossians 2:6

“So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him.”

In 1988 Janet, our two older girls and I went on holiday with my parents, arriving on Saturday

- we didn't have time to choose a church to attend for the morning service, we just went to the first one
- inside the church was rather dark, and an old minister in black robes led a very traditional service
- he was clearly struggling with the rising years and we learned later he had not been at all well
- that said, he preached a good sermon from Luke's Gospel on Jesus stilling the storm

That particular church had no evening service but on the way back to our holiday home

- we passed a Baptist Church that was having a summer mission and resolved to go there
- the evening service was much more modern and I think the visiting preacher was an American
- on the way home my Dad asked me what I had thought about the two services
- I was only 30 years old at the time and might easily have been drawn to the livelier evening service
- and yet, there had been something special about the Sunday morning service though I was not sure why
- my Dad offered a simple explanation, 'because the old minister had suffered'

I don't think I really understood at the time yet since then I have realised that the most powerful witness is offered

- not by people like me; pretty healthy, relatively prosperous
- but people who have testified to Christ in and through adversity – illness, bereavement, pain and loss
- people who have lived out the real demands of the Christian faith
- and not just hidden in a cosy world of gentle sentiments
- these are people who live out the message of Christ and his cross, not hiding at the vicarage tea party

As congregations emerge from churches all over Britain today, the world at large is watching and asking

- is church-going comparable to going to the theatre? – you go (some people even dress up to go)
- and when you come out the thing that really matters is whether you enjoyed it, or is it more than that?

Contemporary British examples may be few, but across the world and in former generations there are many

- a great body of Christians for whom being the body of the crucified Messiah means a different life
- a life requiring sacrifice, a life that shows the triumph of faith through suffering
- as Paul writes to the Colossians (in that part of the letter we call Chapter 2)
- there is every likelihood that he is doing so chained to a prison guard
- he knows that in this he is sharing in the sufferings of his Lord
- and he remembers, if Jesus glorified the Father through the sufferings that he endured
- then the believer also can glorify the Lord through any kind of suffering we are called upon to endure
- Bible commentator, David Garland, has this to say

We live best when we put the purposes of God and the needs of others first; even if it means that it brings danger and distress to our own lives. We handle suffering in our lives best when, in the midst of it, we reach out to help others instead of focusing on our own private pain and anguish.

I know this from first-hand experience – not because I have suffered at that level but because I have seen others

- and have witnessed the power of their testimony, in adversity and through adversity
- These are Christians for whom Christ is pre-eminent, supreme – a life both tested and trusted
- Believers who find in Christ: Complete Salvation; Complete Forgiveness and Complete Victory

I COMPLETE SALVATION

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him,
(Colossians 2:6)

The fact that Paul needs to encourage the Colossians to continue to live in Christ, suggests some were falling away

- the phrase ‘received Christ Jesus as Lord’ can easily be misunderstood – it does not mean ‘become a Christian’
- in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 Paul speaks of receiving a body of Christian teaching and passing it on
- ‘Christ died for our sins, he was buried, he was raised on the third day (according to the scriptures)’
- Similarly, the Colossian believers have received Christ, in the sense of receiving the proclamation of Christ
- the clue is in verse 7, Paul tells them they are to be ‘strengthened in the faith as you were taught’
- it is because they have believed what they have been taught about Christ that they have come to faith
- in that faith they have received Christ Jesus as Lord, this is not simply an emotional experience
- the story of Christianity is rooted in history, the life and ministry of Jesus, his death and resurrection
- when we forget or neglect the centrality of the death and resurrection of Christ we are vulnerable
- to deceptive philosophy (v. 8), whether this be pagan theory, legalistic works or angel-worship

J.B. Phillips put it like this, ‘be careful no one spoils your faith through intellectualism or high-sounding nonsense’

- there is nothing wrong with emotion but a reliance on emotionalism is wrong
- there is nothing wrong with using our intellect except it has a tendency to become high-sounding nonsense
- Anything that draws away from Christ or looks for any other source of salvation is empty and vain
- he, by his very nature, is the Head over every power and authority (Col. 2:10)
- Christ is the one in whom the fullness of Deity dwells – and in whom is no darkness at all
- In Christ, the believer’s every need is met – we can know Complete Salvation and

