

“Multifaceted Deliverance”
Colossians 2:6-15
July 18, 2021
Faith Presbyterian Church – Morning Service
Pastor Nicoletti

We continue, this morning, in our series on Paul’s letter to the Colossians, as we come to Colossians 2:6-15.

Please listen carefully, for this is God’s word for us this morning.

Paul writes to the Colossian church:

^{2:6} Therefore, 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. 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. 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, ¹² 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. ¹³ And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴ by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

This is the word of the Lord. (Thanks be to God.)

“All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever.” [1 Peter 1:24-25]

Let’s pray ...

Lord, our soul clings to the dust,
and we ask you to give us life according to your word!
Teach us your ways,
help us understand your precepts,
make us to meditate on your works.
When our souls melt for sorrow,
strengthen us according to your word.
Help us to cling to your testimonies,
and enlarge our hearts,
that we may run in your ways.
We ask this in Jesus’s name. Amen.
[Based on Psalm 119:25-32]

Introduction

In our text this morning Paul continues to express his desire for the Colossian Christians that they would continue in their faith despite temptations to return to the old ways that are not according to Christ.

So Paul begins with that opening exhortation in verses six and seven. There he says: “Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.”

Paul here is not urging something new for the Colossian Christians. He is instead urging them to continue to “walk in” Christ, just as they had initially “received him.” Paul’s exhortation is for them to persevere and to continue in their faith.

And that helps clarify that the temptation they are facing is to return to the old ways – whether to their old ways, or to the old ways of others.

And Paul describes that threat in verse eight. There he says: “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.”

The threat is to be taken captive by a way that is not according to Christ. What exactly does Paul tell us about that way?

Well first, Paul refers to it as “philosophy and empty deceit.” Now, Paul is not speaking here against metaphysics in general. That’s not Paul’s point. After all, the Greek word he uses simply means the “love of wisdom.” And Paul is certainly not against wisdom.

Instead, Paul is aiming at false philosophy – philosophy that is empty or hollow or deceptive. The NIV helps clarify the meaning as it translates Paul’s exhortation as “See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy.” [Wright, 105]

That is one aspect of what Paul is warning them against – a path that has the appearance of wisdom, but it is actually empty and deceitful.

The second aspect of what Paul is warning them against is that it is according to human tradition.

And again, Paul’s point is not that it has simply been handed down by humans, but that it has human origins, and is, as he goes on to say, not according to Christ.

Then third, Paul says in verse eight that the things he is warning them against are “according to the elemental spirits of the world” or “according to the elementary principles of the world” as the ESV footnote puts it.

What exactly does that phrase mean? Well, that's a good question. And actually, it's a very difficult question.

One commentator states that “the meaning of the phrase that Paul uses here [...] is one of the more intractable problems in New Testament interpretation.” [Moo, 187] And several interpretations have been argued for, each with reasons to support it.

Some interpret the phrase as referring to the fundamental elements of the universe, “from which all matter [is] composed” [Moo, 187] This interpretation starts with a mostly physical interpretation of the phrase.

Others interpret the phrase as referring to spiritual beings. [Wright, 106; Moo, 188-189] This view sees Paul focused mainly on spiritual realities and spiritual rivals to Christ.

Still others argue that the phrase is describing the basic religious and political patterns of behavior and social organization within the communities and nations in which people lived. [Leithart, 36]

And so, as we consider what these “elemental spirits of the world” or these “elementary principles of the world” are, we see that they can refer to aspects of the physical world, the spiritual world, the moral world, and the social world.

And while there can be much debate about what, primarily, Paul had in mind, it may be a mistake to think that our job is to choose between them.

After all, as many have pointed out, “most ancient people did not neatly distinguish the material and spiritual in the way in which we do today.” [Moo, 189] In fact, such separations are a particularly modern tendency, and even we don't separate those things as much as we tend to think. But the ancient world, by contrast, was overt in how those aspects of the world overlapped – to the extent that physical aspects of the world were often worshipped. [Moo 189-191; Wright, 122]

And the same tendency towards overlap was true in the social order. While we may have a sacred and secular divide in how we think of the civic realm or the public square, no such divide existed in the ancient world, and local deities, “the ‘national’ gods” were believed to rule over different areas of the world or different groups of people. [Wright, 106]

For Paul's audience, the spiritual, the material, the moral, and the social were all intertwined, and we see them all intertwined in our text as well. Because they are not just connected in this difficult to interpret phrase, but actually Paul will go on in the rest of the paragraph to discuss our salvation in terms of its spiritual, moral, and social aspects.

