

Colossians: A Big Jesus for Life's Big Problems
Sermon 7: "Remember who you are"
October 21, 2018

Key Verses: Colossians 3.1-11

Key Words: Remember who you are, Identity, Image of God, Do as you please, Resident aliens, Sojourners, Citizenship, Dead to this world

Summary: When we become Jesus followers, we immediately become citizens of God's Kingdom, which makes us resident aliens here. Put off the old, and start living out what you are and will be. Remember who you really are, and what you really stand for.

Okay guys, here's the takeaway for this morning. Right here: "Remember who you are and what you stand for." Say it with me if you would ... If you google it, a lot of guys use that line. In fact here are a couple of pics I found.

- Any of you guys remember this scene from the Lion King? They got half of it.
- I kind of like this one better. It reminds me of Aslan.
- Quite a few people use the line for a tattoo. They'd better be all in!
- I liked this one (kitten). That's kind of the way a lot of people are!

But I stole the line from a colleague of mine at Kentucky Christian College – Dick Damron: a history teacher, a basketball coach, and a pastor. And this is what he'd tell his athletes, all the time. Todd Layne, our discipleship minister here at Capital City played for Dick, and he heard him say these words: "Remember who you are and what you stand for." Randy, my preaching partner, was on Dick's coaching staff, and then he took over when Dick stepped down. I was the soccer coach. We started telling our guys that too: "Remember who you are and what you stand for." And I would suggest that you guys might want to start using it too, because it is huge; and it pretty much summarizes the verses in Colossians we are going to unpack today.

We're about halfway through our study in this little letter written by the apostle Paul to these Jesus followers in Colossae. Remember, this same Paul used to hate Jesus and hate Jesus followers, but now he's about as passionate a Jesus follower as a man can be, and he's a coach – which is kind of what the apostles did; they were coaches. Now usually when Paul

wrote a letter, coaching a church, there is this shift. In the first part of the letter he'd talk "theology" – Who was God? Who was Jesus? What did he do for us? Isn't Jesus incredible! And then in the second part of the letter he'd start talking about what a difference all that should make in the way we live. He gets really practical. What difference does following Jesus make in the way you treat your wife, or raise your kids, or do your job, or treat your neighbors? It ought to change you!

And that's kind of where we are in our study of Colossians. Paul is making that turn. He's moving from the "what we believe" part, to the "what we do about it" part. What difference does it make? And in the first part of Colossians chapter 3 we're going to discover two ideas. The big one is this: "Remember who you are ... and what you stand for." Because if you are a Jesus follower, who you are now is not who you were. So don't act like who you were, live out who you really are. You are different now; who you are, your identity, is fundamentally different now ... so start being who you really are! That's big idea #1.

For the second idea we have to dig a little. And I think it was captured by an old dead guy by the name of Augustine, about 1600 years ago. Augustine said, just "Love God, and do as you please." Love God, and do what you want. You see, following Jesus is not about a bunch of rules, a bunch of dos and don'ts. Just love and honor God, and love and honor those he loves. And you'll do fine. Now we're going to look at a couple of "sin lists," some things we are not supposed to do as Jesus followers. But it's not about "rules." It really comes down to this: We may be living here on earth temporarily, but we are citizens of heaven ... so live like it. Just start treating each other the way you're going to be treating each other in heaven. Just love and honor God – that's what we'll be doing in heaven; and love and honor those God loves – because we'll be doing that in heaven too. Those are the ideas I'm going to try to unpack in the next 25 minutes or so.

So, let's start here. Listen guys: We humans are different. I know that that's contested today. There are those who will tell you that you are just an animal, maybe a little more evolved than the other animals, but really you're just an animal; no better, no more entitled. But God says we are different. Of all the creatures on earth we are the only ones capable of interacting with the spiritual world. I've never seen a dog pray; I've never

seen a cat raise its paws in worship. But all of you guys can. All of you have experienced the spiritual world. You have felt its presence, it's nudges. That's part of what it means to have been created in the image of God. We can sense that there are spiritual forces aligned with God; and that there are spiritual forces that line up against him; and they both tug on us. Every one of us stands with one foot in this world – in the physical world, and the other foot in the spiritual world. Every one of us senses that there's more than what we can see with our eyes, or touch with our hands.

But it goes even further than that. God has planted a sense of eternity in your soul. We believe that this world is very temporary. For us the average lifespan is about 80 years. But we don't think that's the end ... of us. Our physical bodies are going to die, but that's not the end. We believe in a heaven, and a hell. Do you? Do you really?

