

A Life-Changing Encounter with the Living God

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Well, we come now to look together into the word of God and I invite you to take your Bibles and to turn with me to Galatians 2:20. I want us to direct our thoughts to this one verse in God's word tonight, and I want us to dig into this one text and for this text to work its way into us that it might come with great sanctifying power in our lives. I want to begin by reading what will be our verse for tonight, Galatians 2:20. The title of this message is "A Life-Changing Encounter with the Living Christ." The Apostle Paul writes to the churches in Galatia this statement,

20 I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

Some individual verses in the Bible are such a profound statement of truth that they seem to rise above other verses and beg for our attention. It's not that they're more inspired, for every verse in the Bible is equally inspired, but there are those verses in the Bible that stand out like stars in the night, there are those verses that contain such a succinct statement of truth that they are so profound and so pungent that they seem to reach higher and say more than other verses. They are like an acorn that contains an entire forest within it just waiting to be unleashed, like a seed that contains an entire harvest within it. So one verse can contain seemingly an entire systematic theology of truth and such a verse is Galatians 2:20.

For most of us here tonight, it is one of our most favorite verses in the Bible. For some here tonight, it is your singular most favorite verse in the Bible. Some might even claim it as a life verse. For virtually all of us here tonight, this verse has already so captured our hearts that we could virtually recite it from memory perhaps though we have never sat down to memorize the verse. It's just worked its way into our mind and into our hearts and into our psyche and it has been anchored there, and it is ever before us. This is one of those verses and for all of us here tonight who are in Christ, this verse is our testimony, this verse is our spiritual autobiography.

In this verse, Paul is intensely personal. He could not speak any more in first person than he does in this verse. I want you to note the number of times in this one verse that Paul says either "I" or "me." Let me read the verse one more time and let your ear and your

eye be very attentive to the number of times that Paul uses a personal pronoun. It begins with such, "*I* have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer *I* who live, but Christ lives in *me*; and the life which *I* now live in the flesh *I* live by faith in the Son of God, who loved *me* and gave Himself up for *me*." In this one verse, Paul uses "I" or "me" seven times. Unprecedented. And despite all the personal references here, though, Paul is not drawing attention to himself. Paul is not the hero of verse 20. To the contrary, it is all about Jesus Christ and what Christ has done in Paul's life. Christ is the hero, Paul is the recipient of this grace, and Paul is saying that a Christian is one who lives for Christ and Christ lives in him.

For Paul, Christianity is not an institutionalized religion. It is not a religion of outward facades. It is not a religion of empty motion and empty ritual. Instead, for the Apostle Paul and for us, Christianity is a living, vital, personal relationship with the living Christ. It is knowing Christ. It is loving Christ. It is a personal, it is the personal knowledge of Christ. There is nothing shallow here. There is nothing superficial and nothing mechanical, nothing dialed in, nothing clinical. It is a personal encounter with the living Christ and to know Christ changes everything. It changes, Paul says, who I am, where I'm headed, how I live, what I do, and why I do it. It changes my life. It changes my priorities. It changes my identity. It changes my destiny. It changes everything.

So tonight, I want us to dig into this goldmine of a verse. I want us to open this treasure vault and to pull out some of its nuggets and some of its diamonds that we would be blessed tonight. I want you to note three things in this verse, three main headings, and I want to give you simply the first. It's very obvious. It's how the verse begins. I want you to note, first, Paul's crucifixion with Christ. Paul begins with the fact that he is dead before he tells us that Christ is alive in him. Note how verse 20 begins, he says, "I have been crucified with Christ." This speaks of a dual crucifixion. It speaks of not only Christ dying for our sins but it speaks of Paul dying to sin. As Paul says, "I have been crucified with Christ," he is saying that when Christ died upon the cross, I died with Christ. And then Paul, of course, is not speaking literally, Paul is not saying that he was physically present at Calvary some 20 years earlier when Jesus was crucified, and Paul is not saying that he was literally physically nailed to a cross like the two thieves on either side of Jesus, and that he was crucified on a cross when Jesus was crucified on a cross. That is not what Paul is saying, rather Paul is speaking of something far more profound. He speaks of his union with Christ and stresses that whatever was experienced by Jesus Christ was likewise experienced by Paul.