And so that is what we will consider together this morning. We will consider three facets of Christ's deliverance, and in each facet, we'll consider how Christ delivers his people to a whole new landscape – a whole new way of being in and relating to the world, and to God.

But also, key to why Paul is writing, is that in each area discussed, the Colossian Christians seem to be facing a temptation to go back. They are facing a temptation to return to the old ways – to return to the old spiritual landscape, the old moral landscape, and the old social landscape. They haven't returned yet, but Paul is warning them to resist that temptation, by continuing in the new place that Christ has placed them – by continuing to walk in Christ, as we read in verse six.

And we, today, almost two thousand years later, face similar temptations. And so we will look closely about what Paul has to say about each.

Delivered to a New Spiritual Landscape

With that said, we begin with the first aspect of deliverance: Christ has delivered us into a new spiritual landscape.

And we start by asking what he has delivered us from.

We see part of that in verse eight, because as we said, the “elemental spirits” mentioned there can refer to spiritual beings. But Paul gives us more than that as well. He also speaks in verse fifteen of the “rulers” and “authorities” that Christ triumphed over, and those “rulers” and “authorities” Paul mentions also seem most likely to be spiritual beings. [Moo, 196]

And this brings us to an important reality about the world the Colossian Christians lived in. It was filled with gods. It was filled with spiritual beings. Some of them were regional or national – they ruled over the empire or the city in a specific way. Others were family deities, as each family had its own altar in the house, and its own family cult. Others were involved with some specific area of life. In fact, Augustine spends a portion of his work in *The City of God* mocking all the different gods that the Romans had for different activities in human life and in the world. Still others were gods of mystery religions, providing more spiritual fulfillment rather than physical, or familial, or political fulfillment. A person in the ancient world was surrounded by these spiritual beings, and sent out to navigate amongst them on their own. They had to decide which god to go to for what. They had to decide which gods to take seriously, which to just pay lip service to, and which could be ignored. When they faced difficulties in life – whether a family crisis, or a political crisis, or a material crisis, or a spiritual crisis, they had to figure out where to go, and search for which spiritual being might really help.

It makes me think of what it can be like to navigate the medical landscape nowadays. If you have some issue – maybe pain in your neck ... should you go to your GP or to a musculoskeletal specialist, or to a surgeon, or to a chiropractor, or to a physical therapist, or to someone else? Now, in a perfect world any one of those would point you to the right place, even if it were not with them. But often they each instead have their own answer, and their own solution that they claim only they can give, and you are left to yourself trying to decide which form of help to pursue, with no one there as an overarching guide for you.

That was what the spiritual world was like for a first-century pagan. They had to navigate a world of spiritual rulers and authorities.

And in some ways, our world is not as different as we like to imagine. We don't speak of it in the same ways as the ancients did, but we often embrace similar concepts. Most people today tend to treat historic religious traditions not as unified visions that need to be taken on their own terms, but as items in a buffet, from which we can pick and choose pieces that look good to us, based on what *we* think will most help us. We too enter a religious marketplace. And while we all acknowledge there is only one truth when it comes to, say, physics, when it comes to the spiritual realm, everyone has their own truth. And we are left trying to hear of all the different truths in order to figure out ours – whether it will be borrowed from one person's truth, or another's, or blended from several. But that is up to us. We are left alone, navigating a world of spiritual rulers and authorities. What is the solution? What is the answer?

For Paul, the answer begins with Christian baptism and Christian faith. Because Christian baptism and faith, for Paul, is not just one more spiritual good or service or blessing that we can add to our spiritual collection. But baptism and Christian faith redefine who we are. Baptism and faith, Paul says in verse twelve, unite us to Christ so closely that what is his is ours, and what is ours is his. [Wright, 114] Baptism is a bit like marriage. It unites two so that they share what they each had possessed on their own before. But not only that, baptism introduces a commitment. The baptized belongs to Jesus. And Jesus belongs to the baptized. And so Jesus will never forsake the baptized who continue in faith, and the baptized is never to abandon Christ for some other spiritual ruler or authority.

