

Everything for Salvation: Baptism (Col. 2:11-12) | 04.20.14 | Kevin P. Larson | KarisChurch.org

This week, a picture was posted on our our Karis Church Facebook wall from Easter 2009. It showed the baptisms of Kim and Derek. It was from back in our Missouri Theatre days. Kim came our church at the invitation of a friend, a man who would later become her husband. She spent much of her teen years in deep depression. She began cutting herself sometime during that time. Jesus met her. He changed her. Now she's using her gifts for God's glory. She's a wife and mother. Derek came to our church at the invitation of his longtime buddy, Bobby. He was living with his girlfriend at the time, getting drunk and getting stoned, about as prideful of a dude as you could imagine. Now he's one of the most humble guys I've met. He's married with twin girls. He's on the leadership track in our church. Now Jesus is everything to Kim and Derek. Jesus was everything they needed for salvation.

We're in a study through the book of Colossians. Today we come to a passage that's perfect for today. In fact, next week's text is great for Easter, as well. Think of us celebrating His resurrection both Sundays. However, we should be celebrating that every Sunday, right? Today, in **Colossians 2:11-12**, we see hope and freedom. Because He was raised, we can be raised. **In Him, we can be raised, freed from the power of sin, freed for new life in Him.** Let's pray.

The Hope of Rescue

The first thing you see in these two verses is **a hope of rescue**. Those of you who know my wife are aware of the fact that she isn't afraid to bring up awkward subjects. She's always ready to point out that elephant in the room. She has no fear in that respect. But sometimes she just does it for the fun of it, to make you uncomfortable. As a former nurse, she'll commonly talk about things you'd rather not talk about around the dinner table. You think, "Seriously? Right now? Here? I'm eating." You might have thought when we read this passage, "Circumcision? 'Perfect' passage? You're going to talk about that on Easter? Really, Kevin?" Yep. I've got to proclaim what God's word says. Taking on this awkward subject is worth it.

Now I'm not going to take the time to explain what circumcision is. If you don't know, ask your parents at home. But, what's the significance of it? It was a sign given to God's people, the Jews. It marked them off as God's people. We're not sure totally what's going on here, but the people of Colossae - those receiving this letter - are not Jews. They're Gentiles. It sounds like some false teachers there were trying to get them to go back to keeping rules to receive salvation.

Paul here takes that practice and uses it as an illustration. I might have come up with something different, but, hey, this is the Bible. Inspired by the Spirit, he uses circumcision to illustrate something deeper, our rescue from the power of sin. Hear it again in **verse 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."** Human circumcision is done with hands. It's by men. *This* circumcision is performed by God. No hands are used. We see this idea from Paul over in **Romans chapter 2**.

Rom. 2:28 For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. **29** But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.

This is a heart thing. It goes far deeper than physical circumcision. It comes from the Spirit, not a doctor's hands. And through this work there's great freedom. Why's that? Our sinful nature is cut away. That's what I think this means. In physical circumcision, skin is cut off. In spiritual circumcision, our sinful nature is removed. It's cut off. Now we're free. It's not like if we're Christians, we never sin. The battle remains as long as we're this side of the new heavens and new earth. But the chains have been broken. This is why Kim doesn't have to cut herself anymore. This is how Derek walked away from sexual sin.

Through this work of God in our hearts, we can break free from doing wicked things that dishonor God. There's still a struggle. But now there's hope. Have you experienced this? Do you believe it's possible?

Here's what's interesting, though. For Jews, circumcision became a rule you kept that made you feel proud. It meant you were from the right family, too. Apparently the believers in Colossae were being tempted to think they could impress God by getting circumcised or having their boys go through it. Paul, though, knew the foolishness of trying to think we could make ourselves right with God. Listen to **Philippians 3**.

Phil. 3:1 Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you. **2** Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. **3** For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh— **4** though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: **5** circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; **6** as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. **7** But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. **8** Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ **9** and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—**10** that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, **11** that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Paul kept all the rules. It all turned out to be crap. **“Rubbish,”** **verse 8** says. This righteousness he was trying to construct. Crap - that is, compared to knowing Christ, to finding righteousness, or goodness in Him. He says at the beginning of that chapter, “Watch out for those who would try to get you to go back to keeping rules, **“those who mutilate the flesh,”** those pushing this on you.

“We are the circumcision,” he says in **verse 3**. That's Paul's point in **Colossians 2**, also. God has done something much better in our hearts, if we believe. Don't go back to trusting in that old stuff. The apostle here uses circumcision as a way to illustrate sin being cut away. Ironically, trusting in this rite is sin itself. It's the same with any other good works we do.