But here's where it gets interesting. It's not just about what happens after we die. Jesus made it possible for us to start living in the Kingdom of God right now. Right now! You can stand, right now, with one foot in the Kingdom of this world, and the other foot in the Kingdom of God. And you can choose – right now -- which Kingdom will define you. ... I'm a Kentuckian, now ... didn't used to be. I'm an American, always have been. But way more than either of those, I am a citizen of the Kingdom of God – right now! And that's way bigger than my status as a Kentuckian, or an American. It's way bigger! In fact, if you read the guys who wrote the New Testament, they call us – us Jesus followers – they call us “resident aliens” – we are the real resident aliens, we Jesus followers who live here, on earth. I'm an American, I'm a Kentuckian (Kind of) -- but our citizenship is in God's Kingdom. That's way bigger to us. The guys who wrote the New Testament call us sojourners – we're just passing through this world; it is temporary; this is not our home. They call us “exiles” – right now I live over on Shadrick Ferry, but some day I'll go home. Do you believe that? It's kind of hard to really believe that, isn't it?

There was a little letter written by a Jesus follower in Rome right after the apostles had died. His name was Clement. Clement writes a letter to some Jesus followers in Corinth. Here's how he opens the letter. He says: “The church of God residing as aliens in Rome to the church of God residing as aliens in Corinth.” If Clement addressed a letter to us he'd say, “To the church of God – to you Jesus followers – residing as aliens in

Franklin County, Kentucky.” We live here, but it’s not our home. We’re just passing through.

It’s kind of like when my son Andy was in Iraq. He was a soldier, and he was in Iraq during the war. He lived there for a year. Iraq was not his home, but he lived there for a year. Andy was very conscious of the fact that he was an outsider. In fact a lot of the people there wanted to kill him! He was an outsider. Their clothes weren’t his clothes, their food wasn’t his food, their language wasn’t his language, their religion, and their values ... they were not his. We’d send him those crazy little packages to remind him of home, full of all kinds of weird stuff – to remind him that we were thinking of him; and to remind him ... who he really was, and what he was standing for.

Have you ever been in a place where you knew -- you just knew – you were an outsider? Julie and I moved from Eugene, Oregon to Jenkins, Kentucky. Ever heard of Jenkins, Kentucky? Basically, you drive southeast till you was lost, and turn left. We weren’t even sure they spoke the same language sometimes! We were outsiders. Have you ever been able to travel to a different land, a different culture? You know what it feels like to be different. In fact, if you are old enough, then you know that you can feel like an outsider even in places where you used to belong. Sometimes we older guys start feeling like outsiders because our world keeps changing. And sometimes we start feeling like outsiders because we are the ones who are changing. ... Well we are ... Jesus followers, resident aliens, sojourners, exiles temporarily living in what is not really our home!

Here it is: Colossians 3.1-4. Paul says: “Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, (since you have changed, since you have radically changed) set your sights on the realities of heaven, (which is your real home now) where Christ sits in the place of honor at God’s right hand. Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth. (Remember who you are now, and what you stand for now.) For you died to this life, (that was the old you, that’s not who you are now) and your real life is hidden with Christ in God. And when Christ, who is your (real) life (now), (when he) is revealed to the whole world (when he comes back), you will share in all his glory.”

You see, there it is: before Jesus, this was our home. This is who we were and what we stood for. Before Jesus, we gained our identity and our value system from our world. But when we became Jesus followers, here's what happened ... "Since you have been raised to new life with Christ" ... "Since you have already been raised to new life with Christ." Read it carefully. It doesn't say, "Since you will be raised someday to new life with Christ, when you get to heaven, maybe." It says, "Since you have already been raised to a new life with Christ" ... If you are a Jesus follower, it has already happened, it defines you now.

And because you are different now ... act like it! That's the way the Message puts it. It's pretty good. "If you are serious about living this new resurrection life with Christ, act like it!" Just do it! "Set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits (right now) in the place of honor at God's right hand." He says, "Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth." (v 2) The NIV says: "Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things." Now I know that sounds kind of weird. It kind of sounds like he's telling us to go around with our heads in the clouds. But he's not! He's saying, "Never forget who you really are and what you stand for! "Set your minds" he says: that takes focus, that takes effort. Because it's easy to get so wrapped up in the stuff of this world, that we forget that we are really resident aliens, that we are not really citizens of this world.

He says, verse 3, "For you died to this life," if you are in Christ you have already died to this life. I love that language. How many of you guys like "Shark Tank." Great show! Kevin O'Leary, "Mr. Wonderful" (that's what he likes to call himself, which is pretty much the opposite of who he really is). If someone doesn't listen to him, he'll tell them, "They'll crush you like the cockroaches you are." And when he is done with someone he says, "You're dead to me. You're dead to me, I'm out." You're dead to me! Guys, that's pretty much true of us. If you were raised with Christ, you are dead to this world. You died to this life. It is not who you are any more.