But it's more than that too. Because baptism and faith don't just unite us to one spiritual authority among a number of options. Instead, Paul tells us that baptism and faith unite us to a spiritual authority that is like no other.

Paul begins to sketch this out in verse nine. There, the main answer that Paul gives as to why the Colossian Christians should not become ensnared by hollow philosophy or elemental spirits is that in Christ “the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.” [Wright, 107]

Paul is saying that Jesus is not just a new member in a spiritual pantheon. He's not just one valid option among other valid options. He's not just another intermediate teacher or prophet or angelic being. He is the one true God. [Wright, 108]

In verse ten Paul identifies Christ as the “head of all rule and authority.” He reigns supreme over any other being. [Wright, 108] Christ is the head over everything else that exists – whether in the visible realm or the invisible realm.

But there is more. Paul goes on to say in verse fifteen that in the cross, Christ has “disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them.” And with those words, Paul is evoking a specific image.

The picture in verse fifteen is of a Roman general creating a spectacle by marching those he has defeated in battle through the streets. [Moo, 214; Wright, 119] What the ESV translates as “disarmed” can also mean “stripped.” Paul is saying that Jesus has triumphed over the rulers and

authorities, he has stripped them – both exposing them for what they truly are and disarming them – and he has put them to public shame. [Wright, 119-120]

That means that the Colossian Christians are no longer in a sea of competing deities. But they stand before one deity. They stand before Jesus Christ. And Jesus Christ has conquered all those who would compete with him.

This has a few implications.

One, is that the Colossian Christians are no longer slaves to uncertainty about where to go with their needs. Christ is the all-powerful God. He has conquered every rival. And the only god that people need to go to, is him.

Second, it means that the Colossian Christians need not fear any spiritual rival or spiritual foe. Christ has triumphed over them. He is victorious over them. And in Christ, we should see how powerless they are. [Wright, 107]

Of course, that had always been the case. Even before his incarnation, Christ had been supreme. But the Bible tells us that rebellious spirits, joining in the rebellion of Satan, desired to lead men and women astray, presenting themselves as gods and even as angels of light, so that they might deceive humanity. Their boasts of power were always a lie. But Christ came to expose that lie. Which is one reason why those dark spiritual forces battled Christ as they did, tempting Judas, working through the Roman and Jewish leaders, all to bring about Jesus's death, so that he would no longer be a threat to them.

But then, through the very means by which they tried to stop him, Christ triumphed over them, rising from the dead, triumphing over them publicly, and unmasking just how powerless they really are.

There is a striking irony here. Because, as one commentator draws out, in the crucifixion of Jesus both the spiritual powers and the worldly powers thought that *they* were stripping Jesus, and that *they* were putting him to public shame, and that *they* were celebrating their triumph over him. But Paul tells us here that instead, it was through the cross, that *he* was stripping and exposing them, *he* was putting them to public shame, and *he* was displaying his victory over them. In the cross, both the worldly and the spiritual powers that conspired to kill Jesus were exposed for what they were. [Wright, 121] And in Christ's death and in his resurrection, Christ exposed the fact that they had no power over him.

And so Christ delivers his people to a new spiritual landscape. It is no longer a landscape filled with rival gods and rival spiritual claims, all of them making great promises and all of them failing to ever really deliver. Instead he delivers them to a spiritual landscape where the weakness of all those rivals is exposed, and Christ – risen from the dead, head of all authority, in whom the fullness of deity dwells bodily – Christ reigns over all.

This is the great spiritual deliverance Jesus has given to his people.

But now some of the Colossian Christians are being tempted to return to the old landscape. They are being tempted, on some level, to act again as if they live in a spiritual marketplace of different valid deities, each with their own benefits. They are being tempted to allow themselves to be taken captive to this old deception, which is according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.

And we can often face the same temptation ... can't we?