The same could be said of Paul's relationship to Adam, that when Adam sinned, Paul sinned, and when Adam fell, Paul fell, and when Adam died, Paul died, and the same can be said for our other representative, the second Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ. And we who are believers in Christ are in Christ, are we not? And we are so united to Christ that whatever happened to Christ happened to us because we were in Christ when he died upon that cross. And so by virtue of being in Christ, when Jesus died, Paul died. When Jesus rose, Paul rose. When Jesus ascended and was enthroned, Paul was raised up and seated with Christ in heavenly places.

This truth is taught in multiple passages in the New Testament. I want to direct us to some of those tonight. In Romans 6:3 and following, Paul stakes his case of our vital, some call it our mystical union with Christ that by virtue of being in Christ, what happened to Christ happened to us. In Romans 6:3 Paul says, "Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ." When he says "baptized into Christ," he's not talking about water baptism. As I've said many times, there's not a drop of water in Romans 6. He is saying that we have been immersed into Christ. We have been placed into Christ. We have been submerged into Christ, placed into Christ to be in vital union with Christ. So let me begin verse 3 again, "Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?" Again, obviously it's not referring to water baptism. Paul wasn't sprinkled onto the cross or poured onto the cross. What it is saying is that when Jesus was lifted up to die upon the cross and Paul's sins placed upon Christ, Paul was actually in Christ already 2,000 years ago for us, 30 years earlier for Paul, or 20 years earlier. As Christ died, Paul died.

Verse 4, "Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death." And when Jesus was taken down from the cross and buried, Paul in Christ was also buried, "so that as Christ was raised," verse 4, "from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." When Jesus was resurrected, we too were raised not physically but spiritually to live a new life in Christ.

Verse 5 reinforces this, "For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection." Verse 6, "knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him." That old person that you once were, dead in sin, corrupt in heart, depraved in nature, that old life, that old self was crucified at the cross and it was not a partial crucifixion, it was a total death at the cross. This is the other side of the cross.

So he says in verse 8, "Now if we have died with Christ," and we have, "we believe that we shall also live with Him." Two thousand years ago when Jesus died upon the cross, there is a real sense in which you were there and you were in Christ just like you were in Adam at the beginning of the world and when he sinned, you sinned, and when he fell, you fell. So when Christ was crucified upon that cross, you were in Christ being crucified as well so that your old self, your old life was nailed to the cross never to live again. That's, as we would say, black print on white paper. That's the way that it is.

Now come to Ephesians 2:5. In Ephesians 2:5, Paul reiterates this truth again. It is one of the most dominant, monumental, foundational truths that Paul ever teaches in his 13 epistles. Ephesians 2:5 we read, "even when we were dead in our transgressions," Christ, "made us alive," God made us alive, "together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." Please note the verb tenses. This is not in the future. This is not at the end of the age. This is in the past. This is that which has already occurred and transpired. We have been crucified with Christ. We have been made alive with Christ. We have been raised up with Christ. We have been seated with Christ. Why? Because we are in Christ.

If you would, very quickly, just turn to the book of Colossians just two books further, Colossians 2:12, and I just want you to see this with your own eyes and to reflect upon this that it would have a place in your thinking and in your heart tonight. Colossians 2:12, again we see our identity with Christ, our union with Christ, that what occurred to him has occurred to us because we are in Christ. Notice he says in verse 12, "having been buried with Him in baptism," and again this does not refer to water baptism but to Spirit baptism, "in which you were also raised up with Him." It is as though when he was buried in that grave, we were buried in that grave, and by being buried, our old life is over, it's buried, and when he was raised from the dead, we were in him and we were raised with him to a new life. Verse 13, "When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him."

Now look at verse 20, "If you have died with Christ," it could be easily translated "since you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world." And then look at chapter 3 in verse 3, Colossians 3:3, "For you have died." Do you realize this? You have died? You're a dead man walking today. You're a dead woman sitting here tonight. You have died spiritually to all that you were and all that you did, and all of those sinful, selfish, self-centered, self-righteous pursuits in your life, that has now been crucified and buried. That's ancient history and you are now a new person in Christ. In fact, 2 Corinthians 5:14 says, "one died for all, therefore all died."

So what does this mean in Galatians 2:20 when he begins, "I have been crucified with Christ"? It means that when Christ died, Paul died to his old self and to his old way of life. And when Christ died, Paul died to his old sinful pursuits. All this came to a decisive final end. Paul died to self-righteousness. He died to self-centeredness. He died to self-exaltation. He died to self-ego and self-flattery and self-pride and self-will. Paul died to the entirety of his old self life, all that he was, all that he pursued, all that he valued, and all that he trusted, and all that he prized. Paul died to Paul. Paul no longer lived for Paul. Paul came to an end of Paul. When Christ died, that old Paul died. The old Paul was crucified with Christ.

