



Raised
with
Christ

*A Holy Week
Devotional by
Will Burrows*

IF THEN YOU HAVE BEEN
RAISED WITH CHRIST, SEEK
THE THINGS THAT ARE
ABOVE, WHERE CHRIST IS,
SEATED AT THE RIGHT HAND
OF GOD. SET YOUR MINDS ON
THINGS THAT ARE ABOVE,
NOT ON THINGS THAT ARE
ON EARTH. FOR YOU HAVE
DIED, AND YOUR LIFE IS
HIDDEN WITH CHRIST IN
GOD. WHEN CHRIST WHO IS
YOUR LIFE APPEARS, THEN
YOU ALSO WILL APPEAR
WITH HIM IN GLORY.

COLOSSIANS 3:1-4 ESV

HOW TO USE

Easter—Resurrection Sunday—is observed and celebrated by Christians around the world every year. Holy Week marks the seven days leading up to the apex of that celebration. This devotional was designed to help you meditate on the love God has shown you, revealed in the passion of Christ.

As I prayed about direction for this devotional, I kept coming back to the phrases “in Christ” and “with Christ.” Each day we will consider our union with Christ by looking at different “in Christ” or “with Christ” statements from the Scriptures and how we identify with Christ as the events of Holy Week unfold.

There is no set structure; some days include a suggested prayer, some include an excerpt from a song, and some include a recommended reading from Scripture. But my prayer is that each day of this devotional would point you to Jesus, leading your heart to stand in awe before your King and worship him joyfully.

INTRODUCTION

Dutch theologian and pastor Anthony Hoekema (1913-1988) once wrote, “Once you have your eyes opened to this concept of union with Christ, you will find it almost everywhere in the New Testament.”¹ The New Testament describes our union with Christ in two ways:

1. We are in Christ (John 15:4-5, 7; 1 Corinthians 5:17, 15:22; 2 Corinthians 12:2; Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 1:4, 2:10; Philippians 3:9; 1 Thessalonians 4:16; 1 John 4:13)
2. Christ is in us (Galatians 2:20, Colossians 1:27, Romans 8:10, 2 Corinthians 13:5, Ephesians 3:17)²

Union with Christ is a work of God that was planned by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in eternity past (Ephesians 1:3-4). Therefore, our union with Christ is **ROOTED** in God’s divine plan to save sinners. The **BASIS** of our union with Christ is Christ’s redemptive work for us, namely his death, burial, and resurrection. And finally, the **ACTUAL** union with Christ is established with us in time. In other words, though this plan was set in motion before time began, it became an actual reality within the framework of space and time. Jesus Christ—who existed in eternity past with the Father and Holy Spirit, unbound by space or time—entered our world as a man to make this glorious plan a reality.

The very God of the universe had to enter our broken world to accomplish this great plan. I know this is a lot to make sense of, but we’ll break it down into eight points, as outlined by Anthony Hoekema to help us understand that our salvation—from beginning to end—is in Christ. There may be some words you aren’t familiar with here, but don’t worry—we’ll explain them as they are covered over the next several days.

1. We are initially united to Christ in *regeneration* (Ephesians 2:4-5, 10).
2. We appropriate and continue to live out of this union through *faith* (Galatians 2:20, Ephesians 3:16-17).
3. We are *justified* in union with Christ (1 Corinthians 1:30, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Philippians 3:8-9).
4. We are *sanctified* through union with Christ (1 Corinthians 1:30, John 15:4-5, 2 Corinthians 5:17).
5. We *persevere* in the life of faith in union with Christ (John 10:27-29, Romans 8:38-39).
6. We are even said to *die* in Christ (Romans 14:8, 1 Thessalonians 4:16, Revelation 14:13).
7. We shall be *raised* with Christ (Colossians 3:1, 1 Corinthians 15:22).
8. We shall be eternally *glorified* with Christ (Colossians 3:4, 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

We will meditate on these eight points of our union with Christ this Holy Week. Sinclair Ferguson noted that “if we are united to Christ, then we are united to him in all points of his activity on our behalf.” In other words, we cannot be united to Christ in his resurrection if we are not united to Christ in his death. Sinclair Ferguson continued this thought by saying, “[Union with Christ] is rooted, not in humanity and their achievement of holiness or sanctification, but in what God has done in Christ, and for us in union with him.”³ This is a glorious thing! No amount of human striving could ever amount to a single moment of union with Christ, but God has—in Christ—done the work of reconciling us to himself, initiating this glorious union.

