

# Colossians 2:13-23

**Date: Sunday, 13 March 2022**

**Scripture: Colossians 2:13-23**

**Sermon: Jesus Plus...**

**Preacher: Justin Ang**

## Passage

*Col. 2:13 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, 14 by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. 15 He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.*

*Col. 2:16 Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. 17 These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. 18 Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, 19 and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.*

*Col. 2:20 If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations— 21 “Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch” 22 (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? 23 These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.*

# Transcript

## Introduction

A little while ago, at another church I was at, I came across a homeless man who decided that he would set up shop at the church. It wasn't a city church, so I was a little surprised, but he actually looked familiar. And we struck up a conversation. Turns out that he was a Christian but he was homeless.

And I reflect on that time, and I'm a little ashamed to say it but I was judgemental on that man who came to stay at the church. I wonder how would I react if a homeless man, walked into the church and said that they were Christian? We all have expectations about what a Christian ought to be. We have rules about what they should be.

Have you ever felt pressure from others to live your Christian faith in a certain way? Where people have put rules on you that were unnecessary? I have. There are rules that have been placed on me that weren't necessary taught by Jesus. Today, I want to try talk about two equations. I know it might seem like I'm a maths nerd, but it's the best way I can preach on this passage today. They are

Jesus + something =

Jesus + nothing =

Jesus =

We're going to look at these. You'll see it in your order of services. It's a pretty simple equation but it really goes to the heart of our faith in Jesus. And I want to show you that it's really important.

## Jesus + Something =

So the first equation I want to talk about is this. Jesus + something = Religion. When we add something to Jesus, then it becomes religion. Empty religion. For

me, when I met that homeless man, I was putting my expectations on him, and it was this,

Jesus + having a nice smell = being a Christian.

And that's religion. Paul warns against that in this passage. You see there were people in the Colossian church who were making up rules. They said that you couldn't eat certain foods. You couldn't drink certain drinks. You had to celebrate certain festivals.

*Col. 2:16 Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath.*

Colossians 2:16 (ESV)

And

*18 Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind,*

Colossians 2:18 (ESV)

For those in the Colossian church, it was

Jesus + food and drink

Jesus + a festival

Jesus + a new moon

Jesus + a sabbath

Jesus + worshipping angels

Jesus + false humility

They thought if they added these things to Jesus it would get them closer to God. Another word to describe what was happening was legalism. They had to tick the box in order to be "right with Jesus" and that's what Paul is warning here.

I struggle with this sometimes. In the past, I thought, being a Christian was putting my trust in Jesus, and wearing those wrist bands that said, WWJD. I thought I had

to wear those and I would judge people who didn't wear that. That's a sign that we're being religious, when we judge other people as we put rules on them.

It's the problem that Jesus had with the Pharisees. The Pharisees were concerned about what they were eating. They were concerned about making sure that their hands were clean, holding to the tradition of their elders, they had to wash their cups, pots, copper vessels, and dining couches.

They were clean on the outside, their actions looked like they were right with God. But their hearts were as far away from God as you could imagine. When they opened their mouths, they were foolish, they were slanderous. Jesus warns that it's not what goes into your mouth that defiles you, it's what comes out of your heart: evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.

Paul warns the Colossians, and he's warning us against religion against legalism. Now many of us aren't so concerned about food and drink, a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. We don't talk about the worship of angels, but that doesn't mean this passage doesn't apply today. We need to look at our own hearts, to see if we add our own additions.

Maybe it's one of the following, maybe for you it's

Jesus + bible study

Jesus + prayer meetings

Jesus + certain worship

Jesus + certain dress sense

Jesus + certain songs

Jesus + certain behaviours

Jesus + certain rejection of things that God has not ordained.

What is it for you? Jesus + **?**

Don't get me wrong, bible study, prayer meetings, music worship, clothes, songs are all good things to do. But the trouble is that we can easily become legalistic. And we can be tempted to judge others based on these. We condemn others

when they don't live up to our expectations of what it looks like to be a Christian. Can I ask, do we judge people by the way that they dress? Or the songs that they sing? Or the fact that they may not attend bible studies or early morning prayer meetings?

I must admit that our Christian culture is sometimes really unhelpful. People say, "you need to read your bible in a year." You know, when people want you to tick the box. So we feel bad if we can only fit in a minute of reading and prayer. You don't feel worthy in the eyes of God not because of God's expectation but because of our or other people's expectations.

I'll give you an example. Sometimes, I do my quiet time and there's a list of bible reading passages to do. And I just love ticking off the boxes for the day. Because it's satisfying to get through four chapters a day. But the danger is that

Jesus + four chapters = religion.

It makes me think "now I'm right with Jesus." That's what Paul is warning here.

And the problem when we add to Jesus is that we are setting ourselves up as our own judge. Paul tells us that here in this passage. He warns us that when we add to Jesus, we are trying to make ourselves acceptable to God. Paul actually warns us of what we're going to become if we add to Jesus. Paul describes them in verse 18, that we're going to be puffed up. In other words, we're empty like a puffed up balloon. There's nothing in the centre. It's empty. And Paul warns us against trying to build up our life on something that isn't Jesus.

I'll give you an example. When I was younger, I would try to show off around my Christian friends. I would show off about how great a driver I was. And truthfully, the reason why I did that was because Jesus wasn't enough for me. I had to prove to other people that I didn't just trust in Jesus, but I was a good driver.

