

14. A GOD'S EYE-VIEW

Colossians 2v9-15

Some of you might have seen the BBC documentary last weekend called 'James May on the Moon'. Well, he didn't actually get to the moon, but he did fly in an American U-2 spy plane used for "high altitude reconnaissance". At 13 miles above the earth you need a space suit because you have less than 5% of normal air pressure. As May looked down on the earth, like others before him he gasped in wonder and searched for superlatives and he spluttered something about – if only everyone had this view of our beautiful, fragile world it would change everything.

US pilots over Iraq don't have that view but I came across an interesting quote from one of them, a Lt. Col. Pete Gertsen. He was talking about how the focus of US air activity has shifted from dropping bombs to looking for road bombs, obstructions, ambush sites and insurgents giving U.S. troops "a God's-eye view of what's on the ground".

Our text this morning also gives us a God's eye view, not so much of earth but of what He has been doing on the earth. We see His perspective on Jesus, of those of us who believe, and finally the cross. But the backcloth is a very different eye-view of each one. A purely human perspective comes to different conclusions about each of these things and is fundamentally opposed to God's perspective.

1. God's Eye-View of Jesus (v9)

Here we have, in new language, what has been stated earlier about Jesus in 1v15 "*He is the image of the invisible God*" and 1v19, "*God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him*". Now we have it spelled out even more clearly. **v9: For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.**

There were plenty of half divine and half human gods worshipped in the Greek world. But *Jesus was not a demi-god!* Tom Wright, Bishop of Durham says: "*Jesus was and is not simply a fully human being (though he is); not simply a man remarkably "full of God" (though he's that as well). He was and is the bodily form taken by God himself, God in all his fullness.*" But this is so different from a whole variety of opinions expressed about Jesus.

In the early centuries some teachers insisted that Jesus was not unique, that he was just the latest of many manifestations of God. And many contested the claim that Jesus was fully God and fully human. For instance, there were groups who denied *the humanity of Jesus*

- Docetics (from Greek *dokeo*, to seem) said Jesus only seemed human but he wasn't really.
- Gnostics maintained Jesus was spirit not flesh; they viewed the human body as corrupt and detestable and this meant they were repulsed by the thought of a divine being taking on human flesh.

- Apollinaris, the Bishop of Laodicea in the later 4th century, said Jesus had a human body but not a human mind and soul - the divine *logos* took the place of Christ's human mind.
- Eutyches of Constantinople in the early 5th century said Christ had only one nature – a *mixture* of the human and divine. So Jesus was neither truly man nor truly God but a hybrid of the two natures; this effectively denied Christ's full humanity and his full deity.

There were also groups who denied *the divinity of Jesus*

- Ebionists said Jesus was the human offspring of Mary and Joseph but divinely appointed.
- Adoptionism taught that Jesus was born an ordinary man but that God conferred divine power on him at his baptism.
- Arius, an elder in the Alexandrian church, caused an almighty stir in the 4th century when he said that Jesus was not fully God. He argued that that the Son was different in essence from the Father; Jesus was therefore a created being and not co-eternal with the Father. So the Father alone was God. Jehovah's Witnesses teach this still today.

But the Bible presents Jesus as a real and full human being who embodies or "incarnates" the fullness of divinity. **In Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.**

Is this all academic or is it crucial to the gospel? This is what Peter Lewis writes in his wonderful book 'The Glory of Christ.' *"If Jesus of Nazareth is not God in our humanity, then God has not come to us; God has not shared out pain and borne our guilt; God has neither spoken the final word as necessary for our peace nor done the final deed necessary for our justification. If Jesus of Nazareth is not God in our humanity, then neither Jesus nor God is our Saviour and the hope of the world."*

And, oh yes, there is something else here we could easily miss. Paul uses *the present tense* when he writes **in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives** (not "lived"!) **in bodily form.** So, this is *still true!* What was begun in the past is continuing in the present. Jesus was the Word who became flesh - and He still is! Even now, in glory, Christ is both fully man and fully God. We now have a great high priest in heaven who is not only fully God but fully man.

2. God's Eye-View of Believers (v10)

v10: you have been given fullness in Christ who is the Head over every power and authority. Because Jesus Christ is the fullness of God and has the place of supremacy over all things, every believer shares in His fullness. The New English Bible translates this: *"in him you have been brought to completion."* The Message paraphrase puts it like this: *"When you come to him, that fullness comes together for you too."* You are complete in Christ.

This was not what other people were telling new believers. They were saying it wasn't enough to believe in Jesus and be born again - you had to add other things. Some were teaching Gentile converts that they had embrace lots of

Jewish law and ceremony. Others were saying that to get to God you had to go through angelic intermediaries. Others were suggesting that the church combine the gospel with the secret knowledge offered by mystery religions. Paul says, “No!” **You have been given fullness in Christ**

Through the centuries there have been variations on the same theme: yes, you’ve put your trust in Jesus – but you must also perform certain rituals, pray to saints, pay for indulgences, keep the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount, observe Sunday like a Sabbath, tithe your income, achieve a certain standard of holiness, be teetotal, be baptized in the Spirit and speak in tongues, and attend lots of church meetings! Phew! Paul fights against all this tooth and nail. **You have been given fullness in Christ.** You are complete in Christ. Some people need this reinforced for other reasons.