¹ Anthony Hoekema, *Saved by Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Edermans Publishing, 1989), 64

² Hoekema's quotes cited by Justin Taylor, “Union With Christ: A Crash Course,” *thegospelcoalition.com*, accessed February 20, 2021, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/union-with-christ-a-crash-course/>

³ Sinclair Ferguson, *Christian Spirituality: Five Views of Sanctification* (Downer's Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1989), 58

GLORIFIED WITH CHRIST

Day 1

READ MATTHEW 21:1-11

It may seem strange to begin a Holy Week devotional meditating on what it means to be glorified with Christ. I admit, matching these eight themes with the eight days of Holy Week was not an exact science. Yes, we will talk about being crucified with Christ on Good Friday and being raised with Christ on Easter Sunday, but some days may not seem so “positively providential,” as L. M. Montgomery’s Miss Stacy would say. I think that’s okay. Let’s meditate instead on our union with Christ, and learn of him as he is offered to us in the gospel.

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Today is Palm Sunday, when we remember Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem. To many of the Jews, this moment was their moment of glory; the long-awaited time had come. Jesus is now entering the city, and soon he will tear off his robe, revealing his armor and sword and lead them into a bloody, victorious overthrow of the Romans! But this was not at all what Jesus was preparing to do. In fact, he was preparing to do just the opposite. Rather than overthrowing the powers that be, he would offer his life up to them. God the Father, at this very moment, was setting the plan in motion to deliver Jesus up “according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God” to be “crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men” (Acts 2:23).

A few days later, during his longest recorded prayer in Scripture, Jesus prayed, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you....I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed” (John 17:1, 4-5). Towards the end of that prayer, Jesus prays this: “The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me” (John 17:22-23).¹

King Jesus does not wield his kingship for selfish gain or to protect himself from what is to come. He willingly lays down his life for his sheep. Why? He longs to glorify the Father. As he glorifies the Father, the Father glorifies him—and in turn, Jesus gives that glory to us! We share in his glory. Romans 8:29-30 says, “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.”

Jesus willingly gave himself for us, but he did not cease being our king in doing so. Three days after Jesus laid down his life, God raised him from

the dead into a glorified body which will never taste of death again. To be glorified is to be restored to perfection. If God had not raised Jesus from the dead, his body would have decomposed just as any other human body would have. Jesus subjected himself to a literal human body, capable of being wounded and killed. But God raised Jesus into a body which would never be wounded or killed again. Perfect restoration. And those who are in Christ have been glorified in him.

It is true that we dwell in earthen vessels (2 Corinthians 4:7), that is, in bodies of flesh. But our glorification is secured in Christ's glorification—it is as good as done! Just as Christ lives to never die again, so shall we. We will one day be glorified, our bodies being fully restored to their rightful place in God's new heaven and new earth, where there is no pain, no tears, and no death.

Some call Romans 8:29-30 the “golden chain of salvation” because each link in the chain cannot be broken from the rest. Those who are foreknown will be predestined. Those who are predestined will be called. Those who are called will be justified. And those who are justified will be glorified. In other words, God's holy work of salvation cannot not be interrupted or thwarted. When God begins the work of salvation, rest assured it will be carried out to completion. Paul says in Philippians 1:6, “I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.” The chain cannot be broken. King Jesus cannot be dethroned. His glory cannot be diminished. We will be glorified in Christ and share in his rule and reign.

This Palm Sunday, rejoice in Jesus as your King and joyfully anticipate that wonderful day when Jesus will “transform [your] lowly body to be like his glorious body” (Philippians 3:21), and “so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:17). The chronic pain which seems to plague your every waking moment, the addiction you can't seem to break free from, the anxiety that keeps you awake all night—it will all be made right. To be glorified is to be free from every stain and curse of sin. Not a trace will remain!

PRAYER

Jesus, there's no one like you. You—the only King who can make every other king bow down in awe and reverence before your throne—became like us to redeem us and reconcile us back to the Father. You glorified the Father in everything you did, and he glorified you. Jesus, I worship you as my King, and I long for the day I will stand in your presence, glorified. Now, I see through a glass dimly; but then, I will see you face to face. What a day that will be! Until then, hold me fast. Remind me daily that I am not my own, but belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to you, my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.²

¹ This prayer is known as the “High Priestly Prayer,” and it takes up the entire chapter of John 17.

² Heidelberg Catechism, Question 1. Translation © 2011, Faith Alive Christian Resources, Christian Reformed Church in North America.

JESUS WILLINGLY
GAVE HIMSELF FOR
US, BUT HE DID NOT
CEASE BEING OUR
KING IN DOING SO.

