You Are What You Eat Memory Verse: Colossians 3:1

Jan. 29th 2023 Scripture Reading: Matthew 15:1-2,10,17-20

SLIDE 1: TITLE

Today we continue to track with Paul through his letter to the Colossians. And even though this ancient letter was written somewhere around 62 AD, we still find it to be absolutely applicable to us today. At the time the Colossians were dealing with a very syncretic culture, an environment in which different religious and philosophical ideas mixed together and morphed and changed into something else. It really is not much different from the world today. I have compared this dynamic to a buffet. There is a sense in which you just line up and take your pick from all the various options at your disposal. You plate is your own, and you can pick and choose from the great buffet of ideas set before you.

 In through the doors of this buffet comes Paul, and he pleads with his readers, take Christ! Subsist on him! Fill up on him and him alone. He has taken great lengths to explain to us the supremacy of Christ. All other options cannot compare to the One in whom resides the fullness of God. He also admits that Christ is a bit of a mystery, but Paul knows that Jesus is worth getting to know. He says “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are found” in Jesus Christ.

**SLIDE 2: all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are found**

 So as Paul continues, he is going to keep hammering on these ever important themes. The first one being the supremacy of Christ. Nothing and no one is greater than Jesus. Second is this tension between mystery, which is a lack of information and knowledge which is adequate information. And third, is the notion of maturity. This is the entire goal of the Christian life; to be holy as God is holy. Notice in this section how often Paul speaks of life and death. And almost always he will speak of both together. You’ll see what I mean.

 Let’s pick up where we left off in chapter 2 verse 11. Paul has just admonished the church to choose Christ alone and not mix him in with the philosophy and foolishness of this world. He says, very definitively, in verse 10: “You have been filled by him, who is the head of every ruler and authority.” And because you have been filled by him, verse 11 says, READ 11.

**SLIDE 3: Colossians 2:11 In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not administered by human hands. The circumcision of Christ is realized in the stripping away of the whole self dominated by sin.**

 So circumcision was something done to the physical body in order to mark or identify someone as a member of the Jewish family. It was much like a brand that we would put on cattle. If it had your mark, well then clearly that is your cow…and if a person were marked by thie sign of circumsison, then clearly they belonged to God. You could not be considered Jewish without this signifier. But Paul is expanding on the definition. He is saying that yes, circumcision is a sign…it is a sign for the people and done by the people. It is a human tradition that *should* affect the state of your heart. If you belong to God, your life should reflect that reality. Well, the truth is, it did not always work out that way. More often than not, God’s chosen people were living their lives like everyone else. But now we have Jesus! He comes to perform a different type of circumcision that does not come about by human hands. Circumcision, as we have known it, is a dead sign…it did not have the power to transform hearts and lives, but now Christ removes our whole body…and if that does not make any sense, we read on. READ 12.

**SLIDE 4: Colossians 2:12 You were buried with him through baptism and raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.**

 So we can confidently say, according to Paul here, baptism is the new circumcision. And the point of both is to put to death the desires of our flesh. That is what he means when he talks about removing the whole body. Paul is not advocating some out of body experience here, but he does appeal to the empty grave of the supreme Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Because Christ was raised, when we are buried with him in the waters of baptism, we are raised with him as well. It’s one of the main reasons why I have not had my own kids baptized. Because I value the power of that story and that experience of being physically buried under the water…a physical ritual, like circumcision…but then rising up in new life, something that only Christ can give. Paul goes on to describe the reality of that new life. READ 13-15.

**SLIDE 5: Colossians 2:13-15 When you were dead because of the things you had done wrong and because your body wasn’t circumcised, God made you alive with Christ and forgave all the things you had done wrong. 14He destroyed the record of the debt we owed, with its requirements that worked against us. He canceled it by nailing it to the cross. 15When he disarmed the rulers and authorities, he exposed them to public disgrace by leading them in a triumphal parade.**

 This last part here is a reference to how the Romans would tout their military victories. They would parade around the losers and thereby show everyone their own glory. Which touches back to Paul’s main thesis here: Jesus deserves all the glory. Jesus is the ultimate victor! And notice, he cancelled our record of debt by nailing it to the cross.

 We have heard a lot about debt cancellation lately as there has been a push for and some passage of having certain student loans forgiven by the government. And I bring this up because it is an apt way to think about Paul’s point here. I have had to deal with the question, “Why did Jesus have to die? Why couldn’t God just forgive our sin?” And that question is similar to asking, “Why can’t the government just forgive loans?”