Why's that? The Lord wants us to look in the mirror and humbly acknowledge that we don't live as we should toward others. We don't live for Him like we should. He wants us to call out to Him for help, for grace, for salvation. That way, He alone gets the glory.

It doesn't matter what family we've come from, how much trash we've picked up on our street, how faithful we've been to our girlfriend. Our good works don't impress Him.

Some time ago, Rob Gaskin, one of our elders here, got invited to a film over at the Rag Tag. It turned out to be really controversial. It was about supposed Christians over in Uganda who encouraged their government to hand out the death penalty to homosexuals. There was outrage, as you'd expect, over what had taken place. They then handed the mic to Rob and said, "As an evangelical Christian pastor, what's your reaction?" Now he was able to say, as you'd hope, that the way those citizens of Uganda were being treated was ghastly. It wasn't a Christian approach, for sure. But he was able to give the crowd a challenge: the way you're viewing those American "Christians," the way you're condemning them, is about the way the people in the movie were treating the homosexual Ugandans.

See, few of us think we're the bad guys, that we're in the wrong, that we're in sin. We think we're the good guys fighting for the right cause, living as good people. The Bible says that we are sinners. We can be freed from self-destructive, God-belittling passions and behaviors. The Bible says we aren't good enough. We can be freed from trying to run around doing what we think is good and condemning others who don't do it enough. We've been rescued from that, if we're in Jesus. That's been cut out of our life.

In fact, it's been put to death. **Verse 12** reads, "***Having been buried with Him in baptism.***" That old you and me, if we trust in Jesus, has died. That's what baptism represents in part - the death of the our old self, of our sinful nature. We're forgiven the penalty of sin through Christ's death on the cross.

We're also freed from its power. Whatever has a hold on us, we can flee from its grasp. We no longer have to try to do more good deeds than bad, either. We're like an action hero who is presumed dead. The death certificate gets filed. Everyone else moves on. We get up and start all over.

The Hope of Renewal

That leads to the second thing we see in these two short verses. **There is a hope of renewal.** In Christ, we have been circumcised. We've also been resurrected. An old life has been cut away, killed. A new life has begun, will be renewed. We're raised. Look at **verse 12** again:

Col. 2:12 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.

"In which," or maybe better, **"in Him,"** you've been raised. Friends, if you're a Christian, a resurrection is in your future. It's in Christ's past. He died on the cross as a penalty for sin. After three days, He was raised. The Bible says that's just the beginning. The creation that fell and was cursed due to sin will one day be renewed. It will be resurrected. All of it. And so will people, those who believe.

If He doesn't return first, we'll die. But, our bodies will be raised at the last day. We who are His will walk on a new heavens and a new earth with Jesus. The body is good. Matter, His creation is good, too. That's why we should take care of both. It's all plagued by sin now. But not for long. One day, it will be renewed.

However, this passage is talking about now, the present. We are not just putting to death an old life. We're getting a new one. We're not just cutting away an old nature. We receive one that's new. That's what the resurrection promises.

And it's what baptism pictures. We come out of that water, and we're new. Now we're free in another sense. It's not just that we're no longer chained to that old life. We are free to live as we were created to live. We now have the hope of a new life. Many people think Christianity is like this: you're free as a bird and then you "get religion" and you put yourself in a cage. It's really the opposite. You're in the coop following your own, messed up desires. You get released. Now you can fly. You can be you - a new you without a messed up, sinful nature.

Notice that **verse 12** says that it's "**through faith.**" We are not renewed again because of anything we can. It comes through open hands - those raised in surrender, those extended asking for help. That's what faith is, saying, "God, I'm finished trying! Lord, I need a handout." It's specifically trusting in Christ's death for our sins. It's trusting in Christ's perfect, good life, and not ours. That's the object of our faith.

But wait. That's true, certainly. But what is emphasized here? It says "**you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised Him from the dead.**" Here the faith is in God's power. And that's a helpful reminder, isn't it? Some of us would say we trust Jesus - His life and death, His salvation. But do we really, *really* trust His *power* to change us? Do we really think we can be free - from that old life, for something new? Do we believe it?

We're almost done with our new Imago Center downtown. This past week we got the floors refinished. I was talking to Brian, my friend who really helped us out, getting them professionally redone. He was telling me how to care for them. He was actually making me a bit paranoid that we would destroy them. I had also had nightmare experiences with wood floors right after we got our current house, and he redid them then. I told him I was stressed about it. He responded, "If God can raise His Son from the dead, He can take care of your floor." Amen. Touché. That's how this power is described in this passage. This is the "**powerful working of God, who raised Him from the dead.**" If the Father can raise Jesus, if He will raise all things one day, He can raise you. He can change you. You can be renewed. Do you believe it?