MADE ALIVE WITH CHRIST

Day 2

READ EPHESIANS 2:1-10

It's hard to meditate on the events of Holy Week without considering exactly what Christ accomplished for us, namely our salvation. In its broadest sense, a biblical understanding of salvation includes regeneration, justification, sanctification, and glorification. (You can probably see some of that “golden chain” of the finished work of Christ I mentioned yesterday from Romans 8). Today, let's consider regeneration, or what it means to be “made alive with Christ.”

Good Friday is only a few days away. As we follow the narrative of Holy Week in the Scriptures, Jesus is preparing to lay down his life for his sheep. But he does not give himself to simply be a symbol of God's love. He is actually accomplishing the will of the Father in what the great reformer Martin Luther (1483-1546) called the “wonderful exchange”: our sin is laid on Christ, the perfect Lamb of God, and his righteousness is applied to us. The godly dies in the place of the ungodly; the righteous in the place of the sinner. And in laying down his life, he secured eternal life for all who would believe in him. Jesus does not act alone in this great act; he is executing the plan of redemption set forth by the Triune God before the world began. Paul wrote in his letter to Titus that “when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:4-7).

Being made alive together with Christ—being born again—begins a new life with Christ. Paul is intentional with his word choice in Ephesians 2 and Titus 3. We are not merely sick people whom Christ can make better. We are not even bad people whom Christ can make good. No, we are dead. And in Christ, God makes us alive. We are regenerated only according to his mercy. Only the power of God could do such a thing! The power that raised Christ from the dead is the same power that says to us, “Live!” And when God makes us alive, he does not simply make us alive to wander in the wilderness of the world. He makes us alive in Christ. That is, we are moved from death into a new life, complete with a new purpose, new desires, and a new heart.

Apart from regeneration, we could never stand before God, and we could never hope to be made alive outside of Christ. If you are in Christ, meditate on what it means for you to be made alive in Christ today. Consider Jesus, who became sin for us, so that in him, we might become the righteousness of God.

*His life for mine, his life for mine
How could it ever be?
That he would die, God's son would die
To save a wretch like me
What love divine, he gave his life for mine.*

“HIS LIFE FOR MINE,” © REBECCA J. PECK

IN LAYING DOWN
HIS LIFE, HE SE-
CURED ETERNAL
LIFE FOR ALL WHO
WOULD BELIEVE
IN HIM.

FAITH IN CHRIST

Day 3

READ GALATIANS 2:20, EPHESIANS 2:8-9

As we begin today's devotional, let's look at two questions and answers from the New City Catechism:

Question 29: How Can We Be Saved?

Answer: Only by faith in Jesus Christ and in his substitutionary atoning death on the cross; so even though we are guilty of having disobeyed God and are still inclined to all evil, nevertheless, God, without any merit of our own but only by pure grace, imputes to us the perfect righteousness of Christ when we repent and believe in him.

Question 30: What is Faith in Jesus Christ?

Answer: Faith in Jesus Christ is acknowledging the truth of everything that God has revealed in his Word, trusting in him, and also receiving and resting on him alone for salvation as he is offered in the gospel.¹

The theme and focus for today's devotional is "Faith in Christ," and I want to begin by meditating on the last line of answer #30 for a little bit: "...as he is offered in the gospel." There is much to consider in those few words. As we read through the gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, we learn of Christ. We learn of his humble beginnings, being born in a stable. We learn of his flight to Egypt to escape the murderous rage of Herod. We learn that even from a young age, he knew he must "be about his Father's business" (Luke 2:49 KJV). We learn of his compassion, his miracles, his ministry, his preaching. But ultimately, we learn that he is offered to us—to you and me—for the salvation of our souls.

We have a tendency to read ourselves into the Holy Week narrative in a positive light. You might think or say things like, "I must be special because he paid a special price for me." You may gawk at the horror of Christ's beatings and crucifixion and wonder, "Was I so bad that all of this was necessary?" We have a hard time feeling the weight of our own sin sometimes. We use "light" words to describe our sin, like "mistakes" or "mess-ups." Pastor and theologian R. C. Sproul (1939-2017) once defined sin as "cosmic treason."² When our eyes are darkened by our own sin and pride, we simply do not understand how amazing God's grace truly is. If our sin is not so bad, then God's grace for sinners is not so amazing. Some of us might even be offended that the Scriptures would dare assume we are so bad that we need forgiveness. Other of us are grateful for such a grand gesture, but feel the need to "do what we can to help." We'll gladly accept the meal as long as we can bring a dish to pass. But it simply doesn't work that way.

What, then? How are we to receive Christ as he is offered to us in the gospel? How are we to understand the suffering of Christ as we move closer to his arrest and “trial” and crucifixion? Ah, the one answer that seems too good to be true—too simple—is the one answer we so desperately need: faith! Crippled and overwhelmed by the weight of the Law and the knowledge of his own sin, Martin Luther was reborn upon his discovery of this glorious truth in Romans 1: the righteous shall live by faith! It’s not too good to be true—it is **THE** truth. We are united to Christ by faith in him, and it is by God’s grace alone we are offered Christ, whom we receive by faith alone to the glory of God alone.

