

Camelback Bible Church



Dr. Tim Savage, Senior Pastor  
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## ***HEARTS FIT FOR THE INDWELLING CHRIST***

The Plan: Reclaiming All Things for God's Glory (Part 7)  
*Colossians 1:11-14, 21-23*

Have you ever heard of something so good you doubt whether it's true?

Such as a new kind of ice cream that shrinks your waistline. Oh that can't be true! Or the announcement of a vaccine that cures every kind of cancer. Oh that can't be true! Or the possibility of being filled up with all the fullness of God. Oh that can't be true!

But the last one is true. We learned last week in our Bibles, from the quill of the apostle Paul writing under inspiration of God himself, Ephesians 3:19, that as Christians we can actually be filled up with all the fullness of God. In fact, that's God's plan: to fill us up with who he is.

And we've learned who he is.

He is the ultimate self-emptying One. He is infinitely self-emptying. His glory and holiness is displayed in this one resplendent trait: he pours himself out into others.

For all eternity the Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, have been defined by their capacity to pour themselves out into each other. Now this same outpouring love defines humans made to image the love of the triune God.

And yet we have sullied that image. Instead of being self-giving we have become self-grasping, bringing down on our heads a thousand curses as a result. But God will not allow his plan to be defeated and in an act of self-giving quantum-leaps beyond any self-giving act in history, he sends a member of his own family into the world, indeed, his only Son, to dwell in our hearts so that we, through him, might become self-giving, selflessly loving others with the very love of Christ.

This is something so good you almost doubt whether it's true. Could I really become someone as loving as Jesus, someone so perfectly selfless, someone so supernaturally good?

Paul says – "I pray you'd have the strength to comprehend the breadth and the length and the height and the depth of the love of Christ so that you may be filled up with all the fullness of God. I pray you have the strength to comprehend it, because I don't think you realize how true it can be."

It's hard to look at ourselves in the way Paul is describing because when we look at ourselves we usually do so in terms of performance. How I perform in life determines who I am. And since many of us are disappointed with our performances, we don't feel very full.

Filled with all the fullness of God? How can that be true?

I talk with people every week who are filled the opposite of the fullness of God. Such as people who are filled with self-loathing. They don't like where they're at in life. Even Christians. They don't like who they are. They've done a lot of stupid things in life, made lots of mistakes, hurt many people, fallen short of expectations, squandered opportunities, lost money, missed dreams, become ill. Their performance, perhaps your performance, leaves you not feeling very full, instead pretty empty, often depressed.

And maybe you're expecting me this morning to chase away your personal demons and make you feel good about yourself. I can't do that. It wouldn't be honest. I can't change your performance. And how you've performed in life determines who you are. I can't change that.

In fact I have to tell you, it's worse than you think. If you think *you're* upset with your performance, God is even more so because what we've done in life, what we've all done, is to try to run our own lives as though we were our own gods. That puts us at enmity with the true God, as you would expect when we try to usurp his position in our lives. It makes him angry, as we read earlier – *The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness* (Romans 1:18). And what could be more ungodly than de-godding the God of our lives. It makes him angry.

So I cannot chase away your personal demons. I can only add to them the white hot anger of God.

What makes it even worse is that our sin and God's anger disqualifies us as recipients of the indwelling Christ. Everything we've been talking about in The Plan – how we need new hearts, self-giving hearts instead of self-grasping hearts, hearts that can be ours only when the ultimately self-giving One, Jesus Christ, comes and lives inside of us, reproducing his love at the core of our beings – is impossible when the heart is corrupt, when it is an object of God's wrath. You can't put something so pure as Christ's love into a contaminated vessel.

### **We Are All Contaminated**

*We have all sinned and fall short of the glory of God* (Romans 3:23). By the way, we now know that the glory of God is not only some distant future glory, the glory of heaven which will one day be ours as Christians. It is also a present glory. We have fallen short of the glory of the self-giving love of Jesus. Because of our sin, because we want to be our own God, we have fallen short of the glory of God, we have fallen short of replicating the triune love of God through the expression of the infinite love of Christ who dwells within us.