We can be tempted to go from treating Christ as supreme to treating him as a commodity or as one option out there for us among many. And so we take what we find helpful from him, but then we look elsewhere for other help. And we set him aside.

This is something our culture constantly urges us to do. The secular world is fine if we pray to Jesus. They don't care if we look to him for spiritual health ... so long as we see him as one spiritual authority among many. So long as we don't claim that the fullness of deity is found in him. So long as we don't claim that he has stripped all other spiritual rivals, triumphed over them, and put them to shame.

And their call can be tempting. It can gain us acceptance in the world, sure. But it can also loosen the claims of Jesus on us. It can allow us to choose when to follow his commands, and when to opt instead for the commands of another.

But such a path does not lead to freedom and spiritual empowerment, but to spiritual isolation and slavery. It leaves us, once again, ultimately on our own. And even more than that, it means living a lie, and forsaking the One who rules over all, who is the head of all, and in whom the whole fulness of deity dwells bodily.

And so, Paul urges us not to abandon what we have received, but to continue to walk in Christ, and to live our lives in the new spiritual landscape he has delivered us to.

That is the first thing we see here.

Delivered to a New Moral Landscape

The second thing we see is that Christ has delivered us into a new moral landscape.

How does he do that? Well, Paul begins to tell us in verse thirteen. He reminds us there that before God saved us, we were dead in our trespasses.

Now, some of us can see this in the stories of our lives more clearly than others. If you came to know the Lord later on in life, then you have experiential knowledge of this. You know what life is like without Christ. You know that you were, in fact, spiritually dead, disconnected from God, the true source of spiritual life, and in rebellion against him.

But this is true for every Christian – every believer – even if you don’t remember a time like that. If you have trusted in Christ, then there was a time when you too were dead in your sins. Even if you came to know the Lord before you can remember ... even if you were born again before you were born ... your natural state, before Christ intervened, was to be spiritually dead in your rebellion against God.

And if you are not following Christ now, then Paul says that this is your current spiritual state. Paul’s not trying to be hateful in saying that. But he is saying what is true of every human being. Our hearts have rebelled against God, the source of true life. And in our rebellion, we have accrued a great moral debt towards God. And until that debt is paid and we are reunited to God, we remain spiritually dead, cut off from the source of spiritual life.

The moral landscape many find themselves in as a result, is trying to pay off that debt themselves, and to earn their way back into God’s favor. And so, if we become religious, we try to do lots of pious good works to offset our sins and earn a relationship with God. If we are more secular, we try to attach ourselves to the right cause, or follow the ethical practices that are promoted around us, in order to convince others and ourselves that we are good, and worthy of the good life. Or if we are more spiritually curious, we look for some philosophy that will quiet the voices inside that tell us that something is wrong, and that our hearts are not as they should be. But none of it ever really delivers. None of it ever really helps us escape our condition.

But Paul reminds us here that Christ delivers those who trust in him to a whole new moral landscape.

Christ doesn’t just give commands, and he doesn’t just give a social program, and he doesn’t just give reassuring words. He does all that for his followers, but he also does much more than that. Christ unites all who trust in him to himself.

We see that first in verses thirteen and fourteen where we read that for all who have clung to Christ by faith, Christ has “forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.”

Christ so united himself to us that our spiritual debt became his. And then he did away with it. He took it onto himself, and he paid it on the cross – paying it in full so that the debt was cancelled, and nothing remained.

But he didn’t stop there. As Paul says in verse twelve, as we were united with Christ in his death on the cross, so, by faith, we are also united with Christ in his resurrection – we “were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God” In Christ, we received the spiritual resurrection we needed, and we were reunited with God, our Maker, the source of all life.

That is what happens when Christ blesses us with salvation. That is the moral state of the Christian: her sins are forgiven, and she has new life in God.

She then is to go forward, living a good and moral and holy life – but not in order to earn her way back to God or pay off some sort of debt. Rather, it is because she loves her Lord who saved

her, and she wants to please him with her life, and she dares not betray him after all he has done for her.

Of course she never does this perfectly. But when she fails, she brings her failures to Christ – just as we have done this morning. And she sets it before him. And he nails it to the cross. And he forgives her.