It is one thing to be moved by the passion of Christ as we move through Holy Week. It is another thing entirely to receive Christ—by faith—as he is offered to you in the gospel. And he is offered to you in the gospel. Have you received him? If you have received him, has the life-giving message of the gospel grown stale? Ask God to give you fresh faith and newness of joy as you consider his work on your behalf this week.

PRAYER

Holy Jesus, I come to you with empty hands. There is nothing I can bring to “assist” you in your work of redemption. My hands are empty, but they are open—open to receive you. God, grant me faith to believe; to receive and rest in Christ alone for salvation. Thank you for the truth and the beauty and the power of the gospel revealed in your Word. And when I fear my faith will fail, hold me fast. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

¹ *The New City Catechism* © 2017 by The Gospel Coalition and Redeemer Presbyterian Church (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 74-77

² R. C. Sproul, *The Holiness of God* (Sanford, FL: Logos, 2018), 140

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JUSTIFIED IN CHRIST

Day 4

READ 2 CORINTHIANS 5:21

Justification is one of those words that seems to be used less and less in our 21st century “Christian lingo,” but it truly is so important. Tomorrow we’ll talk about sanctification. The Bible uses these two words to express the saving work of Christ for people like you and me—sinners. You may have noticed today’s Scripture reading doesn’t actually contain the words justified or justification. This isn’t for lack of use in the Scriptures. Paul uses the terms often in Galatians and Romans. That said, we certainly see justification in the text. In 2 Corinthians 5:21, Paul is defining justification for us: our sin was laid on Christ, and his righteousness was laid on us. We become the very righteousness of God because Jesus Christ took our sin upon himself and laid his righteousness on us. This is what it means to be justified.

I once learned an “A-B-C-D” acronym to help describe what justification means, and I found it to be quite helpful, so let’s use it today.

Justification is an **ACT** of God. It is not meant to describe the way God inwardly renews and transforms us, but it is a legal term; a declaration of our pardon. In justification, God declares the sinner righteous, pardoning him of all his sins at the very moment of conversion.

But how can a just God declare sinners righteous when they are truly guilty of sin? What is the **BASIS** of this shocking legal declaration? God justifies the sinner on the basis of the obedience and death of Jesus. Christ’s perfect obedience fully satisfies God’s demands for the payment of sin—the debt is paid, the slate is wiped clean, and we are declared righteous (Romans 5:18-19, Philippians 2:8). But we are not justified by our own works. It is through Christ’s work on our behalf alone that we are justified. Our sin was laid on Jesus—who knew no sin—and in turn, his righteousness was transferred to us. This is called imputation; our sins were imputed to Christ, and his righteousness was imputed to us. What a beautiful exchange—one we certainly don’t deserve.

Yesterday, we considered the means by which a person is justified. We are justified not by our works, but we are justified through faith alone when we **CONFESS** faith in Christ (Romans 10:9) and his work on our behalf. However, faith is simply a God-ordained instrument; it is not a work wrought by us. We’re not “meeting God half-way” when we exercise faith in Christ. Faith does not add to what Christ has done, but it receives the righteousness of Jesus offered to us in the gospel (Romans 4:4-5).

Lastly, those who have received saving faith and have been justified will **DEMONSTRATE** the authenticity of that faith by producing fruit. According to James 2:14-25, it is possible to make a profession of saving

faith without actually possessing saving faith. However, don't put the horse before the cart. We are not justified by our good works. Rather, true faith in Christ will result in evidence of such faith. Paul reminds us in Ephesians 2:10 that we have been justified so that we can accomplish the good works God has prepared for us! If you are in Christ, your justification is complete. You cannot earn favor with God by performing good works. But if you have truly been justified, good works will naturally follow—to the glory of God.

So, back to Jesus and Holy Week. How is everything connected? Like we saw a couple days ago, salvation can be defined (in its broadest sense) as regeneration, justification, sanctification, and glorification. Let's break that down a little bit:

1. God has made us alive in Christ (regeneration)
2. God has pardoned our sin, declaring us righteous (justification)
3. God is working in us to make us more like Christ (sanctification)
4. God will raise us to life everlasting in perfect bodies which will be totally free from the effects of sin (glorification)

The gospel is simple enough to be understood by a child, but its underpinnings are enough to boggle our minds, leaving us in awe of God's glorious plan of redemption. We cannot be justified apart from faith in Christ. We cannot exercise faith in Christ when we are spiritually dead. We need new life; we need to be regenerated. So God does the miraculous work of making us alive in Christ, giving us faith to believe in Christ, then at the moment of belief, applies Christ's righteousness to us, laying our sin on Jesus, and declaring us righteous. But, do not miss this: **none** of it works without Christ. None of it is possible without Good Friday. If there is no sacrifice on our behalf, we are still dead in our sins and there is no hope of justification before God. **Everything** hinges on Jesus.