How I perform determines who I am? Indeed. I have performed as someone who neglects God and that sin has made me who I am – someone who angers God and who is disqualified from being filled with all the fullness of God.

*Oh wretched man that I am!* says Paul, *who will rescue me from this body of death?* (Romans 7:24). I do the very things I don't want to do and the things I do want to do I don't do.

I wonder how many churches will read that verse this morning. Oh wretched people that we are! Who will rescue us from this body of death? You would risk emptying the church pretty quickly, I think, if you read that.

But I want you to know what comes in the very next phrase – *Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!* (Romans 7:25). And in the very next phrase he says – *There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus* (Romans 8:1).

What?! I condemn myself for all the sinful things of my past, for failing to reach God's expectations. And God condemns me for my performance in regard to him. I've neglected him trying to be the god of my own life.

What's this about Paul saying, *there's now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus?!* I don't get it! No, I wouldn't get it. It's anchored in logic too sublime for human minds. Something we'd never dream up on our own. It's something only a God of unlimited self-giving love could ever have conceived. A way to get rid of our dirt and make us habitable for his Son. A way to cleanse us. A way to propitiate his anger. A way to forgive us. A way to set us free from our sins.

What's this? It's Jesus not only as the end of our salvation, coming to live in us, but also as the means of our salvation, putting us right so that he *can* live in us.

It all has to do with Jesus and his cleansing blood.

### **We Can All Be Cleansed**

Look with me at Colossians 1:11 – *May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy.* It sounds like last week when we read about Paul praying that his people would be strengthened to comprehend who they are in Christ and now he's at it again.

*May you be strengthened with all power.* Why? Verse 12 – *so that you give thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.* Dirty vessels that we are, we were disqualified, but God steps into the picture and he qualifies those who were disqualified, qualifies us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

How does he do it? Look at verse 13 – *He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

He removed us from one domain, a Christ-less domain, and put us into another domain, a Christ-filled domain. How? By redemption, Paul says here, which means by purchasing us back for himself, by paying for our sins.

And how'd he do that? Verse 21 – *And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind* [yeah that's us, alienated from God by our hostile minds. But you might object, "I was never hostile to God. I've always been an advocate of God." Well if you've ever tried to run your life in your own way, you're hostile to the One whose control over your life you've tried to usurp.] *And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he (God) has now reconciled in his (Jesus') body of flesh by his (Jesus') death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him (God).*

Did you get that? We were once alienated and hostile towards God. We have now been reconciled to God by the only way that he could've done it, a way by which he can present us to himself as holy and blameless and above reproach.

That reconciles us to God: by being holy and blameless, above reproach. And, yet, as we have learned, that's not who we are. Just look at our performance. We're not holy and blameless, we're not above reproach. How can we be presented as people who we're not?

This is so wonderful. What happens as a result of the death of Jesus has been applied to us. Look at verse 22 – *He (God) has now reconciled you in his (Jesus') body of flesh (his human body) **by his death.***

Something happened in the death of Jesus that changes who we are, that works to declare us holy and blameless above reproach, that forgives our sins, that propitiates God's anger (Romans 3), that declares us just (2 Corinthians 5), that cancels the debt of trespasses that stood against us (Colossians 2), that sets us free (Romans 8), that saves us from our sins (Ephesians 2), that gives us eternal life (John 3), that qualifies us to share in the inheritance of the astonishing blessing of Christ coming to dwell in us. All this happens through the death of Jesus.

How?

### **The Great Exchange**

You could call it the great exchange. Christ took who we are onto himself, becoming our sin, and gave us who he is, completely righteous.

