

CITY CHURCH-EASTSIDE WEEKLY WORSHIP GUIDE

February 28, 2010



Series: A New Allegiance The Freedom of Christ

“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...according to human precepts and teaching?”

This week’s sermon opened up by describing a friend who upon completion of a prison term decides that he prefers life behind bars to the free world. Such an idea is preposterous and yet this is the mentality that Paul addresses in Colossians 2:16-23. Verse by verse thus far in Colossians, Paul has been fighting against the spiritual enslavement that now threatens the Colossian believers and the above pericope continues the battle. Specifically Paul shows us in this passage how we are enslaved by shadows and rules yet free in the person of Christ. The shadows are described in verse 16, “Therefore, do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day.” Here

Paul is referring to the rituals, observances, and ceremonies found in the Old Testament. While these ceremonies were merely shadows of the real object, Christ, there were some who were making participation in certain religious and cultural events a litmus test for those who belonged to the people of God. These customs became additions to faith in Christ and thus mitigated against the gospel. As someone once said, “Jesus plus anything equals nothing.” These additional benchmarks easily played into the brokenness of the human condition and very naturally led to judgementalism. If our identity is in anything else besides God himself, it will inevitably propagate judgement. Furthermore, If we think these things bring us identity and life, we’ll naturally associate with the things and people associated with what brings us identity and life and tend to marginalize those who don’t reflect our highest values. Invariably reliance on any other

benchmark leads to exclusion and fear, the very breakdown of community. This is not freedom, but enslavement. Enslavement is not only cultivated from shadows, but also from rules. Many, Christian or not, in our society today believe the path to change comes through asceticism. Yet, in setting up goals of self, we usually wind up with a worship of self. It feels powerless to defeat sin and the flesh in our own strength, something like the exercise where we are told “think about anything but the white polar bear”. Paul points us in a very different direction from the shadows or rules. He calls us to look to the person of Christ. In knowing Christ the patterns of captivity that had power have been disarmed, or “nailed to the cross” (2:14). As we trust that Christ has established our identity and worth we avoid the destruction of both judgementalism and self-oriented asceticism. We are finally set free to worship!

Sermon Application

The questions and thoughts below can be used for further reflection this week. Seek to use a journal or discuss with a friend. Most of all use this to consider how the gospel of Christ can be transforming. Enjoy!

Application Questions: Colossians 2:16-23

1. Much of this passage is about the captivity that imprisons the Colossian church. For them, such imprisonment was by choice. In what ways do people choose captivity today?
2. Read verse 16. In what ways were the Colossian believers held captive? What was the original design of these “shadows” in the Old Testament and how were the Colossians being tempted to use them?
3. Bob, an Eastside resident and very successful widget salesman, takes great pride in his career. In fact, just this week he commented that without widgets he’d be nothing! How will Bob be tempted to treat others around him, especially those unlike him?
4. How does the work of Christ enable us to love others opposed to judging them? How are we set free from a critical spirit?
5. As you look around our society describe the modern techniques of asceticism. Why is asceticism an inadequate tool of change? What power does it rely on?
6. Ceremonialism (what we do to please God) and asceticism (what we avoid to please God) are two enemies described in this text. How does the accomplished work of Christ enable us to avoid both errors and how does this impact our heart for worship?

“If we set as our goals self-discipline, self-awareness, self-fulfillment, self-esteem, self-actualization, or self-help, we usually wind up with a worship of the self...If the aim is to defeat the flesh, it only gives it new power.”

David Garland

The Lenten Journey: Prayer

The classic text for understanding the Lenten journey is the temptation of Jesus found in three out of the four gospel accounts (Matthew 4:1-11, Mark 1:12-13, Luke 4:1-13). Particularly in the case of Matthew the wilderness journey of Jesus was an redemptive echo of a former wilderness journey, that of the Israelites who escaped the clutches of Egypt. Oddly enough even though the children of these vagabonds eventually made it to the promise land, they never did seem to escape the bondage of Pharaoh. Their prisons merely took new forms depending on the synchronistic fetish of the day. While Matthew and Luke go into great detail about Christ’s wilderness journey Mark, in typical fashion, seeks to describe this journey ever so briefly. One thing remains clear. Where Israel as a nation failed in the desert (the original sojourners who left Egypt died in the desert and it was their children who made it to the promise land) Christ, the victor, succeeded. When tempted by all sorts of idolatry he prevailed counting the word of God as truth and the proposed alternative as false. This is marvelously redemptive as Jesus reverses the curse, a universal plague brought upon the cosmos as Adam and Eve failed to trust in the word of God believing the word of the tempter to be true.

Last week the overview of Lenten activities was set forth; prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Colossians 2:16-23 from this weeks worship text reminds us that the Lenten journey is not about what we do to please God (ceremonialism) or what we give up to please God (asceticism). Rather the gospel is living in the realization of what he has perfectly accomplished for us. The wilderness temptation empowers us to recognize the voices of falsehood and embrace the truth of God himself. Despite Mark’s brief, two verse description of the journey we still see that “the Spirit drove him” and “the angels ministered to him”. These two descriptions encompass the fight against falsehood. As we continue the Lenten journey here’s a question for you to consider: Are you carving out time for communion with God in prayer? Simple, yet profound. William Law defined prayer as “the rising of the soul out of the valley of time into the riches of eternity”. During this season of Lent may our communion with God’s holy spirit provide the life-shaping bookends to our day. The spiritual disciplines have never been about pleasing God for our salvation, but rather resting in his pleasure and hearing his voice of truth that we may understand our salvation.