Today is Spy Wednesday, the day Judas betrayed Christ for money, setting in motion the arrest, trial, and crucifixion of Jesus. Jesus knew Judas would betray him, but he entered the Garden of Gethsemane anyway. He walked toward his death. For you. For me. And that perfect obedience is now reckoned to us! In other words, when God looks at you and me, he sees the very obedience of Christ. We are *justified* in Christ. Praise him!

WHEN GOD LOOKS
AT YOU AND ME, HE
SEES THE VERY OBE-
DIENCE OF CHRIST.
WE ARE JUSTIFIED
IN CHRIST. PRAISE
HIM!

SANCTIFIED IN CHRIST

Day 5

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 1:30, 2 CORINTHIANS 5:17

We began this devotional on our union with Christ a bit backwards, looking first at glorification with Christ. Over the past two days we've considered regeneration and justification. Today, we're looking at the "chain link" between being justified and being glorified: sanctification. If you weren't familiar with these terms before reading this devotional, I hope I've helped you understand them a little bit. It may seem like a lot of "Christianese" or church lingo, but I can promise you this: a rich, biblical vocabulary is so incredibly helpful, because it equips you to understand and appreciate the Bible and the gospel so much more.

Sanctification is a topic that makes some people uncomfortable, because it can be easily misrepresented as a way to earn favor with God through good works. However, this could not be further from the truth. As we have already seen in this study, our standing before God (justification) is a work of grace from beginning to end—it does not depend on us at all. And yet, sanctification is a part of our salvation, which Jesus purchased by his death and resurrection.¹ According to the Westminster Shorter Catechism (Question 35), sanctification is "the work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness."² In other words, sanctification is a consistent, continuous process worked in us by God to make us look more like Jesus. By his Spirit and his Word, God transforms us from "one degree of glory to another" (2 Corinthians 3:18). It is not an immediate eradication of sin, but it is more than the mere appearance of change. Sanctification is real transformation; it is the process of becoming more like Christ.

As we are made more like Christ, we look more like Christ. Jesus said when we shine our light before others, they will see our good works, but give glory to our Father. What's happening there? What about good works points a person to God? As we considered yesterday, good works are worthless as a means to earning God's grace. It can't be done. So how do good works point others to the Father? Let's look at 1 Corinthians 1:30, where Paul writes: "And because of [God] you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption" (1 Corinthians 1:30). Follow the grammar here; consider what Paul is saying: "Christ...became...to us...sanctification." Our sanctification is not something we are required to "work up" within ourselves now that we are justified in Christ. Rather, we are given Christ—who is our sanctification! This is what it means to be sanctified in Christ: we are sanctified to God through our union with Christ.

Salvation is a miraculous thing, but it is brought about by ordinary means:

sharing the gospel. Preaching the Word. Praying for unbelieving friends. God ordained these ordinary means to be the instruments of salvation. So it is with sanctification. It's all of grace, and it's all Jesus—but it doesn't come about by kicking back and putting our feet up. God doesn't simply pour a bucket of sanctification over us and “magically” sanctify us. We don't undergo a single grand gesture of outward transformation and consider our sanctification complete. Rather, it is a process brought about by God through ordinary means. Pastor and author H. B. Charles Jr. said it this way: “It is the will of God to have the Spirit of God to use the word of God to make the children of God look like the Son of God.”³

Sanctification is every bit a work of God as justification. God uses his Spirit and his Word to conform us to the image of his Son (Romans 8:29). We cannot meditate on and appreciate our union with Christ—who loved us and gave himself for us (Galatians 2:20)—without considering sanctification. Thank God for this wonderful gift of grace!

PRAYER POINTS

Do you struggle with feeling like you're not any more like Jesus than you were a year ago? Meditate on today's Scripture reading. Pray 1 Corinthians 1:30 and 2 Corinthians 5:17 as prayers of thanksgiving to God. Ask him to give you faith to rest in Jesus. If you are in Christ, God is forming Christ in you (Galatians 4:19). Every day—through the ups and downs—he is molding and transforming you to be conformed to the image of Jesus, who is your sanctification.

¹ It is important to note here that when I say “salvation,” I mean God's work of salvation from beginning to end, not merely justification.

