

Take Off, Put On
New! Sermon Series
5/21/17
Colossians 3:1-17

Welcome/Intro/Vision: PBO get here early!

MAGGIE INTERVIEW HERE AT ALL 3 SERVICES

If you're just joining us we've been saying over the past couple of weeks that for many of us at various points in our lives, something NEW came along and changed our lives for the better: a new job, a new relationship, some new opportunity was a turning point for something great that happened in our lives

But the problem is that new in this word has a very short shelf-life. New in this world has a very predictable pattern that just about everything follows from cars to houses to bodies and jobs:

New to familiar to old to broken to gone

And all of us have scars from living in this world—a world where relationships break down, promises break down, bodies break down, disappointments and frustrations sometimes feel like they're at every turn

And what the Scriptures claim that God has done in Jesus is take this whole progression and run it backwards, done a complete end-around on the laws of physics

On Easter Sunday, Jesus who WAS dead and gone is raised from that dead and gone by God his heavenly Father

And he's been raised from the dead in order to establish a New New that will never grow old, never fall apart, never decay or be gone ever again

And what it means to become a Christian is to enter into this NEW NEW thing that God has done in Jesus

And what we're talking about here on Sunday mornings is how do we experience that now, how do we enter into that now, how does this new life start to work in this old life here and now

And today, we're going to talk very practically and very specifically about a critical transaction that has to happen if we're going to be made new

Last week, if you weren't here, we talked about how each of us has baggage. And some of us took great delight in telling each other that the other person has baggage

And in that baggage we have habits and practices that we've been carrying around with us, some of us for decades that if we want to experience God's new thing, those old things have got to go

And those old things have got to go not merely because they're bad, although some of them are, and not merely because God says so, although he does

Those old things have got to go because very often we have to take off something old in order to make room for the new [REPEAT]

Today, in Colossians 3, we're going to first get a NEW description of who we are and where we are. And then we're going to get some coaching on how to step into that, what's the work required from our part to live into that new

If you've got a Bible turn with me to Colossians 3, if not it's on the screen behind me. If you're new to the Bible, much of the New Testament is made up of letters to churches, all brand new Christians trying to work out this new faith often in a hostile context

Paul didn't help start this church in Colosse but one of his paduan learners did, and so Paul writes to this group of people to help them get their minds and hearts around what it means to be a follower of Christ

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³ For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

On Friday nights when I was in middle school, my dad used to drive my brother and me to the middle and high school dance

Now my dad had a healthy and reasonable fear of what he knew was likely to be happening all around us at the middle and high school Friday night dance

And so his final words to me and my brother as he dropped us off at those dances was always the same: 'remember who you are.'

He would remind us of our identity and with that came a whole package of behavioral expectations. But it started with our names, with who we were first

Paul here is about to launch into a whole list of things he wants the Colossians to do

But where he begins is not with a list of things to do but with a couple of identity statements: this is who you are, remember who you are: you've been "**raised with Christ**"—that's what it means to be a Christian. "**You've died**," that's also what it means to be a Christian. "**Christ, who is your life**"—that's also what it means to be a Christian

What that all means, we're going to take a moment to unpack, but I want to start here because it's an important principle in understanding how to read your Bible and the principle is this: ***there are (almost) no naked commands in the Bible***

By and large when you see a command in the Bible, if you zoom out, either before or after you're going to find one of two things: ***either an identity statement (about who you are or about who God is) or a promise***

Any time you find a command in the Bible: do this or don't do that, just remember that there are no naked commands in the Bible, that's memorable because we don't talk about nakedness very much in church, so that'll stick

There are almost no naked commands in the Bible, there's almost always a larger frame, a larger reason, a larger purpose, that anchors it in what it means to be a Jesus follower or that holds promises for us that we're invited to lean into and count on and prayerfully claim as we walk in his ways

Here, Paul is emphasizing our UNION with Christ. If you're a Jesus follower, this is who you ARE.

