

## All Saints Talk for Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> August 2023

**'Clothed with Love'** Emma King.

The third talk in our series **'Full-on faith'** *Colossians 3*

Last week Tom spoke about wrestling, in prayer, and wrestling with life. So this week we turn to chapter three, where Paul continues to challenge the people of Colossai in the way that they were living their lives. In Colossai is the people were creating what I like to call a picker mix, like you would if you went to a sweet shop, you would pick and choose your favorite sweets. And this is what was happening. They were creating a pick and mix religion made from all the different faiths and ideologies. Having argued that Colossians had been set free from the powers, Paul now contends that they are to be set free for a new life with Christ. In this chapter we hear a list of instructions that Paul has given them, to help them on their way to try and get them out of the rut that they are finding themselves in. It's quite a lengthy list, isn't it? It's not just a don't do this and don't do that. It's quite a lengthy list. And so much so that Paul actually puts it into into two lists. So the first set of instructions of things not to do: Paul says, to turn away from sexual immorality, to turn it away from impurity and lust, from evil desires and from greed.

When you hear those read, when you hear those things that you're that were called not to do, you can actually see how these things can get in the way, can't you. They can get in the way of everyday life and Christianity demands that Christ's followers live worthily of him. If Christians behave no differently from their surrounding culture, they betray their calling and defame their faith. We all know what it's like to live in community and in a culture and if you're around a culture for long enough, you start to develop those ways. You start to pick up those behaviours and those behaviours then become normal, when in actual fact, they're not normal at all. And they're not behaviours that we should be living our lives by. So Paul's focus in this letter is on culture. The culture that they had created had influenced the church. and in return, behaviours such as these were becoming normal.

So Paul's focus then turns to stamp out that culture and put an emphasis on the unique claims of Jesus. That he was not just one of many gods that they could worship. That Jesus is the one true God.

Paul then turns his focus to the next part and the next set of instructions of things not to do, showing how manifestations of anger can destroy a community. He tells them not to be angry, to turn away from anger, to turn away from rage, from malice, from slander, not to use filthy language and then he finishes off with not to lie. Now lying in a community can cause all sorts of trouble. It can create anger, it can create rage, it can create malice it can create slander, it can create filthy language to come out of people's mouths, all by telling some lies. So I don't think it should go unnoticed that 'not to lie' finishes this list. Because lying is rooted in the attempt to gain an advantage on others. To become more powerful than the person that you are speaking to. Such deceit of telling lies to each other reveals a lack of mutual trust. It undermines a community that we all have together and it breeds anger among those people. So here we have a list of all the things that we are called not to do in life. But how do we do it? Where do we find our strength from, not to do those things?

I believe that's by grace. And those graces that are listed are very similar to the fruits of the spirit that we read in Galatians. Paul tells them to clothe themselves in compassion, in kindness, in humility, gentleness, patience, he tells them to bear with one another, to forgive each other, to be peaceful with each other, be thankful for all that they have. And also to love each other. The most important thing. Now all of this sounds easy, doesn't it? We could just do all of these things and we can put our Christian Halo on and we can do all of these things and everything will be just great. We can all live a very happy, faithful life. But what do we do when we struggle to do that? What do we do when things happen in our lives that make us angry? We're human. We have emotions, we have feelings. What if we have been really tested? What if we are upset and cross with people because they have shown those things on that second list of virtues to us or to the people that we love the most? What do we do when we see those things happening in our world and in our community? At those times, where do we find the strength to open up our cupboards, our wardrobes and find those clothes to put on?

Those clothes of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, love, peace, thankfulness. All of these clothes here behind me. it's not an easy task. I know that I have been tested. But these qualities that Paul is telling us to do, these are the qualities that characterise Jesus's life. And they are vital, absolutely vital for a life that is lived in harmony with each other.

We are all called to live our lives like Jesus. The great saying 'what would Jesus do?' I use that often. When things don't go my way. Or if I'm struggling, 'What would Jesus do' I say to myself. And the one thing that brings all of these together is love. We cannot truly exhibit compassion, and kindness and humility and gentleness, and patience without love. Because love is what binds it all together. Love maintains the balance, but brings each of the other virtues to perfection. Because without love, you cannot do each one of those things. So if we truly love each other and the people around us, then these things that Paul was telling the people of Colossai not to do, will not happen. In all we do, whatever powers that we hold, in our jobs, in our church, in our homes, in our volunteering. We must never, ever, ever lose sight of that. Because my friends, love conquers all, doesn't it? It really, really does. A book I was reading, when I was at college, on the New Testament by a man called David de Silva: He sums this up nicely for me. He says: 'these epistles help keep before our eyes and the eyes of those we serve, the truth that the gospel is transformative and that a Christianity that does not change a person's heart, mind and life is empty. They call for fortitude as we face the truth about the passions and the values that drive us when Christ model and God's desire are not in view. But they also encourage us with words about the light God shines on us, so that each step we may walk in his ways and delight in his will.'

So as we go out into our week this week, let's see how many items of clothing we can put on. But we can put all of those on, but without the item of clothing of love, none of them will make sense. Amen.