² Westminster Shorter Catechism, *The Westminster Standard*, <https://thewestminsterstandard.org/westminster-shorter-catechism> (last accessed February 20, 2021)

³ A tweet posted by @hbcharlesjr on Twitter.com, <https://twitter.com/hbcharlesjr/status/481399088681091073> (last accessed February 20, 2021)

SANCTIFICATION
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CONTINUOUS PRO-
CESS WORKED IN US
BY GOD TO MAKE US
LOOK MORE LIKE
JESUS.

CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST

Day 6

READ GALATIANS 2:20, 5:24; ROMANS 6:6-14

Today is Good Friday. It seems fitting to meditate on being crucified with Christ today. The cross of Jesus Christ is a great mystery; the worst thing that has ever happened in the world and the best thing that's ever happened in the world. We break promises, so God keeps his. We run from God, so he runs to us. We suffer for sin, so the Savior suffers for us. Our story is the story of God doing what we can't, in order to make up for us doing what we shouldn't. The Christ suffers for our sin, that we might share in his sinlessness.¹

How can sinful people—even redeemed sinners—share in Christ's sinlessness? Before we get into today's devotional, I want to first make this clear: we will never be sinless on this side of heaven. Nowhere in the Bible are we promised sinless perfection. It's a myth. We are chosen, loved, redeemed children of God, but we dwell in earthen vessels (2 Corinthians 4:7 KJV). We will never be free from the presence of sin until we are with Christ in our eternal home. But we are redeemed. In other words, Christ has purchased our freedom by dying in our place. We are restored to fellowship and union with God because of the sacrifice of Jesus. We have been set free from the bondage of sin. Sin no longer has dominion over us! How then are we to reconcile being free from sin if we still sin?

The reformer Martin Luther coined the Latin phrase “*Simul Justus et Peccator*.” In English, it means that if you are in Christ, you are “at the same time righteous and sinner.” You are declared righteous, though you are still capable of sinning. Again, this is a great mystery. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:17 that to be in Christ is to be “a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” So we are a new creation—we have a new nature! When Paul says “the old has passed away,” he speaks of the “old man,” the once-enslaved-to-sin person you were before you met Jesus. According to Romans 6, our old self was crucified with Christ—we're no longer enslaved!

One might think that because the old self has been crucified with Christ, we need not worry about sin. It is true that sin no longer has dominion over us—it can never “own” us again. But we have not yet received our glorified bodies. So how are we to live as a new creation in Christ?

Paul continues in Romans: “you...must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions” (Romans 6:11-12). On the heels of this glorious declaration of our “old self” being crucified with Christ, Paul turns around and says “so don't let sin reign over you.” Remember, Paul is speaking under the divine inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God. He didn't

make a mistake here. He's not confused. He knows that our hearts are "desperately wicked" (Jeremiah 17:9 KJV).

Paul knows the very sin which caused the hearts of the Israelite children to turn away from God and long to become enslaved in Egypt again would seek to lure us away, too. Our sinful nature hates our new nature. It wants to overcome it. It wants to take you back to where you were before Christ found you—back to when you were its slave. But what does Paul point to as our basis of freedom from sin? Christ's crucifixion. We have died with Christ! Our sin has been nailed to the cross, washed in his blood. Past, present, future—it's all been paid for! The sins we practice in secret, the sins the enemy would use to shame us before the Father, and the sins which so easily entangle us have been covered with the blood of Christ—all of them. The gossip you engage in at work, the sexual sins you try to hide from your friends and family, the bitterness and anger you harbor toward others—forgiven completely, without exception.

Today, when you remember Christ crucified, remember this: he was crucified for you. Not in a general sense, but in a personal sense. He died for the sins you committed yesterday. And the day before. And last year. Jesus died for you. And when he died, he took your sin upon his shoulders—nailing it to the cross—so you could be free from its power. Do you feel helpless in your battle with sin? Look to the cross. Remind the enemy why we call today "Good" Friday. Remind him that he no longer has dominion over you—you are free! Remind him that life you now live in the flesh, you live by faith in the Son of God who loved you and gave himself for you.

PRAYER

Holy Jesus, your dying breath has brought me life. Your sacrifice has broken the curse of sin that once enslaved me—I am free! I will never fully comprehend why you would die in my place, and words can never express the depths of my eternal gratefulness. Forgive me for the times I have chosen sin over communion with you. Forgive me for the times I wallow in shame over my sin rather than confessing it to you. When Satan comes to tempt me to despair or entice me with the pleasures of this world, remind me that my sin was nailed to the cross and I bear it no more! Lord, increase my faith. Let me say with Paul: the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. I love you, Jesus. Thank you for loving me first. Amen.

