

## **Title: Raised**

### **Text: Colossians 2:6-15**

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#### **Introduction**

What just happened here? What is it that happens in baptism? Why is baptism important?

We are only going to consider one aspect of baptism this evening...

We are going to look at Colossians 2 this evening, but before we do, we are going to consider an Old Testament passage in Deuteronomy... you don't have to turn to Deuteronomy 30.

### **Old Testament background for Colossians 2**

The children of Israel have been wandering in the desert for 40 years. They have been a disobedient bunch. 40 years ago, they had been on the brink of Canaan and blew it all away at Kadesh Barnea. All but 3 are left, and only 2 of the 3 will be crossing the Jordan. Having learned some of the lessons that their parents and grandparents failed to learn, this generation is not about to pull another Kadesh Barnea. They will cross the Jordan, they will go in, they will take Jericho, and they will conquer the land... kind of.

Israel's obedience was always "kind of". It was always incomplete. In fact, that's a bit generous. Throughout their history, they were mostly disobedient. The Egyptian chariots hadn't quite reached the bottom of the Red Sea, and Israel was dedicating a very Egyptian-like golden calf. No sooner had the Covenant been ratified at Sinai, and God's finger had etched the stone tablets, and they were breaking the covenant in debauchery and idolatry. Kadesh Barnea was the "not too surprising" end of that generation. But even though this new generation was about to enter the land, God knows their hearts. They may display some faith here and there, but ultimately, they are just like dad and grandpa... they are going to disobey on a grand scale. And God's going to send the Assyrians and Babylonians in judgment.

Just outside of Canaan, getting ready to cross the Jordan and greet Jericho, Moses gives final instructions to the Israelites. In Deuteronomy 29, God (through Moses) tells his people that eventually they will disobey and the covenant curses are going to rain down from heaven and they will lose it all. There will come a day when God no longer will put up with their disobedience and they will be carted out of the land, most of Israel never to return. But in this midst of this word of judgment, there is grace. In Deuteronomy 30, God says there will be day when he will bring a permanent resolution to Israel's sin problem.

Deuteronomy 30 is one of the first clear mentions of the New Covenant age. Much of this language is picked up later by the prophets in describing what the New Covenant age will look like. God tells Israel in Deuteronomy 30 that someday they will disobey, God will judge them and scatter them, and someday he will gather them again. And in the midst of the promises of a new beginning, he says this: "the LORD your God...will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers. <sup>6</sup> And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live... you shall again obey the voice of the LORD and keep all his commandments that I command you today."

It's interesting in the midst of this promise of the New Day that will come, that God brings up circumcision. Circumcision began with Abraham. It was what set Israel apart from other nations. It also reminded them of their covenant cut and ratified in blood with the death of an animal. Circumcision, as a reminder of holiness and salvation and forgiveness in the covenant, was supposed to be an external sign of an inward reality. But for Israel, the inward reality too often was lacking. Their disobedience inwardly did not match the outward sign of consecration and salvation, which were supposed to be inward realities. The prophets charged Israel with having "uncircumcised hearts", hearts that would not believe and obey.

And so God tells this generation about to go into the Promised Land, the problem with you right now Israel, is that you have disobedient and unbelieving hearts. Someday, I'm going to circumcise your hearts; I'm going to cut away and cleanse your hearts so that you will always love me and always obey me, and never lose your inheritance...ever. A big part of the New Covenant promises in the Old Testament is that God's people would get a new heart and a new life, a life marked by love for God... and interestingly enough, God's delight in his people (Deut. 30:9). This New Covenant will be marked by a new people with a new heart and a new life to love God with all the heart and soul.

Israel hears this promise of a New Covenant coming... and they did enter the land, and they did disobey, and they did lose their land, and they struggled to obey... because they had disobedient hearts.

## Colossians 2 context

And that brings us to our text this evening. Colossians 2, beginning with verse 6:

**6 As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, 7 rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.**

**8 See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.**

There are two commands here... based on one reality... 1. walk in Christ. 2. See to it no one takes you captive. Interestingly, these commands flow out of what has already happened to us in Jesus: our reception of Jesus. How is it that this church at Colossae "received Christ Jesus"? That's found at the end of verse 5: faith in Jesus. We receive Jesus in faith. We live for Jesus in faith. Our transformation into being "mature in Christ" happens in the same way we came to know Jesus: through faith.

That faith results in action. Notice these two commands in verse 6 and 8. These are positive and negative. 1. Walk. 2. See to it no one takes you captive. These two commands are the results of being "in Christ" (Colossians 1:15-20), and are part of what it looks like to "be made mature in Christ" (Colossians 1:28).

And there are four characteristics of the walk: Rooted, built up, established, and abounding in thanksgiving; all of this employs the image of a tree. Paul has already told the church that they have been united to Christ. Here he is saying they need to "walk" or "live their lives in action" in a way that reflects their union with Christ. If you have a saving relationship with Jesus your actions should look like it.

This provides the context for our passage. As you received Christ Jesus the Lord (by faith alone in Christ alone), live every day of your life the same way (by faith alone in Christ alone). As O'Brien says, behaving must follow believing.