We're going to do our baptism class in a couple of weeks in preparation for a Baptism service at the end of June, those details are in your bulletin. We use this language in baptism around here every time we do a service.

Baptism is a public proclamation of the fact that I'm joining my life with Christ. And the actual act we do is go down into the water, that's sharing in Christ's death—just what Paul says here, I've already died!

And then we're raised with him to new life—I'm all-in on sharing my life with Christ, my life is in his hands, my life is joined with his--and so wherever Jesus is now, that's where I am now!

If he's seated up at the right hand of God, then that's where I am, too! And when he comes back to re-claim all that is his and to make ALL THINGS NEW, you'll also appear with him, be shown to be his—this is your present AND this is your future!

THEREFORE, Paul says, given that NEW reality--THEREFORE set your hearts and your minds on things above, not on earthly things. Draw your life and your energy and your hopes and dreams from God, not from the things of this world

For you ALREADY died. What makes zombies so creepy and so powerful is you can't kill them, they're already dead. This is actually rather like that but in a non-creepy way—there is ENORMOUS power in having already died but yet still alive and active here on this earth

If you've already died with Christ, then death itself has lost all its power to generate fear over you. Can you begin to imagine how much more freely you'd live if you knew how indestructible you already were in Christ?

You've already died, your life is already hidden with Christ in God and therefore you are free from death and all those little deaths that we're so scared of: free from fear of failure, free from what other people think, free from worry, from fear

Free of fear of any condemnation, no more guilt, no more fears of failure or shame, you'd lose your addiction to people's approval—you are free: this is part of what it means to be made NEW!

What if you prayed this week to ask God to help you to wrap your mind and imagination around a life that was already dead and already alive with Christ?

Paul is adamant that this is Union with Christ is the reality for the Christian. And it's all grace. Nothing that we do generates this or makes it happen, this is all pure gift from God

One way of putting it: God sings our new name into existence, he sings over us with mercy and grace, he sings us into a new identity and sings over us with a new name

But God's not the only one who's got a song. We're made in God's image and so we've got a song to sing, too. The song of our lives, the song of what we're doing with the days God gives us, the gifts he gives us, the opportunities he gives us

So Paul transitions next to declare that there some songs that we might sing that would be off-pitch and in the wrong key, that would out of step with this song of grace being sung over our lives in Christ

⁵ Put to death, therefore, [any time you see a therefore in the Bible: "what's the therefore there for?" Paul is picking up on the identity statements we just read: died with Christ, hidden in Christ, raised with Christ, so he's going to give us a bunch of commands here, but remember "no naked commands in the Bible!"] whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. ⁶ Because of these, the wrath of God is coming, ⁷ You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. ⁸ But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips.

Well, Buzz our puppy has gotten some air time here recently, so in order to maintain equal time, here's Kitty, the original Kirk family pet

When we first moved to Chatham County about 5 years ago, we got a delightful housewarming gift: a whole host of Chatham County fleas made their home in kitty

When we made the discovery that Kitty had fleas, Kelly and I declared all-out war those fleas those fleas don't belong in our house, he's miserable, we're miserable, so we're declaring war v. fleas in our house: baking powder, vacuuming 18 times a day for days and days and days on end, flea bath, etc.

Wwe were finally only delivered by the good Dr. Linda Sands who owns Dogwood Vet Clinic who delivered me and my family from the fleas with her superpowers! Fleas did not belong on our cat or in our house, we were fully devoted to killing those fleas and getting rid of them!

Paul here saying "kill these fleas." Kill them. Declare war on them. They don't belong in your heart or your relationships or your life any more if you're a Christ follower.

They are discordant from the song of grace and mercy that God is singing over you, they don't fit in the life that God has made you for

You've died and have been raised with Christ, and these things have no place in the glorious eternal kingdom of God that you've been called into

And he gets pretty specific with the fleas, he names them, so that we won't be too confused. These lists aren't meant to be comprehensive, it's suggestive, it's getting us in the ballpark of what we need to deal with

Because you and I have a tremendous capacity for rationalization and self-justification, don't we?

