

Text: Colossians 2:6-15. *Sixth Sunday after Pentecost.* July 2, 2015.

**In Christ, God Has Made You
ALIVE!**

Jesus did not come to make *bad* people *good*.

He came to make *dead* people *alive*.

Likewise, **God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him.**

Dear friends,

(John 3:17)

Well, it's already July, the Brewers are in last place... so whatever can we look forward to? Not school. Not yet. Of course the answer... is FOOTBALL. The great American gridiron! Go Packers. Go Badgers. Go local high school football team! At the mere mention of FOOTBALL, does not adrenaline surge through your veins?!? Don't you just want to tackle someone? Even if football is like Facebook for you – maybe it's NOT your thing – you still have to admit the frenzy that settles over our dear dear family and friends every fall. Nothing quite like that pigskin soaring through the crisp, autumn air, a perfect spiral, into the end zone... touchdown! Football fever... is coming! SO **FEEL ALIVE!!!** Do you feel alive?!?

You know, NBC made an entire TV series that revolved around a fictional high school football team in Texas. It was called "Friday Night Lights," and it became pretty popular. I've only seen one or two episodes, but there's a phrase that comes from "Friday Night Lights." The football team would use this phrase to get psyched up before the big game, or to refuel at halftime. Here's the phrase. Ready?

"Clear eyes. Full hearts. Can't lose!"

CLEAR EYES. FULL HEARTS. CAN'T LOSE!!!

Now if that doesn't make you feel ALIVE... I don't know what will!

Of course I'm joking a little bit. We can't always rely on any pre-game speech or inspirational quote to keep us going, 24/7. But I *will* use this catchy, emotional chant from "Friday Night Lights" in the context of Colossians, chapter 2. And what's more, we are not putting on helmets and pads to go play some football game. Instead, we're putting on the power of God, given to us in the Gospel. We're strapping on real strength whose source is the Spirit of God. As we've learned and re-learned in the past few weeks, we're putting on our unstoppable identity, which is **Christ** himself. And with Christ at the head, we go off to fight a greater battle, a life-and-death struggle that we need not be afraid of.

The completeness and FULLNESS of Christ ought to equip us like an athlete who strikes the perfect balance between being *humbly prepared* and being *confident in victory*. Let today's verses from Colossians serve as a warning to keep perspective, to have "CLEAR EYES" in the face of all opponents. Let God's Word today serve as a reminder that in Jesus we are complete: we have "FULL HEARTS." And best of all, let the Apostle Paul announce the guarantee of victory we have in Christ, who has canceled all our sins. He's forgiven us completely and fully! So we "CAN'T LOSE!"

The Colossian Christians were under such severe spiritual attack... it was like they had entered an athletic contest against several opponents at once. They never should have agreed to this game in the first place. Because each one of their crafty adversaries used variations of the same approach. Every hollow and deceptive philosophy fell under this nasty umbrella called... "*Gnosticism*". Gnosticism is spelled out for you in the worship folder. Basically, it means *knowledge*. And not just a healthy, innocent knowledge that joyfully acknowledges *Jesus as Lord*. It was this "secret knowledge" invented by men, a secret knowledge couched in the academic traditions of smart scholars and philosophers. And most of these false teachers... for that's what they were... couldn't just be *fine with Jesus*. Jesus didn't fill them up exactly like they expected or wanted, so they became Gnostics needing something more...

There are fine people like you & me who sometimes can't just be *FINE* with Jesus. We may not call ourselves Gnostics, but often in our weakness and sin, don't we feel the need to add a few wrinkles to our faith?

Maybe my faith seems too simple, too childish. Perhaps I need to supplement my biblical beliefs with a popular series of self-help volumes. *"What? I found these books in the Christian book store."* Ok, fine. But do you compare the content of those books to ***the Word of God*** as you read?

Or maybe my faith is too boring and needs a makeover. *"You know, many Christian churches have altered their stance on marriage. Isn't it about time we get with the program and adjust the way we teach the Bible?"* Well, Jesus is actually pretty clear about marriage. Even clearer, he forgives every sin, whether that sin is a homosexual desire, a mean thing you said, or just plain laziness.

As a young football player must keep his eyes open and CLEAR, knees bent and ready to rise up out of his stance to make an important play... so also God's people – you and I – must keep our eyes CLEAR to see the utterly EMPTY philosophies around us that threaten to add to our faith in Christ, or even replace Him. Friends, do you have CLEAR EYES? → If the teaching is not based on Jesus, if it's not in line with Scripture, Paul says, ***"See to it that no one takes you captive!"*** Notice Paul doesn't say *"be blissfully ignorant!"* He doesn't say *"don't ever talk to your kids about false teaching, because it's gonna corrupt them!"*

No. ***See to it that no one takes you captive.***

Literally, let no one else besides Jesus run off with you. Let no one besides Jesus transform you into their treasure. Let no one deceive you into some pseudo-religious scheme or special club. And Satan will certainly come alluring. Satan will advocate for individuals and opportunities that would seem to advance your knowledge and status. A small stream of quick, clean cash over here. A promotion over here, that would certainly enhance our image within the company, even community. And our overall PROFILE would seem to benefit from these sorts of things...