I love this picture. It's actually a picture of a statue sculpted by a guy named Dean Kermit Allison. It's called "Born Again." I have a poster of this on my wall; my daughter gave it to me. It's a reminder: This is a snapshot of what is happening to me right now. If you are a Jesus follower, this is a snapshot of what is happening to you, right now. And someday that job'll get done!

Paul goes on; he says, verse 4: “When Christ, who is your life (right now) ... When Christ is revealed to the whole world (and someday he will be, it’s going to happen, he’s coming back) ... When Christ is revealed to the whole world you (Jesus followers) will share in all his glory.” Then we’re really going to look something like that ... metaphorically. ... Is that cool ... for you?

Now I know this is kind of weird stuff, especially if you haven’t been around Jesus followers all that much. This whole idea of a physical world and a spiritual world. For some of you the whole idea of life after death, eternal life for some, eternal death for others. I means, the whole idea that Jesus was dead for 3 days, then he walked out of his tomb. And after proving that he was really alive for 40 days, he went back to heaven where he sits right now at the right hand of God. And if we accept him as our Savior, and make him our Lord, we die to this world, and we immediately become citizens of the Kingdom of God. And that changes things: When we remember who we really are and what we really stand for. But guys, for us this is so. And this is deadly serious; this is life altering serious.

The Kingdom of God already is, and if you are a Jesus follower you’re part of it. But you ain’t seen nothing yet! He’s coming back. And when he comes back everything changes, once and for all. He’s going to win. Do you remember the words of the Lord’s Prayer? “Thy Kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth, as it already is in heaven.” “May thy Kingdom finish coming on earth as it already is in heaven.” When we pray that we mean it!

And this is how it’s going to be in God’s kingdom:

- In God’s Kingdom we Jesus followers are actually going to love each other. As crazy as that sounds, we really will! It’s going to happen. So do it now!
- In God’s Kingdom all sins will be forgiven, and we will embrace God’s forgiveness: there will no guilt, no shame. We’re not going to be carrying around any anger, or bitterness, or grudges. Can you imagine that?! So start living that way now! We have already died to this world.
- In God’s Kingdom there will be justice, perfect justice. Won’t that be cool?! So live that way now!

- In God's Kingdom human life will be valued, and we will treat people with the dignity they deserve as children of God. What a different that will make! So start doing it now! It's who we already are, and what we already stand for.
- And guys, In God's Kingdom God will be honored. So do it now! You are already a citizen of the Kingdom of God. And your God deserves your honor.

You see, we are supposed to do life in this world in a way that reflects who we really are, and who we will be in the next. When Jesus comes back he will finish transforming every Jesus follower. You will finally be as you were meant to be. You will do life as God meant it to be lived. You will finally be ... really you. And you will be amazing!

- You may still be quirky. God seems to love diversity.
- But you will be healed of all your hurts. Do you think that will change how you treat people?
- You will be reconciled to every other Jesus follower – all those church people who annoy you so much right now... because we will all be as God meant us to be. And that will be so cool!
- There will be no more sin; no more shame. Won't that be a relief!
- There will be no more suffering; no more pain. Won't that be amazing?
- And we will live with a profound awe at who God is; and a profound gratitude for what he has done, and what he made us to be.

Maybe some of you are thinking, "If that's how my husband is going to be then – perfect -- I wish he would be more like that now; it would make living with him a whole lot easier!" And he's probably thinking the same thing about you. Maybe you're thinking, "I wish some of my so-called friends were a little more transformed now" – they can be really annoying and hurtful! And they probably think the same thing about you. But it's going to be a while, guys. (Poster) We have already died to this world, but it takes a lifetime of serious Jesus following to peel this stuff off. And we won't be done until he finishes the job when we meet him face to face. But we can be working on it!

Here's the key, here it is: "Set your sights on the realities of heaven," Think about the things of heaven not the things of earth." "Remember who you

really are and what you stand for.” Because if you can keep that focus, it will change the way you do life right here, right now.

Which is where the apostle Paul goes next. Verse 5: “So (therefore; since you are already dead to this world, and since you are already a citizen of God’s kingdom), put to death the sinful, earthly things (still) lurking within you.” Peel that stuff off, guys! It’s messing you up; it’s holding you back. It’s not who you are any more. So, kill it! He doesn’t say control it, or repress it, or stifle it. He says, “Kill it!” Kill things like ...