And so Paul gets very specific with the fleas that we've got to get rid of: **sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, greed**, and then a second list: **anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language**.

Paul comes at the sexual appetite with three different words in part because the religions of the Greeks that the Colossians used to be soaked in was a sex-saturated as much of our culture is—temple prostitution was a part of the worship services at some sites

The sex appetite is so powerful, so we've got to put a firm boundary around that, we're not going to let that flea run our lives and drive us into behaviors that would ruin our lives and would be out of step with the NEW thing that God is doing in us in Jesus

Nothing wrong with sex! Sex is GREAT! But it's only a blessing to us if it stays within healthy limits, otherwise it could totally destroy us.

And then he broadens it to evil desires and greed "which is idolatory." Let's talk about that a bit: Idolatory is taking a good thing and attempting to make it an ultimate thing

Greed is idolatory because it takes the pursuit of a good thing, wealth or applause or approval or stuff, and it attempts to make that pursuit the center of our lives, driving the whole thing

Paul says that greed specifically is idolatry, the worship of STUFF in place of God. Whenever we do that, it dehumanizes us and destroys people's lives and relationships

Do you know how many millions of people throughout history have been captured, trafficked, and enslaved, literally enslaved in chains, because of the greed of someone in power?

Do you know how many millions of people throughout history have lost jobs, lost houses, lost food on their tables because of the greed of someone in power?

Do you know how many relationships with children and wives and husbands have been sacrificed to the idol of greed? Do you know how many billions of hours of worry have been sacrificed to the idol of greed?

My friends, for all of these things that Paul lists, these are not nice, tame little side habits that don't really matter all that much and this is not just some angry passage of the Bible that's just out to get us and tell us all how terrible we all are

These are vicious gods that demand horrible sacrifice. Inordinate, disproportionate sacrifice that demand that you do damage to yourself and everyone else around them in order to appease them

These are gods that will destroy you, they are cancers that have eaten whole women, children, and men, adults and kids, the strong and especially the weak have all been consumed by these gods

And so we must either destroy them or they will destroy us. Kill these fleas!

And so Paul declares that because of these things, the wrath of God is coming. And the wrath of God is something that some of us have baggage with maybe because it's been described in disturbing or distorted ways

Or we have people in our lives that we would describe as angry and they hurt us with their anger—which is why Paul says we need to take that practice off!

But do you know why a loving God has wrath? Because his wrath is part and parcel of love, his wrath serves his love.

I read this quote recently: Wrath isn't the opposite of love, hate is, which eventually morphs into vindictiveness or ambivalence and loathing

God's wrath is coming to deal with these demons and these cancers and these idols once and for all—thank God!

Thank God he's going to come and do away with these things that have ruined countless lives!

Thank God that he hates the powers that would destroy us and all that is good around us.
Thank God the wrath of God is coming to do away with these demons once and for all!

And so here before we move on, I want to pause and ask you: what do you need to put off in your own life? What fleas do you need to kill today? Paul was very specific about naming them I want to press you to do a little soul-searching and not justify or rationalize, but to name it.

What needs to go in order for you to live in line with the status you've been given as you're joined with Christ?