But at day's end, you might ask yourself, "Do all these empty pursuits make me feel more ALIVE?!!" You might ask yourself if "running the hamster wheel" is worth it – is it worth it to try to keep pace with the world's current trends, all its changing schools of thought... and to keep pace in every area of life? Is that even possible?!?

Thankfully, NO. And I'll say it again, thankfully Jesus did not come to make *bad* people *good*. Neither did he come to make *sufficiently saved* people *extra-saved* through some secret knowledge. No, Jesus simply came to make *dead* people *alive*. He has already jolted your deadbeat heart awake and ALIVE, and has filled your whole self with LIFE, and to the FULL!! For ***when you were dead in your sins, God made you ALIVE with Christ.*** What really do we NEED to fill up our hearts when they're already FULL? FULL HEARTS in Christ.

For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ. Friends! We're already FULL in CHRIST. We have all we need or could ever want in Him. When the *-isms* start coming fast, whether it be Gnosticism, communism, capitalism, feminism, legalism, post-modernism, we can face these empty *-isms* with hearts already FULL of Jesus. Simply be AWARE – CLEAR EYES – be ready to defend your faith, and plow ahead with HEARTS ALREADY FULL IN CHRIST. And we are FULL of life in Him.

"Why can we be full in Christ?" "How do we have FULL HEARTS?" Go back a couple weeks when we studied the bigness and the enormity of Jesus. **All God's fullness dwells in Jesus.** Knowing that Jesus is already big, then look at the first two verses of today's text. ***So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.*** When Paul says "continue to live your lives in him," he uses a word that

literally means to “walk around.” To explore the endless reaches and depths. So, he’s expressing a truth that we have in Christ. We have the freedom—and the Gospel command—to essentially “walk around in Jesus,” to explore the person of our Savior, Jesus. To constantly fill ourselves up in Him, because we are already IN Him. Notice, it doesn’t say “live your lives” TO GET to Jesus, but live IN Him, because our hearts are already full IN Him.

Maybe picture it this way. You are in the championship game. Or perhaps it’s just a big day, a significant milestone. Maybe it’s Graduation Day, maybe it’s your 50th wedding anniversary!!! The point is... you’ve come this far, through joys and sorrows, through practice and perseverance, through sin and forgiveness, and now... WHAT’S NEXT??

God has not brought you this far – he has not made you ALIVE in Christ so that you can suddenly reach back for something empty. When he has you already FULL in Christ, there is no need to look back with regret. In fact, you don’t even need any trophy, diploma, or standing ovation. No, you simply rejoice because your heart is already FULL of God’s greatest blessing, the blessing of being made ALIVE in Christ. God has done it. So you gladly live your life and “walk around” in Christ.

You are able to do this not by some sheer athleticism or will power, but by the power of the Spirit... in Christ you can shake off your old, sinful self.

When Jesus died – sounds strange – **we also died**. Not physically, not two thousand years ago, but through the Spirit’s power at our baptism. Through the same washing-away of our sins that Jesus announced when he died to save us from all our sins.

And of course, we do not and will not **stay dead**, just as Christ never stayed dead. **We were also raised with him through our faith in Him**. And this time, our resurrection will be quite literal. Just as Christ came back to life, we will also rise to spiritual and physical life. Death may visit every person of history – sin & death will even cut short the careers and lives of powerful football players who were once legends in their youth and heyday. Yet death itself will not keep the CLEAR EYES of God’s children closed, nor will it stop the FULL, beating HEARTS of all believers who belong to Christ.

This guarantee is as good as clinching a championship victory. Moreover, the amazing things that God does for us in Christ allow us to chant, “CAN’T LOSE.” Because **God made you alive in Christ**, we just can’t lose. We just can’t, and we absolutely won’t. Why? Our guilt is gone, and **it was nailed to the cross along with our Jesus**. All those empty idols that we thought might make us fuller and better... **God takes those away from us... nails them to the cross**. All of our dead thoughts, all our less-than-lively words and actions that emerge from our frail hearts, **God literally takes the whole pile of those sins, takes them away, and nails them all to the cross**. He doesn’t just shove them under the bed, or smear over them with partial forgiveness. He tears through each one of our sins, nails it to the cross, and remembers it no more.

Remember Good Friday? As with a written certificate of debt that no longer applies, Christ takes the “IT IS FINISHED” stamp and absolutely **cancel**s our record of sin. It’s totally gone. We now say with all peace, joy, relief, and confidence, “CAN’T LOSE.”

A guy named John Chrysostom couldn’t lose, even as a Byzantine empress Eudoxia threatened him with banishment if he held to his belief and preaching in Christ:

Chrysostom declared: *“You cannot banish me, for this world is my Father’s house.”*

When the empress threatened to take his life, Chrysostom replied, *“No, you cannot kill me, for my life is hidden with Christ in God.”*

When the empress said, *“I will take your treasures,”*

Chrysostom answered, *“No, you cannot, for my treasure is in heaven and my heart is there.”*

Finally, the empress threatened to drive him away from his friends so he would have no one left. To which Chrysostom said, *“No, you cannot, for I have a Friend in heaven from whom you cannot separate me. I defy you, for there is nothing you can do to harm me.”*

Friends, you can feel ALIVE in Christ, and even if you don't “feel” it, you ARE ALIVE in Him. God has made you ALIVE in Christ, who forgave you your sins when he nailed them all to the cross – Amen.