Rescued, Renewed in Him

That leads to my next and final point. **We are rescued and renewed in Him.** If you ever need help getting tickets, you need to be with Rob Gaskin. I've seen him turn two tickets into five tickets in about ten minutes and make profit in the whole thing.

If you ever want to return something to Best Buy, you need to be with my wife, Amy. I can walk in there and accomplish nothing, but she knows just what to say and how to talk to get a complete refund, apology, and dinner money. If we want rescue from our old life and renewal for a new one, we need to be with Jesus. Using the language here, we need to be ***“in Him.”*** Salvation isn’t just through Him, either. It’s ***“in Him.”***

This picture of union with Christ is throughout Colossians. Paul addresses the ***“saints and faithful brothers in Christ”*** in **chapter one, verse 2**. He says he labors to ***“present everyone mature in Christ”*** in **verse 28** of that same chapter. In **chapter 2, verse 3**, he writes that ***“all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”*** are ***“hidden”*** in Him. He tells them to walk ***“in Him,”*** being ***“rooted and built up in Him”*** in **verses 6-7 of chapter 2**. They’ve been ***“filled in Him,”*** **verse 10**. That’s what we see in today’s passage. ***“In him also you were circumcised.” “In Him you were raised.”***

In connection to Christ, these benefits flow to us. It’s as if when He died, we died to our old way of life. When He rose, we rose to this new way of living. And in Him is this power.

1:16 says ***“For by Him all things were created.”*** **1:17** says, ***“In Him all things hold together.”*** **1:19** says, ***“In Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.”*** **2:9** says, ***“In Him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.”*** That’s the one to whom we’re connected! He who is God! He who made all things and sustains all things! There is power, friends. Do we believe it? United with Him, there is power. There is salvation. There is freedom. There is hope.

Non-Christian, have you considered this? That you can be free of those sins, that shame? That you might be able to start again? For the Lance Armstrongs? For the DGBs? For the Lindsay Lohans and Paris Hiltons? For members of the Phelps family? For you? If you open up your heart to Jesus and His power, there is hope.

Christian, do you live like this? That you are free? That you don’t have to go back to that sin? That it’s no longer who you are? That you have been made new? This recent “Heartbleed” internet security bug freaked a lot of people out. You probably changed all your passwords. I sure did. We’re all concerned about identity theft today. But our enemy snatches ours all the time. You’re dead to sin. You’re alive to God. Don’t believe the lies.

Jesus is everything. He is everything we need for salvation. We see this here in baptism. Because He died, we can die. Because He was raised, we can be raised. **In Him, we can be raised, freed from the power of sin, freed for new life in Him.**

Will You Be Raised?

There is power for you to conquer that addiction to alcohol or pornography or dieting or shopping. There is power to stop gossiping and lying and verbally abusing. There is power for child molesters and drug dealers and chronic worriers. Really angry people can be changed. There is freedom from sin.

There is also a new life available to you. One where you live for something greater. You build His kingdom. You love those around you. You work for a better city. You share the message of Jesus. You use your gifts and talents, your calling, for Him. There is freedom to truly live.

This is for all people. That's the message here by saying this heart circumcision isn't only for Jews. It's for rich and poor, black and white, old and young, male and female, Republican and Democrat, smart and not-so-much, even Tigers and Jayhawks. In Him, you can be changed.

Kim can tell you that. Derek can share it, as well. So can so many here. Trust in Him. He was raised. One day we'll be raised. *Now* we'll be raised, if we believe. Trust in Him.

Don't work. Kumbh Mela is a 55 day festival that occurs ever three years in four different rivers in India. It's the largest gathering of human beings on earth. There over 100 million pilgrims come to wash themselves and clean themselves spiritually. Tragically and ironically, where they bathe is incredibly dirty. In fact, the Ganges is one of the top five most polluted rivers on the planet. Dysentery, cholera, and hepatitis are found and contracted there. Friends, that's what religious ritual does. It makes things worse. It doesn't bring cleansing. There is only one place to be washed. Change is found in only one spot. It's in Jesus. It's by faith in Him. You don't have to take a pilgrimage to a far place. You can find Him here.

If He is working on your heart, and you would be interested in proclaiming that in baptism, we are open to performing some even today. We would just prefer you be in your early teen years. We would love to hear your story of faith first. Come to the back as we celebrate the Supper. The elders will be there and they would love to talk to you.