Listen to the way Paul puts it in 2 Corinthians 5:20 – *I implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.* On what grounds, Paul, can we be reconciled? We are enemies of God. Our performance has made us hostile in mind towards God. How can we suddenly be reconciled to

God? Paul continues in verse 21 – *For our sake he (God) made him (Jesus) to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

Jesus took our performance, sin, and paid sin's penalty, death, even death on a cross; appeasing God's anger over sin and commuting to us his performance, the righteousness of God, so that now we are no longer condemned. *There is now therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus* (Romans 8:1).

### **Christ's Performance Absolves Us of Our Performance**

This changes everything. The work of Christ on the cross changes the most fundamental thing about us. ***How we perform no longer determines who we are. Rather, how Christ performed on the cross determines who we are.***

We are righteous, we are holy, we are blameless, we are above reproach as we stand before a perfect God because of what Christ did on the cross. Some have called this a legal fiction. Before the heavenly tribunal, the eternal Judge, we are legally declared something that we are not – innocent, righteous, holy, blameless. Is not this a legal fiction?

There is a sense in which we are still sinners and still sinning, even as Christians. Whoever says he has no sin is a liar, says the apostle John. How then can we be declared righteous before God and be sinning at the same time? Because of Jesus and his death on the cross. Martin Luther's life was changed dramatically when he discovered this truth. He used a Latin phrase to describe it, *Simul Iustus et Peccator*: simultaneously righteous and still a sinner.

This is what God has done to qualify us for the indwelling of Jesus. He has declared us righteous through the shed blood of Jesus, even while we're still sinning. He has declared us habitable by his infinitely loving Son who proved his love by being not only the end of The Plan, filling us with his infinitely loving presence, but also by being the means to the end of The Plan, appeasing God's anger, by dying the death we should have died for the sins we committed and by cleaning us up by exchanging our sin for his righteousness.

Oh what a Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ! It's too good to be true! Actually, it's just the reverse: it's too good not to believe!

Do you believe that on the cross Jesus averted God's wrath by receiving in his person the penalty for sin we ought to have paid, thus taking away your sin and pronouncing you righteous? Believing is key.

Paul says – *By grace you have been saved through faith. And even this faith is not your own doing but the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast* (Ephesians 2:8-9). Even our faith, even our believing, is a gift of God. He is a self-giving God. If you said, "Yes, I believe I have been declared in the right by God through the shed blood of Christ," your faith has been given to you. Even that. It's all God's doing. It's all God's grace, his self-giving love. It had to be. By our sin, we had worked ourselves into an abyss from which we could not extricate

ourselves. Only God could rescue us and by the shed blood of his only Son he did. Do you believe?

Sometimes I ask people, “How’s it going in the Lord?” And they will tell me, “Well, I’m going to church. I’m participating in Bible studies. I’m saying my prayers.” Basically I’m performing and how I perform determines who I am, determines how I’m doing with the Lord.

No it doesn’t. That’s not right, that’s the opposite of right. How Christ performed determines who you are.

This may be the most important thing you’ll ever learn right here. How you perform does not determine who you are. You are not how you perform. Do you believe this? Do you have faith in the saving work of Jesus Christ? If you do, it will change you completely.

Some of you are discouraged today or, if not today, you were yesterday or may be tomorrow. And I know why you’re discouraged. It’s because you aren’t *doing* so well. Maybe your health isn’t doing too well and you’re discouraged. Maybe there’s a key relationship that has really gone south and you’re discouraged. Maybe there’s an expectation that you’ve always cultivated for your life and it hasn’t come true. Maybe it’s a romantic or financial expectation. And that expectation is flagging right now. Or maybe a goal. You thought by this point in your life you’d be doing better financially, socially, physically. It discourages you that you aren’t doing so well.

