

THAT'S MY KING!

Colossians 1:9-20

We have a plan for life, thanks to King Jesus!

A sermon preached by
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This week we had a funeral for Dr. Ron Powell. I'm sure he was a friend to some of you. Ron grew up in very humble circumstances in Oklahoma, graduated from Oklahoma State, served in the Army during the Vietnam era, and then came back and earned a veterinary degree. For the rest of his adult life until he retired, he juggled doing veterinarian work for the USDA and serving in the Air Force reserves. He was also faithful to his God and to his church.

Ron and his wife Cheryl had two boys, and he was a good family man. One thing I learned from his family was that Ron was a "vacation ninja." They always had family vacations that were planned like military operations. Ron was organized to a fault, and he had a military background, and that's how he planned the trips they took when his boys were growing up. Ron would make reservations for each night and each event months in advance. He would draw maps and plot travel times from one destination to the next so no time would be wasted. Before the trip, he would print out itineraries and give to each family member so they would all know what to expect on vacation.

Not everyone does vacations like that. Some people sort of vaguely decide which direction to head—mountains or beach maybe—and they take off. Finding a place to stay every night, stopping whenever something looks interesting, sometimes just relaxing and doing nothing—that's all part of the adventure.

I'm sort of a hybrid of the two styles. I like to have a plan; I like to make reservations, especially for the big things. But I also like to relax, lie on the beach, camp in the hills, spend a few days not doing much. But I think it would have been fascinating, at least once, to go on vacation with Ron Powell and to see how one maximizes vacation time. With Ron, there was always a plan.

With Paul, there was always a plan. Even in the introductory parts of his letters, there is not a wasted word. Everything is full of meaning. Letters in the ancient world usually began with a salutation, a word of thanksgiving, and a prayer for the well-being of the recipient. That was just formality. But Paul uses even these perfunctory words to communicate the gospel, to set

up the message he would then communicate in the body of the letter, and sometimes to gig his opponents in the process.

So here in the beginning of the letter to the Colossians, we find some very meaningful words. Colossians is written to a church that Paul did not start and did not know personally, but he felt responsibility for their growth and progress. The problem was that some false teachers had worked their way into the church, and Paul sent a letter to try to correct these false ideas. So he begins the letter with a greeting and a thanksgiving for the good reports he has heard about the church. Then Paul prays that, contrary to the false ideas they have been hearing, they will be “*filled with the knowledge of God’s will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.*”¹ In other words, that they will get back to the right path. The purpose is simple but profound: “*so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him.*”² Paul has a plan, and the plan produces a life that is worthy of the Lord. This is the kind of life we all want to have, right? So what’s the plan?

First, the plan is to grow and bear fruit for God: “*as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God.*”³ A life that is worthy of God is growing spiritually and bearing fruit. In Galatians, Paul identifies the kind of fruit he is talking about: “*The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.*”⁴ This is where the knowledge of God leads us.

The second part of the plan for a worthy life is strength: “*May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience.*”⁵ Paul knows that being filled with the knowledge of God’s will produces strength to overcome obstacles, defeat difficulties, and endure the trials of life. This is a recurrent theme in his writings, like in the Letter to the Ephesians: “*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power.*”⁶ A life worthy of God is strong and patient. Most of us are still working on that, especially the patience part.

And finally, Paul says the worthy life is full of joy and thanksgiving: “*while joyfully giving thanks to the Father.*”⁷ This is the good life, the abundant life that God wants us to have. When we have it, we are filled with joy and gratitude. This is not a new idea, either. In the earliest letter we

have from Paul, I Thessalonians, he includes this in his closing words of advice: “*Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*”⁸

So there, in two short verses, is a plan for life. Not a word is wasted. Grow and bear fruit. Be strong and patient in trials. Rejoice and give thanks. What good does this kind of life do? What is the outcome of the plan?

Next words: “*giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light.*”⁹ Our inheritance is the heavenly kingdom of God. Paul describes believers as joint heirs with Christ, eventually coming to reign with Jesus forever in eternity. Peter also gives witness with these words: “*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.*”¹⁰

In addition to the inheritance, we are rescued from the powers of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of light: “*He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son.*”¹¹ The false teachers in Colossae had all these weird ideas about kingdoms of darkness and light and supernatural powers that could entrap your soul. Paul is saying that God has taken us out of all that and put us in a new place through God’s Son Jesus.

Finally, the outcome of this life worthy in the Lord is redemption and forgiveness: “*the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*”¹² Forgiveness means our sins are wiped away; redemption means that we were slaves to sin, but God has bought our freedom through the sacrifice of Jesus. This is incredible news!