The reason we are to "walk" and "see to that no one holds us captive" in faith is unpacked for us in the rest of this section. Notice the word "for". Any time you see that word "for" it means it's giving us the reason for what the author has said:

9 For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, 10 and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.

Why should or must our lives look like we belong to Jesus? That answer involves baptism, which we will get to in a moment. Verses 9 and 10 says we are to walk "in Christ", because it is "in Christ" all of God's fullness dwells in bodily form, and we have everything we need in King Jesus. We are to live all of our lives every day in the gospel because we are united to King Jesus who is everything we will ever need, especially when the enticing enchantments that the world have to offer come calling.

### **Baptism: a death and resurrection "in Christ"**

But that's not all. Our lives should reflect that we belong to Jesus because of our inward baptism, which is reflected or proclaimed in our outward baptism.

11 In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.

There it is. Remember the promises to the new generation of Israelites that were ready to enter Canaan way back when? That new day that was coming in which God was going to fix the problem of Israel's disobedience has arrived. That day that was promised way back in Deuteronomy before Canaan was ever Israel's, before the Jordan had been crossed and Jericho had been conquered... that day is \*now\*.

In Christ you have been "circumcised" with a circumcision made without hands. No longer are we set apart based on the physical act of circumcision. Instead, we have been given circumcised hearts... a "circumcision made without hands", just as God had promised in the Old Testament to his people. That's happening now. Life in the New Covenant is characterized by having new hearts that love and obey Jesus.

We have new, circumcised hearts that believe and obey because Christ himself became our circumcision. Christ's death became our death. Death to an old way of living. Death to sin that once dominated us. And this death is pictured in our baptism.

Christ was circumcised in his death... and we, as a result, have been given circumcised, cleansed, clean, obedient and believing hearts.

How is it then, that we were given believing and obedient hearts, and now can live believing, obedient lives? Christ died for us. And we participated in that death. We were united to Christ in his death. We don't understand how all of this works. Someday we will know more. But when Jesus died on that cross, I was participating in that death with Jesus. When Christ died, I

died. The dominion sin had over me died. Verse 12... having been buried with him in baptism... so when Christ was circumcised, Christ was killing the old, disobedient heart. That heart died. My baptism signifies that that has happened to me, and by extension to us. My baptism is a picture of Christ's death... what Christ did for me on the cross... dying the death I should have died. That should have been me. Instead, Christ took my sin and my guilt and I died in him. The "old me", the one that was disobedient and unbelieving, died.

The rest of verse 12... **in which you were raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God who raised him from the dead.** What we have seen in baptism tonight is a death and resurrection. In baptism we see Christ dying and rising for the recipient of baptism. This is what has been done to this individual. Christ has died and Christ rose. In Christ's death, the old, rebellious antagonist against Jesus dies, and in Christ's resurrection new life is given to the sinner.

When Christ died, I died. When Christ arose, I arose. That's baptism. Baptism is a visible picture, a symbol of what has happened on the inside. In Christ's resurrection, we are given new life. Our faith is the channel or vehicle for the resurrection to be applied to us. Christ through his Spirit gives us life and we respond in faith. Just like Christ was raised from the dead, so too we have been raised from the dead. I have been made alive "in Christ". He rose on my behalf.

Verse 13: **And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him.**

We have been made alive. We once were dead in our sins and Christ's death and resurrection has made us alive. This baptism tells me that my old man is dead and I have new life in Christ. We have new hearts that believe and obey. The church's new heart is characteristic of the New Covenant age in which we enjoy the benefits of Christ's blessings.

Baptism, then, is identifying with Christ's death and resurrection. This baptism that we have witnessed this evening is a proclamation of the gospel. This is a confession of Christ's death and resurrection on behalf of the one who is being baptized. This is a proclamation that this is what Jesus has done for me. He has died and rose on my behalf.

And because this baptism proclaims the gospel of Jesus in his death and resurrection, in this baptism, the recipient becomes identified with Christ's death and resurrection. This baptism is our identity. This is who we are. We are Christians. This is what Christ has done for us and to us. He removed our sin. He made us alive. And somehow, some way, Christ has ordained that this baptism is our participation in his death and resurrection. We own Christ's death and resurrection as our own. We were "in Christ" when he died and rose participating with him in that event. In baptism, we have been given our identity in the Person and Work of Jesus. We are now free to live out that identity with believing and obeying hearts that love Jesus with everything in us. This baptism is what Jesus has done; this baptism is who we are.

## **What does this mean for us this evening?**

**Cherish the gospel.** Believe the gospel again... for the first time. See Jesus proclaimed in the death and burial of the baptism. This baptism is the gospel in picture form. Treasure Christ and what he has done for you and to you. Orient your eyes of faith to the heavens where Christ is seated and receive his life-sustaining grace in what has been proclaimed here.