- “Sexual immorality.” In Greek the word is “porneia.” That’s where we get the words “porn,” and “pornography,” and “pornographic.” It meant any kind of unlawful intercourse; sex outside of God’s design. Kill it, he says, or it will kill you. Eventually it will kill your relationships, it will kill your joy, it will kill your intimacy with God, and it may even kill your life with God.
- And the “Impurity,” all of us fight with. Which means any kind of immoral sexual conduct: porn, sexting. Kill it; or it will kill you!
- And your lust. You see in this world, they tell us to follow our feelings. “But you’ve got to follow your heart, right?” “I can’t help it, I love him, right?” And God says ... no, no, no! “If you were a dog you’d have to follow your heart; if you were a cat you probably can’t help it ... you’re just a dork!” But you are different! You were created in the image of God. You can say no to your feelings! They are powerful, they are strong ... but they can get all twisted up. If they are pulling you away from God, kill them!

Last week we talked about two things our enemies uses to pull us away from God – our lusts and our likes. Remember that stuff? He says, “Put to death ... things like sexual immorality, and impurity, and lust, and evil desires.” Then he goes after another big one. He says, “Don’t be greedy, for a greedy person is an idolater, worshiping the things of this world.” (5) Guys, we are not going to be greedy in heaven. We’re not going to be jealous of what others have. We’re not going to battle this insatiable discontent. We are not going to go around comparing what we have to those who have less, or those who have more. We are not going to value stuff more than we value people ... or God. So ... because you already citizens of the Kingdom of God, change now! And if you feel that stuff welling up inside you, kill it ... before it kills you.

Because ... verse 6 ... “Because of these sins, the anger of God is coming.” This stuff is already messing up your life. This stuff is already driving a wedge between you and the people you are supposed to love. This stuff is already corrupting the intimacy you really do want with God. But someday Jesus is coming back, and he will make all things right. So don't get caught up in this junk, don't let it drag you down ... it's not worth it.

Almost done; just a couple more pieces. Verse 7: Paul keeps pounding. He says, “You (guys) used to do these things when your life was still part of this world. (But that's not who you are now.) But now is the time (already, while you still have one foot planted in this world; now is the time) to get rid of anger, rage, malicious behavior, slander, and dirty language. (And) Don't lie to each other.

Guys I know that this sounds like a bunch of rules. It's not. Listen, this is just what it looks like when you love and honor God and then do what you want. This is what it looks like when you actually love and honor people, like he does. This is what it will look like in God's Kingdom when Jesus comes back.

- You're not going to go around frustrated and grumpy, and agitated. That's what anger does.
- You're not going to explode, and rage when your anger gets out of control. That's what wrath does.
- You are not going to think about ways to make life hard for each other, or ways to hurt each other. That's what malice does.
- You are not going to gossip, or wound each other with hurtful words. That's what slander does.
- You're not going to have a foul mouth, or a dirty mouth.
- And you're not going to lie. You won't make stuff up, you won't re-write the past.

Do you know why? It's not because God is an old prude, trying to make stuff up to make your life hard. It's not because God is trying to hold out on you, trying to steal the joy out of life. It's because he doesn't want us to settle.

- Just love and honor God ... and this stuff will sort itself out.
- Just love and honor the people God loves ... and this stuff will sort itself out.

- If I love her, I'm not going to hurt her, and I'm not going to pull her away from her family, or her God.
- If I love her. I'm not going to use her, or abuse her for my gain.
- If I love him, and honor him, I'm not going to lie to him, or cheat him, or undermine him, or badmouth him.

We're not going to do that stuff in heaven ... so start living the Kingdom life now! That's who you are, and what you stand for. And that's what will draw those who are watching us to the life they were made for. Which is ... our mission from God.

Paul says, Do this stuff because "you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. (So) Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him." Remember who you are now, and what you stand for. Live it out, he says.

And when that happens I love how he wraps it up. He says, When that happens, "In this new life, it doesn't matter if you are a Jew or a Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbaric, uncivilized, slave, or free. Christ is all that matters – Christ is all that matters -- and he lives in all of us – all of us." (11) Let's pull that into our context. When that happens, he says, it doesn't matter if you are black or white or some color in between, it doesn't matter if you are rich or poor, if you are republican or democrat, if you are a millennial, or a gen-exer, or a boomer, or a builder; it doesn't matter if you are white collar or redneck, a Cat or a Cardinal, County or Hills or whatever. If you are in Christ, you're family. And we want to love and honor each other today the way we will love and honor each other then. Because we want to love and honor our God ... more than life itself.

In a moment we are going to sing a song together. Here's what it says:

Who am I that the highest King would welcome me
 I was lost but He brought me in, Oh His love for me
 Who the Son sets free, Oh is free indeed
 I'm a child of God ...Yes I am

Remember who you are, and what you stand for

It says,

I am chosen not forsaken
I am who You say I am
You are for me not against me
I am who You say I am ... that's my reality!

Guys, let's sing it like we own it.

And then let's gather around the table as a family, committed to treating each other right now as we will be treating each other in heaven.