

Become a Christ-Centered Christian: Preaching from Colossians

Refuse Religious Distractions: Don't Focus on Shadows

Thank you for your prayers during my visit to New Orleans on the 20 th anniversary of Hurricane Katrina's landfall. Coming up: September 14: Set Your Heart on Things Above; Col. 2:20-3:4. Then a four-part series:

*****THE POWER OF YOUR HIDDEN LIFE (4 Message)**

Journaling this week: Make a list of traditions, celebrations, rules, and rituals. Center yourself in Christ alone.

Col. 2:16-19: 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. 17 These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ. 18 Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. 19 He has lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.

Intro: The moon will pass through the umbra, or the inner part of Earth's shadow tonight creating a total lunar eclipse (blood moon eclipse).

I. THESE ARE SHADOWS: These are a shadow of the things that were to come (Colossians 2:17)

***We lived for 14 years only a few steps from the levee on Lake Pontchartrain. One evening at sunset, while walking on the levee, I stopped to measure my shadow. It was twenty feet long at 6:00. At 6:45 it was 60 feet long. Your shadow often gets there before you do. Imagine at the dawn of creation, Jesus standing on the perimeter of the universe with a bright light casting its shadow through the galaxies and over our world. His shadow arrived on this planet before he did. But now he has come, and it is not a time to keep examining his shadow.

*** We were stopped by the pants police.

On the 11th hole, driving along the cart path, an older gentleman blocked our way with his cart and ordered us off the golf course.

A member had complained, he said, and there was nothing he could do but insist that we change our pants. Regulations at the club clearly stipulated that blue jeans were not allowed.

We did not know about this requirement, we pled. We thought about it but decided not to tell him we were from New Orleans where we lost our golf clothes in the flood. Some things are important. So we turned our carts around, went back to the clubhouse, and purchased qualifying khaki pants.

I actually chose khaki shorts and put my winter-white legs on display despite misgivings from the church staff.

Humans make all kinds of rules, especially when it comes to religion. Religious regulations run the gamut from what you can eat to what you can wear to who you can see to where you can go to when and where you can do what, wearing what and with whom.

The early followers of Jesus were bombarded with rules from their Jewish friends. Some Jews who were converted wanted all Christians to keep the Old Testament regulations. Some Gentiles who became Christians thought that they were practicing some important observances and rituals that should be incorporated into the lives of all Christians.

A. What you can eat or drink. This is a very popular religious regulation. The OT is full of rules about eating and drinking. They had lived so long with those rules that leaving them behind seemed impossible to them. Surely, the Jewish Christians thought, God gave us those dietary laws and we must continue to obey them.

B. Special feasts and Celebrations are part of the Old Covenant as well. They were like anchors in their year, and they were delightful breaks from the routines of life. The feast of Pentecost, the Passover, the Feast of Booths, setting up tents like they were traveling through the wilderness again.

***The Lunar Eclipse will begin at 9 pm tonight and may be visible in our region in a limited way.

C. The Jewish Christians could have simply continued to keep these religious and cultural events. But they thought so much of them that they wanted to impose them on the Gentiles. All Christians, they said, should keep these special days.

D. The Gentile Christians were raised with religious festivals as well, celebrations for the New Moon, etc.

***The Apostle Paul is criticized for what he says here. Some people reject the inspiration of his words. They insist that the Old Testament laws came from God and should be obeyed. Paul was the Apostle to the Gentiles. He is preaching and teaching the good news about Jesus in a very different world than the Jewish synagogues embrace. He wrote the letter to the Christians at Colosse to tell them, in no uncertain terms, that Jesus Christ himself was the beginning and end of the Christian faith, and everything in between.

Does that sound like heresy to you?

Jesus was the fullness of God for personal salvation and for religious practice.

He insisted then, and we must insist now, that no religious regulations or rituals be added to the gospel of faith in Christ.

Shadows can be intriguing. You can drive a cat crazy by flitting a shadow around on the wall in front of them. They just keep trying to catch that shadow. But in the end, a shadow is only an outline of your hand, not the hand itself.

The SHADOW OF A DOG cannot bite you. The shadow of a KNIFE cannot cut you. The shadow of a Gun cannot shoot you. The shadow of a car cannot crush you. The shadow is an INDICATOR OF A REALITY beyond itself.

II. THESE ARE LOST CONNECTIONS: Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. 19 He has lost connection with the Head (Colossians 2:18-29)

A. We are all mobile, just like our phones. We are going down the highway of life. We are developing new habits and positions. Each season of life requires some thoughtful contemplation about our connection to the Head, which is Christ.

***When I travel east, I prepare to lose my connection as I go down Center City Hill. There is nothing so frustrating as losing your connection in the middle of an important call. Sometimes I will stop the car at the top of that hill, make the call, hang up, and then proceed, even though I can talk hands-free. I do not want to ask, "Are you still there? Hello?"