Jesus + a good driver.

Maybe you know what you're doing with that equation.

Jesus + a new car

Jesus + a great career

Jesus + a loving family

Jesus + you can fill that in.

Jesus + something = religion.

## **Jesus + Nothing =**

Let's talk about the second equation. This is more important to remember. If you forget everything I've said today, this is what you need to remember.

Jesus + Nothing = Relationship

Paul warns us about the danger of religion. And he also shows us the blessing of relationship with Jesus. Have a look.

*17 These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.*

Colossians 2:17 (ESV)

Paul is illustrating here that when we add to Jesus, when we add rules to Jesus, it might look good. It might seem wise, but it's really man-made religion. It's kind of like if you were at a fancy restaurant, and you decided that you would fill up on the bread. And then you realised that as you were filling up on the bread, the main course came along. The bread was a shadow of what was to come, the main course. Jesus is the main course. He is the substance. All these rules we add to Jesus are just meaningless.

For the Jews, Sabbaths, festivals, new moons, food laws, were all shadows of the true thing that was to come. Jesus. And once Jesus had come, they didn't need to go back to these things.

And it's the same for us today. I'll give you an example. With my relationship with Rachel. As you know, that we've been married for 6 years. And we rarely spend time away from each other. I love spending time with her. But imagine if now, that I forgot about her. When I cooked her meals, I set the table for two, cooked a meal for two, but I forgot about her. I just ate with two meals in front of me, and I actually neglected Rachel. Or if I decided to go on an overseas trip, but forgot to bring her. She'd be pretty upset, right? Why? Because I've forgotten that the substance to our marriage is Rachel.

We're a bit like that. We can forget that the substance is Jesus.

I want to share with you today that you don't need to look anywhere else, you don't need to seek anything except for Jesus. Don Carson, a famous Christian scholar says this, "Men love to substitute ceremony for integrity, purity, and love; but Jesus will have none of it." What he means is that we would rather look good, we would rather be religious, than actually having a relationship with Jesus.

Jesus has come and he desires for each one of us to have a living relationship with him. The Westminster Shorter Catechism teaches that the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

And I want to share with you that there is real power in our relationship with Jesus. There is life in our relationship with Jesus. Have a look with me.

*Col. 2:20 If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations— 21 "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch" 22 (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? 23 These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.*

For the Colossian church, they were trying to stop sin by putting down regulations. Don't handle, don't taste, don't touch. But there's no power in rules.

I'll give you a modern example. Gossiping. How do you stop gossiping? Maybe people might say to you, the way to stop gossiping is to put down a rule. You might say, "remember that you've got two ears and one mouth so you should use it in that proportion." Maybe you have heard that. It sounds like wise advice right. But you know, the problem with that man-made advice is that even if you were to listen twice as much as you speak, you're still going to gossip about people when you do talk. There's no power in man made rules because the spirit of God isn't involved in it. It doesn't stop the stuff that comes out of the heart.

That's Paul's point here. Rules, regulations, man made religion is nothing in comparison to Jesus alone. There is no power in rules.

Paul is reminding us of our relationship with Jesus. Power to overcome sin comes from pursuing Jesus. Power in our life comes from holding fast to Jesus, the head of the body. In one of my favourite hymns,

*Turn your eyes upon Jesus,*

*Look full in His wonderful face,*

*And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,*

*In the light of His glory and grace.*

Growth happens not because we are religious but because we have a relationship with Jesus. It's found in looking full into Jesus' wonderful face.

Maybe you're thinking, how does Jesus help me to stop gossiping? Well, maybe you gossip because you don't feel great about yourself. You want to put other people down in order to lift yourself up. But when you look at Jesus, when you look full into his wonderful face, you realise you don't need to put people down, because Christ himself has lifted you up in his death and resurrection. He has shown you how much he loves you. He has shown how much he values you by going to the cross for you. How can you put other people down when Christ has lifted you up?

Paul wants us to see that Jesus + nothing = relationship.

I want to talk about something really practical. I want to ask the question, have you lost connection with the head? Have you stopped looking at Jesus? I love using my mobile phone. But recently, I've been running out of battery halfway through the day. Not because my phone is old. It's because I forget to charge my batter up during the night. So my phone goes dead during the day and I lose connection with Rachel, with friends and family.

We're a little bit like that. We lose connection to Jesus. Jesus says this,

*I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. John 15:5 (ESV)*

Are we growing in our relationship with Jesus? Are we looking full into his wonderful face? Are we growing in our love for Jesus? Are we pursuing Jesus? Are we receiving the love of Jesus into our hearts each and every day? Here's where bible reading, and prayer come in. They are a means to an end. They are a means to spending time with Jesus. But as soon as we think of reading as ticking a box, then it becomes legalism.

Jesus + nothing = relationship.

## **Jesus =**

I want to end it here, but sharing one more equation.

Jesus = everything.

Do you realise that if we have Jesus, we have everything that we could ever hope for? It has all been accomplished for us with Jesus choosing to humble himself, making himself nothing, emptying himself, and becoming a servant, so that we would be lifted up on high. So that we might be exalted. So that we might be adopted into the family of God, so that we might call God our Heavenly Father and Jesus our brother. So that we might have an inheritance in heaven that will never be stolen, spoil nor rust. So that we might be loved beyond anything we could hope for. So that we might have all the resources that we need in order to live a life honouring to him. Our sins have been forgiven. we have eternal life.

Let's pray.