¹ Most of this paragraph is quoted from Kevin DeYoung, *The Biggest Story* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 106-107.

WE WILL NEVER
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SIN UNTIL WE
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IN OUR ETERNAL
HOME. BUT WE
ARE REDEEMED.

PERSEVERING IN CHRIST

Day 7

READ JOHN 10:27-29, ROMANS 8:38-39

Today's topic of persevering in Christ might be more fitting for the Monday after Easter. After a week of celebrating the pinnacle of our faith—the very crux of the gospel itself—we wake up to a new week. We go back to work, back to school, back to “normal life.” How does the gospel and our union with Christ empower us to “carry on?”

A couple days ago, we considered sanctification, and how we are being made more like Christ every day—one degree of glory to the next (2 Corinthians 3:18). And we eagerly await the day when we will be raised to sin no more in glorified bodies, when God will once again dwell with his people. So we are here in this place of waiting; the “already and not yet.” We eagerly and expectantly await Jesus' return and our glorification. But until that day, we are called to persevere; to be faithful until the end.

If you're like me, a call to “persevere until the end” is overwhelming to hear. So often, I truly desire to faithfully endure whatever life may bring, but my flesh is weak, and I fail over and over again. My faith is weak and fickle. Sometimes I doubt the promises of God—how can I hope to endure? Our answer is found in today's Scripture reading from John 10. Speaking to a group of Jews, Jesus said that he gives his sheep “eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.” For those who are in Christ, we can never be lost. No one is powerful enough to take us out of Christ's hands. As if that weren't assurance enough, Jesus finishes the statement by saying, “My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.” We are in Christ's hand. We are in our Father's hand. We cannot fall away. Of course, we stumble, we fall, and we sin. But where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more—God's goodness and mercy are there, drawing you gently back to the Father, and they'll follow you all the days of your life (Psalm 23:6).

Sheep are stubborn creatures, and they are not very smart. Paul seems to sense that we will struggle with knowing for sure that we will endure to the end; that we won't ultimately be lost or fall away. I love the certainty in his voice in Romans 8:38-39. You can almost hear him shouting from the depths of his soul, eager for this precious truth to sink down into our hearts: “For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Paul's words are no accident. He writes with divine intention under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God. The scope of his message is clear: **NOTHING** can separate us from the love of God **in Christ Jesus**. If we are in Christ Jesus, we will persevere until the end,

not because we are holding onto Christ—so fickle are we—but because he holds onto us.

In closing, I want to do two things. First, I'm going to ask you to visit YouTube and search for "Don Carson on the ground of our assurance"¹ and watch the video (it's the one posted by The Gospel Coalition). It's only a few minutes long, but it's incredibly powerful. Jot down some notes as you watch and put them somewhere where you'll be reminded of them often.

Second, I'm going to close today's devotional with some lyrics from one of my favorite songs, "He Will Hold Me Fast."²

HE WILL HOLD ME FAST

*When I fear my faith will fail, Christ will hold me fast;
When the tempter would prevail, He will hold me fast.
I could never keep my hold through life's fearful path;
For my love is often cold; He must hold me fast.
He will hold me fast, He will hold me fast;
For my Saviour loves me so, He will hold me fast.
Those He saves are His delight, Christ will hold me fast;
Precious in his holy sight, He will hold me fast.
He'll not let my soul be lost; His promises shall last;
Bought by Him at such a cost, He will hold me fast.
He will hold me fast, He will hold me fast;
For my Saviour loves me so, He will hold me fast.
For my life He bled and died, Christ will hold me fast;
Justice has been satisfied; He will hold me fast.
Raised with Him to endless life, He will hold me fast
'Till our faith is turned to sight, When He comes at last!
He will hold me fast, He will hold me fast;
For my Saviour loves me so, He will hold me fast.*

¹ Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sjRz5fLCmM8>

² © Words: vv. 1-2 Ada Habershon (1861-1918), Public Domain. Alt. words, new words (v.3), and music: Matthew Merker © 2013 Getty Music

IF WE ARE IN CHRIST
JESUS, WE WILL PER-
SEVERE UNTIL THE
END, NOT BECAUSE
WE ARE HOLDING
ONTO CHRIST—SO
FICKLE ARE WE—
BUT BECAUSE HE
HOLDS ONTO US.

RAISED WITH CHRIST

Day 8

READ COLOSSIANS 3:1-4

Happy Easter! Today, we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus—the pinnacle of Holy Week. Paul said, “if Christ has not been raised, then all our preaching is useless, and your faith is useless...if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, and you are still in your sins” (1 Corinthians 15:14, 17). Jesus fulfilled every prophecy he was meant to fulfill. He was from the right city, from the right family, did the right things. He was meek, humble, and compassionate. He performed miracles, healing the sick and raising the dead.