B. If you are not careful you will lose connection with the head simply because you have moved out of range. You are between towers. God cannot speak to you because the line of sight is blocked. You cannot receive calls from him where you are.

C. **People make turns. They change directions.** They speed up and slow down. They get distracted in their journey. They fall asleep at the wheel.

D. People lose connection with the head. Then they lose their focus, they lose their purpose, and they lose their way. They get lost in a jumble of rituals and traditions.

E. "SUCH A PERSON", touting old regulations about diet and holy days, may sound spiritual to you. They are pleading for a faithfulness to the Old Testament regulations. They seem sincere. But they have LOST CONNECTION with Christ. Their rules and regulations MINIMIZE the person and work of Christ. They are going a different direction. ***We are contemplating a major overhaul of our first floor and the possible construction of a new building. I want us as a church—and individual church members—to guard against the creeping heresy that the church is constituted by its possessions, its buildings and furniture. Theoretically, we know this. But emotionally and spiritually, we sometimes get confused about it. The life and vitality of our church COMES ONLY FROM CHRIST.

III. CHRIST IS THE REALITY: He has lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow (Colossians 2:17)

A. Christ is the reality for you as a person. He is the HEAD. You are dead when you are BRAIN dead. And when you are disconnected from Christ, you have no life in you.

B. Christ is the reality for our church.

1. We are supported by Christ.
2. We are held together by Christ.
3. We do are growing because of Christ.

***This is an exciting time for us as a body of believers. People in the community ask me about what is happening at our church. Maybe you have had some of those conversations. We are considering some very significant things as a congregation. We need tools to help us do our work, including the buildings that we own and operate. These buildings are not the reality of our faith, but they are useful and important. And they are pointers, indicators of the reality which is Christ. Houses of worship announce the presence of the church of Jesus Christ in a community. And our buildings may be the most obvious such announcement in our community. We want these buildings to say, "The church of Jesus Christ is alive and well." "The church is about the future as well as the past."

We want them to say, "The gospel is for us, not just for our parents or grandparents." We need to update our main building. We need to replace the youth center across the street which is our primary fellowship building. And we need to do these things while remaining focused, not on the physical manifestations of our church, but on the One who alone is worthy, the Head of the church, which is Christ. We need to do these things in CONNECTION WITH THE HEAD, loving Christ and loving each other and loving our neighbors.

C. The Lord's Supper stresses the reality of Christ.

***Martin Luther spoke of the 'REAL PRESENCE' in these elements. Catholics speak of these elements BECOMING THE BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST. We understand these elements to be symbolic. But the point is—they are ELEMENTS. They are bread and juice. They will be ingested into our bodies. Our blood will carry these elements throughout our bodies. They will become the building blocks of muscles and sinews and ligaments. Christ is the ultimate reality. He is the ground, the foundation, of all existence. That is what Paul has been saying all along.

CONCLUSION: When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, he did not ride a white horse. He rode a donkey. He did not wear a royal robe; he wore the seamless robe of a peasant.

He did not hold the royal scepter in his hand or wear the royal signet ring. His hands were unadorned and empty. When Jesus was hailed as king that day, he had no throne on which to sit **nor any army to command**. He was in the lineage of David, the warrior king, but **he did not brandish a sword** or swing a battle ax or find pebbles for his slingshot or arrows for his bow.

If you look at the scene that day, you might conclude with the Pharisees that this was a silly and dangerous sham and that the praise should immediately be quelled, for Jesus of Nazareth, this penniless preacher, was certainly not a real king.

Jesus was not a paper king or a puppet king. He was not an imposter or a king impersonator. He was not an upstart or pretender. He was not a Mardi Gras king or a shadow king. He received the praise of the people that day because it was proper and right for them to praise him. It was his appointed moment of fame, **the day when he was recognized for who he truly was and really was—and will remain for all eternity**. So

when his enemies suggested that he quiet his disciples, Jesus replied, **"If they keep quiet, the very rocks will cry out!"** When you deal with Jesus, you deal with what's real. You are not playing shadow games anymore.

EVERYTHING eventually GOES IN THE LANDFILL.

Jesus said that our lives do not consist of the things which we possess. Our clothes, our cars, our houses—all destined for the dump, the junkyard, the landfill. Even our bodies are destined to be buried, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the single and solitary exception to this discouraging picture. Jesus went into the grave a dead man, and he came out of that grave as our Risen Savior and Lord who would never die again. Paul is concerned that somehow, he will attain the resurrection from the dead. He says this clearly in Philippians 3:10-11:

I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

DAILY JOURNAL PROMPTS

September 7- Where am I letting others' opinions define my faith more than Christ does?

September 8- Is there anything in my faith that I'm clinging to that isn't centered around Christ?

September 9- How can I shift my focus more fully onto Jesus?

September 10- Have I ever felt "disqualified" in my faith?

September 11- What helps me stay truly connected to Jesus?

September 12- Am I choosing spiritual "experiences", or staying rooted in Christ himself?

September 13- What's one area where I want to grow in Christ?