Let me tell you something. If you’re discouraged, you’re listening to a pack of lies. You’re believing rubbish and I mean rubbish because what you’re believing is turning you into rubbish, somebody useless to God and therefore rubbish. You’re believing voices not coming from God because the last time I checked there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

None. If you are condemning yourself, if you are thinking condemning thoughts of yourself, even if you deserve them, you’re listening to lies. You say, “Well Paul said, ‘Wretched man that I am, who will rescue me from this body of death.’” Yes, but in the very next phrase he was giving thanks to Jesus because there was no condemnation. How much time do you think elapsed between Romans 7:24 and Romans 7:25? Wretched man that I am...thanks be to God, there’s no condemnation! How long did it take? I think he spent about a click of a finger condemning himself and started to revel in the fact that because of the shed blood of Jesus Christ, God looks at him as fully righteous.

Is that the way it is with you? There is no condemnation, only righteousness, holiness, blamelessness, above reproach. If you are looking at yourself in any other way you are not looking at yourself as God looks at you, and he looks at you through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. And if you’re not looking at yourself through the blood of Christ, what use is Christ to you and what use are you to God?!

Precisely, and the devil knows it well. He knows that God has gone to infinite lengths to declare you righteous, sending a member of his triune Family to die on a cross and to qualify you as a habitation of that very member of the Trinity, the infinitely loving Jesus Christ who fills you up with all the fullness of God.

The devil will do everything in his power to keep you from believing it; parading before you all the gaps in your performance, convincing you that you are not much because your performance is not much. But we believe the devil at a great cost to the glory of God. When you are down and despairing who you are and what you haven't accomplished, you are not only wallowing in a lie, you are also useless to the work of God.

Brothers and sisters, hear me out. How you perform does not determine who you are. How Christ performs on your behalf determines who you are. Believe it and it'll change the way you live!

### **Filled With the Fullness of God**

There's one good thing about my dad's death and that is I am able to share stories about his life. When he was alive I couldn't do that. He wouldn't let me. "Just focus on Christ, Tim," he would say. "Well Dad, your life shows Christ," I would respond. "No, no, no," Dad insisted, "talk about Christ."

My dad did a lot of things well. There were also times when he did not perform to his expectations.

He was a land developer. He built residential communities in north San Diego County. There was one piece of raw land that was his favorite. It became known in our family as Batiquitos, the name of the most beautiful tidal lagoon property in North San Diego County. He owned hundreds of acres surrounding this lagoon; and it was a residential bonanza just waiting to happen.

But then the highway system of California decided to put an interstate freeway right through the middle of the property, bisecting it in two. It was called Interstate 5. In court Dad tried to reach a settlement that would properly compensate him for the lost value of his property. The government lawyer was dishonest and an imposed settlement was ultimately made for far less than market value.

Then the voters of California passed an initiative called Proposition 21, enforcing restrictions on the development of all property in the coastal zone. While it is, of course, important to protect environmentally sensitive land, Proposition 21 added many years and many setbacks and many attorneys' fees to the project.

Then just as the architectural drawings were approved and the partners lining up financially, the Savings and Loan crisis hit the Pacific West and all residential development in California ground to a screeching halt which meant, in many ways for my dad, starting over.

Thirty-five years it took my dad to develop that parcel of land. Thirty-five years of setbacks, failed expectations, lost hope, lost money, dialing back family spending, making sacrifices, lost respect, and, doubtless, much introspection. I say "doubtless" because I never heard or saw the introspection.

These thirty-five years that dovetailed perfectly with my childhood, adolescence and early adulthood, and yet I never once saw my Dad deeply discouraged about anything in his life. Not anything. He greeted me every day with a big smile and a big hug. He would say something like, “This is the day the Lord has made, Tim. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.” Never did I know what must have been assaulting his heart. His office door was always left open and he always gave me the impression that seeing me come through that door was the highlight of his day. He always effused joy and perfect contentment. I had no idea what he might be suffering vocationally.

You say, “That’s such a shame. Your dad was not being real.”