And yet, Paul says with confidence that if Christ had not been raised, our faith is futile and we are still in our sins. This is strong language; what he’s really saying is that if Christ had not been raised, then Christ’s death would be worthless. It’s a heavy thing to say, it’s a heavy thing to hear, and it’s a heavy thing to meditate on. Paul finished this thought by saying, “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable” (1 Corinthians 15:19 KJV, emphasis added). If our hope in Christ dies with our mortal bodies, this broken world is as good as it’s going to get for us. For us to truly grasp the wonder of the resurrection, we must ponder this weighty thought.

In Ephesians 2 (my second favorite chapter in the entire Bible), Paul paints a dark picture of our lives before Christ. Dead in our sins, slaves to self and Satan, living under the wrath of God. Then, he says, “But God...” It’s hard to read those two simple words without being moved. Many times, those two words have brought tears to my eyes. But God. Because God is rich in mercy and has great love for us, our lives are forever changed. We are made alive in Christ!

Paul employs this same effective, joy-inducing conjunction here in 1 Corinthians 15. If Christ has not been raised, everything we’ve believed and everything we’ve been doing and preaching is worthless. We’re still in our sins, and of all men on earth, we are the most miserable. BUT... here’s the shift: “But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead” (1 Corinthians 15:20-21, emphasis added). Christ’s resurrection is our promise; the sign of our sure hope that we **WILL** be raised to life everlasting. In verse 22, Paul said, “Just as everyone dies because we all belong to Adam, everyone who belongs to Christ will be given new life” (1 Corinthians 15:22, NLT). This is good news—the best news, in fact. Our faith is not in vain. We are not still in our sins. Christ’s death was not useless. We will be raised.

So, what about now? Does this matter for our lives today? Absolutely. This

is another example of the “already and not yet” tension we live in. We will be raised; that’s the “not yet.” But we have been raised (Colossians 3:1); that’s the “already.” This is not a mistake or typo in the Scriptures. It’s a dual reality. We have been raised and we will be raised. We are saved (Ephesians 2:8-9), we are being saved (1 Corinthians 1:18, 2 Corinthians 2:15), and we will be saved (Romans 5:9). All three of these tenses are used in Scripture in relation to our salvation, which is directly tied to the resurrection. So what does it mean to be raised with Christ now? Let’s look at three implications of the resurrection:

1. WE HAVE DIED WITH CHRIST

We looked at what it means to be crucified with Christ on Friday, but Paul tells us in Colossians 3:3 that being raised with Christ reminds us that we have died with Christ. To die with Christ means we are dead to sin (see day 7). As Horatio Spafford said in his famous hymn, “It is Well,” our sin is “nailed to the cross” and we “bear it no more.” Praise the Lord! Sin no longer has dominion over you (Romans 6:1-14). Being raised with Christ means we are freed from sin, because we have died with Christ.

2. OUR LIFE IS HIDDEN WITH CHRIST

In the garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve sinned, their first instinct was to hide themselves from God. Their eyes were opened to the reality of their sin, and they feared God in a way they never had before. In the book of Revelation, we see a similar scene when Jesus comes in judgement and wrath. Those who have rejected and blasphemed Christ are now terrified when God’s mercy is removed from the earth. Revelation 6:15-16 says they will call on mountains and rocks to fall on them to hide them “from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.” Between these two bookends (Genesis and Revelation) we have the message of the gospel; the preaching of the cross of Jesus. We come to him clothed in our shame and filthy rags, and he gives us his righteousness. He becomes our cleft in the rock; our hiding place. To be raised with Christ is to be hidden in Christ—we are saved from the wrath to come.

3. WE WILL APPEAR WITH CHRIST IN GLORY

Paul finishes these few verses by reminding us of the coming glory of an eternity with Christ and God our Father. Try as we might, we simply cannot fathom nor explain what awaits us in glory. But we know this: our God will once again dwell with us, and we will know him as we are known (1 Corinthians 13:12). Christ, who is our life, will one day return. And when he does, we will be joined to him in a way we cannot now comprehend: in glorified bodies, without the presence or stain of sin, seeing God face-to-face. This is our blessed hope (Titus 2:13). Being raised with Christ means he will come back for those for whom he died, and “so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

As you return to your Resurrection Sunday celebrations with a fresh understanding of your union with Christ, as we look forward to that “blessed hope,” I’ll leave you with the same words with which Paul encouraged the Thessalonians after this assurance: Comfort one another with these words.

WE COME TO HIM
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ROCK; OUR HIDING
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H O S A N N A
revival