For instance, single people. We sometimes hear loose talk about being only half a person until you are married – but when you meet your soul mate you become a whole person. This is not biblical teaching. This is not what the creation of Eve is about in Genesis 2. It is not what “one flesh” means in Christian marriage. The idea of only being half a person until married originates in Greek mythology with Zeus, the chief of the Greek pantheon of gods, who cut mankind in half and destined each one to be incomplete until they found their other half. This has nothing to do with biblical theology. You are complete in Christ, whether you are married or single. In fact, you can be married and incomplete if you are not in Christ. And you can certainly be single and a complete person.

Every Christian is complete in Christ. I like this sentence in Dick Lucas’ exposition of Colossians: *“In Christ we have all that can be ours this side of heaven.”* It reminds me of this story. At the beginning of the 20th century a Scotsman travelled to Liverpool to set out on a journey by sea to America. The ticket cost him just about all he had, so he decided to economise on food on the journey. He bought a supply of crackers and cheese. But during the voyage, the sea air made him hungry; and the damp made his crackers soft and his cheese hard! At last, he asked a steward how much one good square meal would cost; the steward looked at his ticket and said, *“Sir, all meals are included in the price of the ticket”*. He could have eaten heartily every mealtime! Instead he had existed on soft crackers and dry cheese. The resources we have in Christ are more than sufficient to meet our every need. Everything is included in the price He paid, so that: *“In Christ we have all that can be ours this side of heaven.”*

3. God’s Eye-View of the Cross. (v11-15)

But how can God look on us and see us complete? Much of the time it doesn’t feel like that does it? We still struggle with sin. We stumble and we fail. We wish we prayed more. We keep our head down when we should declare our faith in Jesus. It doesn’t feel like we are complete. Yet this is the way God views us now - because of Jesus, and what He has done on the cross.

A human perspective on the cross is very different. When Jesus died it looked like a triumph for his enemies. And when the early Christians preached about the cross it was a difficult message because crucifixion was such a disgusting subject. It was *“a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles”*. In the west today the cross is a repugnant message to many.

But in a series of four rapid-fire metaphors (in verses 11-15) Paul gives God’s perspective on the cross. **v11:In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ**. This is clearly an answer to the Judaisers who wanted new believers to be circumcised, saying they were not complete until they were. No! The real surgery you needed was not circumcision, but the more radical surgery of the cutting out of your sinful nature so you can belong to God. This, Jesus did for us by dying on the cross.

v12,13: having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. Elsewhere Paul writes: *“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.”* From God’s perspective your old sinful self is now dead and has been buried, and you have the resurrection life of Jesus living in you now. A friend who leads a church in South London told me about the baptism of a young woman in their church. She lived across the road from their building and was a “together” kind of person. She had a good job and happy family life. At the weekly “Mothers and Toddlers” she saw something in the Christians that she knew she didn’t have and became hungry for God. She began to come on Sundays and gave her life to Christ and grew and flourished as a new believer. When she was baptised, her husband, a roofer, reluctantly came along. But he spoke to one of the church leaders afterwards and these were his words: *“As I saw her baptised I realised she had died, and had a new life”*. He had seen the reality of his wife’s new life of which her baptism spoke.

v13,14: He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. Your overwhelming debt has been cancelled. Paul is speaking of impossible arrears; a terrible accumulated debt of sin and guilt. Your own handwritten IOU is the evidence against you. But now the IOU has been completely cancelled and nailed to the cross. Jesus has paid the price for your sin. He has redeemed you. When guilt and condemnation plague you, look through God’s eyes at the cross. *“There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”*

Finally, Christ is like a victorious general returning from the battle field. **v15:And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.** The Romans knew how to celebrate triumphs over their enemies. Victorious armies and their generals would march back through Rome parading the spoils of victory – treasures, enemy soldiers disarmed and shackled, and at the end of the line the enemy ruler, stripped and helpless – soon to be executed. At first glance

the cross looked like Jesus had been the victim - defeated, humiliated, paraded and executed. But that is not God's perspective on the cross. Jesus had been the great victor. The cross had disarmed the powers and authorities. Jesus broke the power of sin over your life by His death on the Cross. He is now marching in triumph with defeated enemies chained, stripped, disarmed and trudging behind. Yes, sin and guilt still come against us, but they have no power over us. We now have all that we need in Christ to come through victoriously.

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Each of us has a choice to believe God or follow the prevailing culture - a biblical worldview or a secular worldview. Here is God's perspective on Jesus, you and the cross on the one hand - and a purely human perspective on the other. I know which one I have chosen. Do you?

John Wilthew. June 2009

Message Summary

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- **v11:** On the cross we have a more radical surgery than circumcision - the cutting out of your sinful nature.
- **v12,13:** Your old sinful self is now dead and has been buried, and you have the resurrection life of Jesus living in you now.
- **v13,14:** Your overwhelming debt has been completely cancelled and nailed to the cross.
- **v15:** Christ is like a victorious general returning from the battle field.

Each of us has a choice to believe God or follow the prevailing culture. Here is God's perspective on Jesus, you and the cross on the one hand - and a purely human perspective on the other.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

Is there anything from Sunday's message you particularly want to pick up on or talk about?

Jesus: Why is the issue of Christ's full humanity and full deity of crucial importance and not just of academic interest for theologians?

Believers: What "extras" are sometimes heaped on us which can rob us of the great truth that God sees us as complete in Christ? Have you had to face such things yourself?

The Cross: What practical difference will it make to us to look at the cross from God's point of view using the four metaphors in verses 11-15.

1. Circumcision – radical surgery
2. Death – dying with Christ
3. Debt cancelled – sins forgive
4. Victorious general – God's enemies vanquished