On the contrary, I’ve never met a more real person in my life. He began every day with his Bible open, rehearsing the promises of God which he chose to believe were the true representations of reality. Promises that he was righteous before a holy God. Promises that he was indwelled by the infinite love of Jesus Christ. Promises that he was protected and preserved by God through Jesus through all eternity. Promises that *he couldn’t be any fuller than he was because of what Jesus had done for him*. Promises that, because of Jesus, he, my dad, was *all right*.

My dad’s performance didn’t define him. Christ’s performance did. And he chose to believe Christ’s performance did.

Christ’s performance was so much greater than anything my dad could have done in his own strength. It just raised his joy to levels that didn’t allow the difficulties of this life to cause him to despair. My dad believed it. And so can you.

Faith is a gift of God and he can give it to you. You are what Jesus had done for you. And you couldn’t be more than that – filled up with all the fullness of God. You can face anything with contentment in your heart because you are filled with a fullness that no one can take away. Christ’s blood has assured it to be so.

You might ask, then, do I just sit back and revel in the greatness of what God has done for me and be thankful? Yes, but with one caveat – that you are more active in the pursuit of the good than you would have ever been before.

The thing that stops us dead in our tracks is introspection, feeling bad about who we are, lamenting our failures. It sinks our feet into concrete and we don’t go forward for Christ. Stop introspecting, stop despairing. Stop listening to the devil tell you who you are and who you are not. Stop defining yourself on the basis of your performance. Start looking at yourself on the basis of Christ’s performance. And then become active, more active than you’ve ever been before. Do something radical.

When someday you drive north on I-5 and you cross over Batiquitos lagoon and you see the lovely community of homes on both sides of the freeway and you think how rich in the end Bill Savage must have become through this extensive residential development, be aware also of this: that every dollar of profit earned from this project Dad put into a trust whose sole purpose would be to distribute funds to evangelistic Christian ministries throughout the world. He didn’t take a



penny for himself. Why not? After thirty-five years of backbreaking, browbeaten labor? Because he viewed the ultimate success of the project as a gift of God. He also viewed himself as an heir of the unsearchable riches of heaven. Because of the self-giving love of Christ to him, he wanted to image that same love to others.

We don't sit back and adopt a quietistic approach to life, "Oh how wonderful I have it. I'm righteous. I've got Christ in my heart. I'm filled with the fullness of God." If you believe that to be true, you become more active, more radical, more given to the advance of the kingdom of God. You move out for Jesus. To glorify him, to serve him. You say, "He's given me so much, I've got to give my all to him! I've got to take care of the poor. I've got to take care of the immigrants. I've got to take care of the foreigners. I've got to take care of my neighbors. I've got to take care of my wife. I've got the love of Christ in me. I've got to spend it lavishly. I can't resist extending the love of Christ to others!"

Do you know who you are in Christ? You are holy and blameless above reproach. You are filled with all the self-giving love of Jesus, with the fullness of God. You are what Christ has done for you. And that changes what you do. It's all for him, isn't it? It's all for him.

Can I just say before I close, there may be some here this morning who are not aware of the fact that through the blood of Christ you can be declared righteous. Do you have the faith to believe that something so wonderful could actually be true?

Well, no you don't, in yourself. But faith can be given to you by the One who is so good. Ask the Lord, "Give me the faith to believe that Christ is my Savior from sin. That he's filling me with his very own self and that I am now prepared to go out and serve him. Really to be human as God intended humans to be. Imaging his self-giving love."

Trust Jesus this morning to be your Savior from sin. Trust him. If you're having a hard time, say, "Help me to trust you. Give me faith. Help my unbelief. Give me faith."

**[PRAYER]**

Father, you are a great and holy God. We are in awe of what you have done for us, for your glory to be exhibited in us. Father, use Camelback Bible Church, we who are so filled by your grace. Use us to change this world. At least to change pockets of this world. To bring hope to this world. To bring hope where there's despair, life where there's death, peace where there's conflict. All the things that Christ is, may we bring him into this world. We want to move forward in ways, Father, we never have before. Thank you for this new day at Camelback. Thank you for Jesus. In his name we pray, amen.