That is the new moral landscape that Christ delivers his people too. It trades debt and death for forgiveness and life.

And yet ... we can be tempted to return to the old ways again. We can be tempted to return to those elementary principles of morality from human tradition. We can be tempted to think that what we really need to do is to earn God's favor and prove our worth. Or that what we really need to do is to hide our sins so others will think we are good. Or that what we really need is a god who is more permissive with sin, rather than one who is holy but who will forgive sins. As irrational as it may seem, in one form or another, we are tempted to return to those old ways, as if Christ had not taken our spiritual debt away and given us new life.

But Paul exhorts us not to return. Paul reminds us of what has already been done for us and what we have already received in our union with Christ. For in Christ we have been given great spiritual riches.

And so, Paul urges us not to abandon what we have received, but to continue to walk in Christ, and to live our lives in the new moral landscape that he has delivered us to.

Delivered to a New Social Landscape

The third and final thing we see is that Christ has delivered us into a new social landscape.

For, as some have argued, these elementary principles, coming from human traditions have a social dimension as well. And they point us to certain social patterns. [Leithart, 36]

What those patterns include is that every group operating according to the principles of the world and not according to Christ, has a tendency to assert its inherent superiority and to cast outsiders as the real problem. This is one of those elementary principles of worldly groups – whether families, cultures, subcultures, or whole nations.

Because every worldly group strives to see itself as inherently superior, and others as the problem in the world, and then those groups go to war with one another, with those assumptions in mind. The unbelieving pagans did this in Paul's day, as did many of the first-century unbelieving Jews in his day. As Paul alludes to, they had even transformed circumcision, which was meant to be a cleansing rite, proclaiming their need for purification, into a prideful rite and a badge of honor. So is the way of the world.

And that was the kind of world that the Colossian Christians had come from. But Christ delivered them into a new social landscape.

He did that by giving them the true circumcision – what Paul calls the circumcision of Christ, one made without hands. And the circumcision of Christ, he says, is Christian baptism.

And baptism should have transformed the social landscape of the Colossian Christians in at least two ways.

First of all, it should have reminded them that they were not inherently superior to anyone else. N.T. Wright comments that just as a doorway to a building can sometimes indicate the kind of building it is that it's letting you into, so baptism, as a doorway into the Christian life, tells us a lot about the Christian life and the Christian Church. [Wright, 113] Most obviously it tells us that those entering the Church were not clean in and of themselves, but they needed a rite of cleansing, performed by another on their behalf, before they could enter in. But even beyond that Paul also tells us here that baptism also portrays our need to die with Christ and to be raised again with him if we were ever to have true life.

If the Christian church understands the gospel – if it understands its baptism – then it can never pretend that it is inherently superior to others, but must see itself only as the recipient of grace, no better on their own than those outside. Baptism reminds us that we are the problem, until God cleanses and raises us.

But then second, along with that, the new social landscape of the gospel should rescue us not only from a sense of social superiority and social antagonism as the Church, but it also should deliver us from the social arrogance and warfare of the other groups and communities we are a part of, by stripping them away from us and relativizing their importance in our lives.

And this may be illustrated by Paul in the circumcision language he uses. Paul here says that the Colossians' baptism was "the circumcision of Christ" and that it was a "putting off [of] the body of the flesh."

Paul's primary meaning here may have more to do with the spiritual landscape of the Colossian Christians. But he may at the same time be saying something about their social landscape as well.

One author writes: "As a result of their baptism into Christ, the Colossians now belong first and foremost to the family of God, and not, therefore, to the human families [...] to which they formerly belonged. 'Body' [in verse eleven] can in fact, easily carry the connotation of a group of people, [and 'flesh' can mean] human solidarity. The phrase [in verse eleven 'by putting off the body of the flesh'] can thus easily mean 'in the stripping off of the old human solidarities'. The convert, in stripping off his clothes for baptism [...] leaves behind [...] the solidarities of the old life, the network of family and society to which, until then, he or she has given primary allegiance." [Wright, 110-111]

If the Christian understands the gospel and understands their baptism, they know that their membership in the Church relativizes every other familial, political, economic, and vocational community that they are a part of. We may still be called to be a part of those communities. We may still be called to invest deeply in those communities. But we are called on now also to reject each of those communities' idolatries, its lies about its own superiority, and its slander of those outside its bounds. This is in part because of the humility that comes with the gospel, but also in part because the gospel and our baptism mean that we have a closer and deeper connection to other believers who are outside our familial, political, economic, and vocational community than the connection we have with the unbelievers who share each of those circles with us. Baptism strips those ties down to their proper place, and strengthens our ties to fellow believers.