**SLIDE 6: Debt**

 For Paul, our sins create a debt that we owe. Effectively, sin is a debt, it’s a spiritual debt, but even so, it’s very real debt. And as sinful humans, we live under the weight of that debt. And we can’t pay it back. And God cannot simply overlook the debt because that would not be a just and holy God. What’s fair is fair. I owe God a debt, and I cannot expect him to do me a favor and overlook what I owe. I can beg and plead all I want to, but fair is fair. My debt justly remains.

 It’s the same with a landlord. I owe rent every month and if I don’t pay by bill, my debt, what I owe him, I don’t get to live there anymore. And if my landlord evicts me for not paying, does that mean that he is an evil villain who is out to destroy my life? No, fair is fair. He is just following the rules. Imagine what would happen if every renter came and said I can’t pay this month…Imagaine the landlord replying, “Well, okay then, I forgive you. Debt cancelled.” Well within a month flat the landlord would be out of business as well and no one would have anyplace to live. The point here is that a “debt-cancelling” landlord might seems like a real nice guy, but he would be a terrible landlord. And God, who is loving and gracious, and slow to anger and abounding in mercy, is still God. He is just and he cannot, he will not, overlook sin. God will not overlook the debt, but he will pay it. In God’s economy, a debt is a very real problem. It cannot be overlooked or cancelled…it must be paid. But also in God’s economy, we who are literally drowning in debt, find relief and payment in full in the cross of Jesus Christ. God himself supplies the means to pay off our sin debt at the cross. Paul says that Jesus nails our record of debt to the cross. Boom. Debt is not cancelled…it is paid in full. This is the new life Jesus provides for us when we undergo a journey of death to our flesh and resurrection into new life with him. So sin is defeated and evil is conquered…what more do we need?

**SLIDE 7: Colossians 2:16-17 So don’t let anyone judge you about eating or drinking or about a festival, a new moon observance, or sabbaths. 17These religious practices are only a shadow of what was coming—the body that cast the shadow is Christ.**

 New life comes with a new way of living…Paul mentions a few rituals that would have been near and dear to those with a Jewish background. READ 16-17. So Paul denigrates those old rituals; food laws and festivals and the Sabbath. Together with circumcision, these were the primary identifiers of a Jewish person. These traditional pieces had their place, but they served as a foreshadowing, and Christ is the one who casts that shadow…some translations say the “substance belongs to Christ.” Why would we ever want to live in the shadow of something when we could experience and enjoy the real thing?

 And again, if we think about the buffet of options that we can partake of, we can see that Jesus is the substantive portion. Filling up on Jesus is a dense, hearty meal. He is the very substance of what all the traditions pointed toward! So we can easily pass by that part of the buffet, because we know those dishes can never satisfy us…they are just fluff and smoke compared to Christ himself. The substance belongs to Christ, and we are looking for something substantial.

 In verse 18 now Paul talks about some specific gnostic tropes. Remember, the Gnostics taught that the body was bad and the spiritual world was good. So for some of them, it meant we want to restrict and diminish the body. This would mean withholding food. Paul also references the practice of angel worship which affirms the spiritual world as good and the knowledge of mysteries that comes through ethereal visions. READ 18-19

**SLIDE 8: Colossians 2:18-19 Don’t let anyone who wants to practice harsh self-denial and worship angels rob you of the prize. They go into detail about what they have seen in visions and have become unjustifiably arrogant by their selfish way of thinking. 19 They don’t stay connected to the head. The head nourishes and supports the whole body through the joints and ligaments, so the body grows with a growth that is from God.**

This last section almost sounds like copy from a Got Milk? advertisement. He is talking about nourishing and supporting the whole body, he is talking about joints and ligaments, and healthy growth. Again, we partake of Christ, we feast on his words, our lives become his life and we will be nourished, healthy. Just as our circumcision was from God, so too our continued growth and progression into maturity is from God. All the other gnostic stuff simply serves to enlarge our pride and as one translation puts it, to puff us up. I know I can relate to leaving a buffet feeling puffy.

**SLIDE 9: Colossians 2:20-3:1 If you died with Christ to the way the world thinks and acts, why do you submit to rules and regulations as though you were living in the world? 21 “Don’t handle!” “Don’t taste!” “Don’t touch!” 22 All these things cease to exist when they are used. Such rules are human commandments and teachings. 23 They look like they are wise with this self-made religion and their self-denial by the harsh treatment of the body, but they are no help against indulging in selfish immoral behavior. 3 Therefore, if you were raised with Christ, look for the things that are above where Christ is sitting at God’s right side**.