But the Bible is so psychologically brilliant and offers us so much insight into how we're wired, Paul knows that it's not enough to say "stop doing something"—we need to replace that behavior with something else

And so Paul makes this transition in the letter:

⁹ Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. ¹¹ Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

Here's the NEW! Identity that you've been given: the **NEW self**, which is being renewed in knowledge in what direction? In the image of its creator—that's how the Bible described human beings in the very first pages of the whole book. We were made in God's image

So as we come to Christ do you know what God's doing? He's making us new—which is actually all about re-claiming God's original intention for you and for me

The fleas of sin weren't a part of the original plan, we weren't made to sin, we weren't made for all those things that Paul just told us to take off—and as we follow Christ we're being made new into this new life, the original life that God had in mind for us in the very beginning of time

And so we're called not just to get RID OF the bad stuff, but to embrace this NEW self, embrace the new journey, to walk in this new way, which entails some new specific practices

And it starts here with new community—the world of ancient Rome was as divided or even more divided along lines of race and class and rank and privilege as we are today

And Paul says this startling thing—that we're not just being made new individually but we're being made new in community and we're called into this new community

Community is so central to this whole experience, this is why we gather, this is why we do small groups around here, this is why we're here doing what we do

And given how central community is to the New Testament's understanding of what it means to be made New, it's not surprising that when Paul talks about what we should PUT ON in place of all the stuff that he's just told us to PUT OFF, it's almost all relational

I'm just going to read over this whole list, watch for how many of these things that Paul's going to tell us to put on are relational

In fact, I want you to count how many of these commands have to do with how we treat one another, but before we get there, we're going to get another word about our identity:

¹²Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, [NOTE: more identity language. You ARE chosen, holy, dearly loved. Repeat that with me. Because that's who you are, here's what you're to do, keep count of how many have to do with how we relate in community:] clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

¹⁵Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. ¹⁶Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. ¹⁷And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

How many of these commands are relational?

In the Exploring Christianity class I've invited people to write down at the end of each session any question that's been generated or lingering and hand it in and we'll try to answer it in a future session

At one point we were talking about the cross: how Jesus takes on all the sins for all people for all time and absorbs all that toxicity and all that pain and does away with it once and for all

And one person wrote on their notecard after that session: "If Jesus has absorbed all that's toxic in the world, then how come the world's still such a mess?"

Great question! Let me ask one in response: which of these lists do we see people most easily and most frequently and most actively doing:

This one: ***⁵Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.... rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips.***

Or this one: *clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.* ¹³ *Bear with each other and forgive one another...Forgive as the Lord forgave you.* ¹⁴ *And over all these virtues put on love...* ¹⁵ *Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts...be thankful.* ¹⁶ *Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom ...And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

Which list is more pervasive on the news, at work, on your neighborhood list serve? That's why the world is such a mess!

That first list assumes that everything and everyone around me exists for my consumption. And when I don't get what I want, I get angry, I slander, I curse, I lash out

That second set of lists declares that I am taken care of in Christ, therefore I am here to serve you not use you.

I'm more than a consumer, I'm an image-bearer of the most high God. You are more than a consumer. You are an image bearer of the most high God.

And we are called to put on Christ, rest in Christ, trust in Christ, set our hearts and minds on Christ, and to embrace our identity as children of the most high God

And then to LIVE like it—taking off the old stuff and putting on the New self, which looks like this

Look, especially if you're not a religious person, not yet a Jesus follower, consider this:

how much better do you think things would be if for JUST ONE WEEK and JUST IN THIS COUNTRY everyone did exactly what the Scriptures told us to do and took off this list and put on this other list?

How much better do you think things would be in your neighborhood, in your family, at school, if everyone everyone agreed to this crazy experiment for just the next 7 days to live exactly as this Scripture called us to live?

Whenever we participate in God's economy, it's a blessing to us—this is part of the reason why I've kept coming back to it over the years! It just makes sense out of life!

So our Wildly Important Take-Home Question is simply this:

What do you need to put off, what do you need to put on, to participate in God's work of making you New! this week?

If you're a Jesus-follower, there are things that are in your life like there are in mine that are going to have to go

fleas that don't belong in this environment, that don't belong in your life or mine as one who has died with Christ, been raised with Christ, is holy and dearly loved by Christ

What are those things that gots to go? And then what are the things from that list that you read and you know, at some level, that's exactly what I need, that's what I need to cultivate, that resonates with me, that would be fantastic to have more of that in my life?

RECITATION?