**Live out the gospel.** Because our old man died and we have been made alive in Christ's resurrection, we are resurrection people. As we grow to be more like Jesus, our lives should be characterized by resurrected living. If we were to follow Colossians 2 into Colossians 3, we are to put off the old man that died with Christ, and we are to put on the new man who rose with Christ. We've died to sin. We have new life in Christ with new hearts that love and obey Jesus. Our lives should reflect our death to ourselves, and should reflect the pursuit of a passion for Jesus in all area of our lives. In a broken and a world marked with all of the characteristics of "death" in sin, our resurrected lives in Christ should be transforming relationships and conversations and situations as a poignant contrast. Death to self and alive to Christ is the rhyhm of a cross centered life marked by love for and obedience to King Jesus.

**Remember your baptism.** Even as it proclaims the gospel to us and declares what has been done for us and to us in Christ, baptism also marks our identity in Christ. There will be times when our lives will not look much like the new man Christ has made us. Baptism is a reminder of who we are and what has been done for us and to us in Christ. This is our identity. In those times of personal (or even corporate crisis), come back to this baptistry. When you are tempted to disobey or you do disobey or you are unbelieving, remember your baptism. Remember whose you are. Remember your identity. Allow these baptisms tonight to proclaim to you the gospel all over again. Feed on Jesus as he is proclaimed in this word picture. And begin again the put off and put on that is the mark of one who has been baptized into Christ.

**Desire baptism.** Some of you have yet to find your identity in Christ. Some of you have yet to allow Jesus to mark you off as your own in baptism. Some of you have made private professions of faith. But you are not Christians. We lived in an evangelicalism that has blurred the distinction between being "saved" and being a "Christian." We live in an evangelicalism today where it is popular and even OK to call oneself a Christian and yet not be baptized. This is actually a relatively new development in Christian history.

You do not have the right to call yourself a Christian. You may be inwardly have faith in Christ alone for your salvation. If you died right now, you'd be with Jesus. But you cannot call yourself a Christian. A Christian is not someone who has said the sinner's prayer or stated privately that they have faith in Christ. In the Scriptures, there's no such thing as a profession of faith outside of baptism. If you have not been baptized you do not belong to the visible and identifiable body of Christ... you have not appropriated the visible expression of being united to Christ's death and resurrection. In fact, we as a church, have no reason to believe in the genuiness of your private confession outside of a public declaration of your faith in baptism.

**Embrace Jesus and the baptism's gospel.** And there are others of you here this evening who have not embraced King Jesus. Some of you need to, as Peter says in Acts, "repent and be baptized". What we have proclaimed in baptism this evening is foreign to you. If you died tonight, you would not be with Jesus. You do not love Jesus. You do not obey Jesus. He's simply not important to you. You are pursuing your identity in other things. You are pursuing your happiness and contentment in other things. Yet you know there's more to life than this. You know that that girl or that guy or that dream job or that chemical high cannot satisfy. Yet you pursue it anyway.

You need to embrace Jesus. What you've seen tonight in baptism is the only thing that will ever satisfy. The Christ of this baptism offers himself, in his life, his death, his resurrection. Make the Christ of this baptism your object of faith. Orient your eyes away from the temporary things that life has to offer that are so fleeting, and being trusting and loving and obeying Jesus for the

salvation of your soul. What you have witnessed tonight in baptism is the meaning of life. This is where you will find your identity. Repent of your sin. Respond in faith to Jesus. Come die with Christ in baptism. Come, be made alive with him. There is meaning, there is identity, there is new life, there is hope in the Christ of this baptism.

There is an interesting journal entry from September 1, 1812 that speaks to the nature of baptism. The wife of a Congregational Pastor wrote,

“I have been examining the subject of baptism for some time past, and, contrary to my prejudices and my wishes, am compelled to believe, that believers' baptism alone is found in Scripture. If ever I sought to know the truth; if ever I looked up to the Father of lights; if ever I gave up myself to the inspired word, I have done so during this investigation. And the result is, that, laying aside my former prejudices and systems, and fairly appealing to the Scriptures, I feel convinced that nothing really can be said in favour of infant baptism or sprinkling. We expect soon to be baptized. O may our hearts be prepared for that holy ordinance! and as we are baptized into a profession of Christ, may we put on Christ, and walk worthy of the high vocation wherewith we are called. But in consequence of our performance of this duty, we must make some very painful sacrifices. We must be separated from our dear missionary associates, and labour alone in some isolated spot. We must expect to be treated with contempt, and cast off by many of our American friends—forfeit the character we have in our support, wherever we are stationed.”<sup>1</sup>

5 days later, the mother of modern missions, Ann Hasseltine Judson and her husband, Adoniram, were baptized in Calcutta, India, by William Ward, an associate of William Carey. 14 years later, Ann Judson died at the age of 37 in Burma, having expended her life for the very gospel proclaimed in her baptism. She knew she was being baptized into a profession and confession of Christ, a profession and confession that cost her everything: her friends, her home church, her income, and eventually her life. Ann Judson found her identity and her meaning in the gospel of the Christ of her baptism. So much so, she was willing to sacrifice it all through the proclamation of baptism.

There is meaning, there is identity, there is new life, there is hope in the Christ of this baptism.

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<sup>1</sup> Ann Hasseltine Judson, Relayed by Donna Ascol, “Why I am a Baptist”, Founders Journal, Summer 2000