This is the new social landscape Christians have been delivered to. But often we are tempted to return to the old ways.

Sometimes the temptation is to combine our faith with other worldly commitments, and in this way to merely put a Christian veneer on the old social landscape – fighting for our family reputation above others, or our political sect above others, or our class, or our vocation, just as before, but only now we also claim that Jesus is on our side.

C.S. Lewis captured this spirit well when, in *The Screwtape Letters* he described one demonic tempter advising another demonic tempter by saying: “The real trouble about the set your patient is living in is that it is *merely* Christian. They all have individual interests, of course, but the bond remains mere Christianity. What we want [– what the demons want –], if men become Christians at all, is to keep them in the state of mind I call ‘Christianity and’. You know – Christianity and the Crisis, Christianity and the New Psychology, Christianity and the New Order, Christianity and Faith Healing, [...] Christianity and Vegetarianism, Christianity and Spelling Reform. If they must be Christians let them at least be Christians with a difference. Substitute for the faith itself some Fashion with a Christian colouring.” [Lewis, Letter 25]

As one commentator puts it: “All power structures, ancient or modern, whether political, economic, or racial, have the potential to become rivals to Christ, beckoning his followers to submit themselves to them in order to find fuller security. The invitation is as blasphemous as it is unnecessary. Christ brooks no rivals. His people need no-one but him.” [Wright, 108-109]

And so Paul urges us to reject these human traditions and worldly ways, and instead to walk in Christ as we have received him.

But then, even as we turn to Christ alone, we can fall into yet another worldly pattern, by reducing the Church to just one more worldly community, clamoring for worldly attention, and grasping at worldly power. We do this when we forget how dependent we are on grace, and so begin thinking we deserve more from the world. And we do this when we forget that our community is an eternal community, and so we begin to focus our primary attention on comfort and power for ourselves in this life. And so we join in the worldly battles and fight and villainize others.

But the gospel would dictate that rather than wanting to crush our enemies, we would plead with them to join us, knowing that they are no less worthy of inclusion here than we are. And that should drive how we live in the world, and how we speak to the world. As one writer puts it: “The reconciling mission of the church in the world therefore includes the task of proclaiming to the present ‘power structures’ that God is God, that Jesus is Lord, and summoning them to climb down from his throne and take up their proper responsibilities in looking after his world. Having been defeated as rebels, they now can be reconciled as subjects. They do not own the world. They do not hold the keys to death and hell. They [...], being essentially of ‘this age’, do not hold final authority over those who belong already to the ‘age to come’.” [Wright, 123]

Our call is not to hate them. It is to see how they are just like us if we were left to ourselves, and to extend the offer of Christ to them, just as Christ and his offer were extended to us.

And so, in these ways, Paul urges us not to abandon what we have received, but to continue to walk in Christ, and to live our lives in the new social landscape he has delivered us to.

Conclusion

When God brought Israel out of slavery from Egypt, in a shocking turn of events, the Israelites began to long to go back. They wanted to return to their slavery. They wanted to go back to how things were.

We can read that story and be baffled. But Paul here reminds us that we are not so different.

Christ has given us great riches in the gospel. He has delivered us to a new spiritual landscape, a new moral landscape, and a new social landscape.

Our call is to resist the temptation to return to our old spiritual slavery, our old moral indebtedness, and our old social antagonisms.

Instead, Paul calls us to walk in Christ, just as we have received him: “rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.”

Amen.

This sermon draws on material from:

Leithart, Peter J. *Delivered from the Elements of the World: Atonement, Justification, Mission*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016.

Lewis, C.S. *The Screwtape Letters*. New York, NY: Touchstone, 1961. 1996 Edition.

Moo, Douglas J. *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary Series. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008.

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