 Paul then returns to the first point we looked at today…baptism. He contrasts new life in Christ with the old life offered up by this world. READ 2:20-3:1 Paul again employs the life/death rhetoric. “If you have died with Christ, why are you still enmeshed in the ways of this world? Why are you still partaking of the things this world offers? Skip all that when you approach the buffet. All this world can offer you is rules. Don’t do this, don’t do that…it’s all refuse. Rules really only bring death. They can only point out what is wrong.

Matthew 15 the Pharisees call out Jesus and his disciples. It seems they were not washing their hands correctly. And so they were eating in an unclean fashion. They were not following the traditional Jewish rules. It’s a little like helping yourself at a buffet line without getting a clean plate. Jesus responds by saying in verse 10, “It is not what goes into the mouth that contaminates a person in God’s sight, it is what comes out of the mouth that contaminates the person.”

**SLIDE 10: Everything that goes into the mouth enters the stomach and goes out into the sewer, but what goes out of the mouth, comes from the heart.”**

Later, in verse 17, Jesus says, “Everything that goes into the mouth enters the stomach and goes out into the sewer, but what goes out of the mouth, comes from the heart.” The point being that all these food rules are a bunch of crap. God is interested in your heart, not in the things that literally perish as they are used…God is not about rules. He is about making us holy, he is about giving life. Paul makes the point that all these rules seem wise, they sound good what you first hear them, but they originate in humans and so these rules have no bearing on the heart. If I have been diagnosed with cancer and something wrong is going on inside of me, I need a treatment that will transform me from the inside. I need something to penetrate through my skin and bones and affect the source of my sickness. If I have been diagnosed with cancer, I can’t run to the store and buy a box of band-aids. Band-aids can be helpful in some situations but they will do nothing to heal my sickness. They can do nothing to transform the state of what is going on inside of me. That is what following human rules and traditions is like. It’s like slapping a band-aid on a spiritual cancer that needs to be eradicated and destroyed. Verse 23: this band-aid, these rules “are no help against indulging selfish immoral behavior.” You are what you eat. If we subsist on the rules and regulations of man, we will find ourselves to be bloated and puffed up, untransformed and using the bathroom a little too often. But when we fill up on Christ, when we choose to die with him, die to our self-made regulations, die to the ways of this world, we can find true transformation and a cure to this terrible sin disease.

I wanted to use the first verse in chapter 3 to round out this whole section, because it really is a summary of what Paul has talked about thus far. It’s a classic if/then statement: “Therefore, if you were raised with Christ, (then) look for the things that are above where Christ is sitting at God’s right side.” And where would that be? The heavenly throne room. In other words, Paul is saying, have a heavenly mindset. Think about the kingdom. Don’t get caught up in the agendas of this world. Don’t get obsessed by any rules made down here. Keep your eyes on the prize. When it comes to the buffet of endless options, you are what you eat. You are what you think about. You are what you desire. Essentially, Paul is rehashing what Jesus tells us in the sermon on the mount in Matthew 6:33, “Seek first and foremost God’s kingdom and God’s righteousness, and all these things (that is worldly needs) will be given to you as well.”

 So we are left with these words and with a question…Do we trust these words? The allure of this world is very charming. The things people say, the arguments they make, sound pretty good. It’s seems reasonable. The sins we commit seem benign. The motives we have seem decent enough. But Paul is calling us to a new worldview, one that originates in heaven. If you are what you eat, well then what are you eating? News media? Social media? Politician’s talking points? Celebrity takes? Netflix or Hulu or other streaming service? Do you eat up the latest gossip? The opinions of those who think like you do? The adulation of others? How much of our diet consists of the things of God? How often do we partake of scripture? How often do we engage in worship? Prayer? How often do we ingest the thoughts and teachings and insights of other Christians who have gone before us? If we are what we eat, what does our normal diet consist of? Believe me, I am preaching to myself here.

**SLIDE 13: If we are what we eat, what does our normal diet consist of?**

You and I suffer from a disease called sin. It is time for us to stop messing around with band-aids. We need transformation, we need healing from the inside out. We need Jesus. And thankfully, God has provided a way for us to access that new life in Him. No more playing by the rules of this world. Christ has overcome this world. Choose Jesus. Bring your brokenness to him. Bring you sin. Let Him heal you and give you a new mindset, a heavenly mindset. I close with verse 13 of today’s passage, “God made you alive with Christ and forgave all the things you had done wrong.” That’s what God offers us: life and forgiveness. What more could we want?

If we are what we eat, may we find our fill in Christ alone.

Amen.