I have stayed very close to Scripture this morning because I want to demonstrate how Paul does not waste a word, and that even these words we often pass over are full of meaning for us today. Here’s the plan: we can have a life worthy of the Lord, producing fruit and growing, strong and patient in the face of trials, joyful and grateful for all God’s blessings. Here is the outcome: a life free and forgiven, transferred from darkness to light,

promised an inheritance in God's heavenly kingdom. How does this happen? Through Jesus! Only through Jesus! Jesus is the One who makes it happen. He is the Heir of the promise; he is the Redeemer of our pain; he is the King of Light!

Paul gets so excited at this point that he begins to sing! Colossians 1:15-20 are the words of a pre-existing song or liturgy that the Colossians probably used in their worship. Paul sticks in a few extra words to make his point clear, but basically he bursts into a song of praise to Jesus: "*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.*"¹³ Kind of catchy, isn't it?

Who is this Jesus who is worthy of our praise? He is the image of God, God come to earth, the Incarnation. In him all the fullness of God has taken up residence. Jesus is the Creator before all time; John says, "*In the beginning was the Word, ...and the Word was God. ...All things came into being through him.*"¹⁴ Jesus is the Sustainer of all creation, the cohesive force in the universe. Jesus is the head of the body, which is the church. By his death and resurrection, he opened up eternal life as a hope and reality for us. Through Jesus God reconciled all things to himself and made peace with the powers of evil, sin, and death. That's my Jesus! That's my Lord, my Savior, my King!

This Sunday is Christ the King Sunday in our church year or liturgical calendar. It's the last Sunday of the church year; next Sunday we begin the cycle again with Advent. So on the last Sunday of the liturgical year, we celebrate the Lordship and the Kingdom of Christ. It's kind of the Big Finish, the coronation ceremony in worship.

The last real coronation we saw in the English-speaking world was the coronation of Elizabeth II as Queen of England in 1953. She has been Queen for 66 years! Millions around the world watched on black-and-white TV as royalty gathered, regiments marched, and crowds observed as the entourage processed into Westminster Abbey. Elizabeth wore a silk and velvet cloak. The choir sang a selection from the Psalms. She was handed the royal orb (made of gold, jewels, pearls), the scepter (studded with diamonds and sapphires), and the royal ring (of sapphire, ruby and fourteen diamonds). Then St. Edward's Crown (velvet with 444 precious stones) was placed on her head. She was given dozens of titles (Her Majesty, Head of the Commonwealth, Defender of the Faith, and so forth). Everyone, including her mother, swore allegiance to her and sang "God Save the Queen." She rode away in a golden carriage. Royalty and dignitaries from all over the world rejoiced.¹⁵

Contrast the coronation procession of Jesus. It was not nearly so pretty. He carried his own cross not to a church but to the place of the Skull. He was stripped of his modest garments and mocked. One title, "King of the Jews," was nailed to his cross as a joke. No choir sang, but Jesus screamed words from Psalm 22, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*"¹⁶ His hands held not an orb or ring but nails. His scepter was a soldier's lance that pierced his side. His crown was made of thorns. His mother wept in sorrow. Mockers cried, "Save yourself!" He left the cross not in a golden carriage, but carried in the arms of a few friends and laid in a borrowed tomb. The rulers rejoiced because they thought they were done with him.

But at the conclusion of the coronation of Elizabeth II almost 2,000 years after Jesus, she knelt in Westminster Abbey and removed her crown. She bowed her head and took Communion, tasting the body and blood of our Lord, showing the world who the real King is.

God has a plan for our lives. The worthy life is a life of growth and strength and joy and gratitude. The plan has an outcome. We are heirs of God. We are rescued and redeemed and forgiven. The Center of the plan is Jesus Christ—our Creator, Sustainer and Redeemer, the Savior of the world. That's my King! (Close with video "That's my King!" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZKsN-AeqJP0>)

¹ Colossians 1:9.

² Colossians 1:10.

³ Colossians 1:10.

⁴ Galatians 5:22f.

⁵ Colossians 1:11.

⁶ Ephesians 6:10.

⁷ Colossians 1:12.

⁸ I Thessalonians 5:16-18.

⁹ Colossians 1:12.

¹⁰ I Peter 1:3-4.

¹¹ Colossians 1:13.

¹² Colossians 1:14.

¹³ Colossians 1:15-20.

¹⁴ John 1:1-2.

¹⁵ James Howell, <https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/9952/weekly-preaching-christ-the-king-sunday>.

¹⁶ Matthew 27:46.