II COMPLETE FORGIVENESS

When we think of things Christ has done for us, we are unlikely to start with spiritual circumcision

- not least because we are not living in the world of the New Testament, where an important issue
- was did you have to become a Jew first (circumcision being the distinguishing mark of God's covenant people)
- and then progress to being a Christ? Or was it possible to be a Christian by faith alone in Jesus Christ
- once again, the clue to the answer comes in a later verse (this time v. 12), 'through your faith'
- The covenant sign was given to Abraham – the man of faith; the sign was important, faith was more important
- Paul, with impeccable Jewish credentials affirms: circumcision is not a matter of the flesh but of the heart
- even Jews agreed that the physical rite of circumcision could not bring about forgiveness of sins
- but the death of Christ can bring about such forgiveness and therefore supersedes the rite

The new outward and visible sign of baptism represents incorporation into the death and resurrection of Christ

- circumcision is not an issue in any branch of the church today but there are similar issues
- which suggest something other than faith in Christ alone is necessary, when I was growing up
- it was a matter of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and not drinking, not gambling, not smoking
- it took me a long time to learn that being a Christian is not Jesus and Victorian or Puritan legalism
- later, people were experiencing new spiritual blessing and were also speaking in tongues and being baptised
- some people have wrongly made the Gospel about Jesus and speaking in tongues; Jesus and believer's baptism
- but the major point to be made here is that being a Christian is not a matter of 'Jesus and ...'
- everything that needs to be done to secure our salvation and forgiveness has been accomplished by Christ
- there is nothing or no one that can offer anything more to us than Christ
- God has provided Christians with complete forgiveness and fullness in Christ

III COMPLETE VICTORY

The football season is with us once again and as usual the hopes of many football fans are running high

- while the exploits of Plymouth Argyle F.C. for a century or more have hardly been an epic
- there have been times when we have won - it is the total identification of the fan with the team
- that enables that fan to say 'we won' even though the fan never so much as kicks a ball
- Much as I enjoy football, we do not want to trivialise the victory Christ secured by his death and resurrection
- but Paul affirms that God, through Christ's cross, routed all the threatening powers arrayed against us
- any fear that these powers can have any authority or mastery over Christians is allayed, in him, 'we won'

From time to time, only very occasionally, I am called to minister with those who are concerned about evil

- I can't say that I relish these occasions and I always follow some simple rules
- firstly, I never go on my own; secondly, I always go in the daytime; thirdly, I always take a Bible with me
- Fourthly, I sing or recite to myself as best I can the following hymn (no longer in our hymnbook)

Jesus hath died and hath risen again,
Pardon and sin to bestow;
Fully I trust him; from sin's guilty stain
Jesus saves me now.
Jesus is stronger than Satan and sin,
Satan to Jesus must bow,
Therefore, I trust him without and within;
Jesus saves me now.

Paul is at pains to make sure that his description of the work of Christ on the cross is complete

- at the cross, Jesus wiped out the record of everything that accused us, the law, its rules and regulations
- no doubt Paul was well aware of the superscription on the cross, Jesus of Nazareth King of the Jews
- that was the very basis on which Jesus could fulfil the requirements of the law
- to make sure that all that stood against us was set aside

In ancient Rome, an army commander who had won a great military victory paraded through the city in triumph

- the conqueror would ride at the front in his chariot, leading his returning troops
- behind them would trail a wretched company of the vanquished
- Paul uses this familiar picture to affirm that Christ is the victorious conqueror
- if anyone should think the cross is a crude instrument of death, to Paul it is the chariot of victory
- the powers and authorities (including those esteemed by the errant Colossians), were publicly disgraced

David Garland quotes An African Christian song from the Transvaal (particularly relevant to Africa but also to us)

- adding a list of all our fears, whatever they may be, and in Christ crossing them out one by one
- by it we affirm: Complete Salvation; Complete Forgiveness; Complete Victory

Jesus Christ is the conqueror; by his resurrection he overcame death itself,
by his resurrection he overcame all things:
he overcame magic, he overcame amulets and charms,
he overcame the darkness of demon-possession, he overcame dread.
When we are with him, we also conquer.