When I was called into the ministry, I was in Memphis, Tennessee and I was in Bellevue Baptist Church and the previous, one of the previous pastors before Adrian Rogers at that church was a very famous preacher, equally as famous as Adrian Rogers. His name was R. G. Lee. He preached a sermon "Payday Someday" that has been preached around the world by Dr. Lee. Dr. Lee first took a group from Memphis to the Holy Land to bring some of the members of the church to see Jerusalem, Galilee, the wilderness. Dr. Lee had never been to the Holy Land and as they came to Calvary, a tour guide said, "And how many of you here have been here before?" Dr. Lee raised his hand and said, "I've been here." The tour guide said, "I thought you said this was your first trip to Jerusalem?" He said, "It is but I was here 2,000 years ago and when Christ died, I was in Christ and as He died for sin, I died to sin."

The same is true for you and the same is true for me. It's true for all of us here tonight who are in Christ. Of course, there's a difference between being in church and being in Christ, and those who are in Christ are those who are true believers in Jesus Christ. But

when Jesus died for sin, we died to sin. When Jesus was raised from the dead, we were raised to newness of life. When Jesus ascended into heaven, we ascended into heaven with him and he presented us faultless before the throne of God with full acceptance. And when Jesus was seated at the right hand of the Father, we were seated with him in heavenly places. We are so identified with our Savior Jesus Christ that not only is he in us but we are in him, and all that occurred to him has occurred to us.

This is vitally important. It is vitally important because we need to understand that what has happened in our lives is more than the forgiveness of sin, more than the imputation of the perfect righteousness of Christ. What has occurred in our lives is more than just our standing before God. Over and above and beyond that, we have died, we have been buried, we have been raised, we have ascended, and we have been enthroned with the Lord Jesus Christ. And this is where this verse begins, and we could spend the next months digging and digging and digging into this goldmine of truth but what happened to Christ happened to all who are in Christ.

Now second, as we look at Galatians 2:20, I want you to see, secondly, not only Paul's crucifixion with Christ, but Paul's communion with Christ. Not only has Paul died with Christ but he has been raised with Christ and the living Christ now lives in Paul. Please note how this verse continues, he says, "and it is no longer I who live." Yet Paul is alive as he writes this epistle, is he not? This was not written posthumously. Paul is very alive and very awake as he is writing the book of Galatians, yet we read here and he says, "it is no longer I who live," and Paul is saying that he is no longer living for himself and he is no longer running his own spiritual life, there is now a new driving force at work within Paul that was not there previously. And he goes on to tell us what this driving force is that is now in Paul that is so dominant in his life that he would say, "it is no longer I who live," yet he does live, and he tells us what it is and the "what" is in reality a "who," and the "who" is a capital "W." "There is someone living in me," Paul says, "and this One is driving me and empowering me and guiding me, and living His life in me and through me and it is Jesus Christ."

So he says, "it is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me." Christ has been raised from the dead. Christ is alive. A dead man cannot live within us. Christ is alive and Paul says, "He lives in me." The old Paul no longer lives in Paul. The old Paul died. There is now a new royal resident within Paul and seated upon the throne of Paul's life is no longer self and no longer sin and no longer Satan, it is now Jesus Christ enthroned in Paul's life with all the royal regal authority to preside over Paul's life, and Paul is an entirely new person and he has a new person living in him. It is Jesus Christ.

Paul will write in Colossians 1:27, "Christ in you, the hope of glory." Christ in you, not merely close to you, not merely near you, not merely next to you, not merely rubbing shoulders with you, not merely nudging you from the outside, but Christ on the inside at the deepest level of our being. This is no superficial relationship that Paul has with Christ. It doesn't just lay on the surface nor lay on the outward facade of Paul's life. Christ is living in the very depths of his soul such that Christ's thoughts are now Paul's thoughts. He has the mind of Christ and Christ's priorities are now Paul's priorities, and Christ's

passions are now the driving passions of Paul's life, and what Christ loves, Paul loves, and what Christ hates, Paul hates because he is one with Christ, and Jesus lives in Paul and lives out his life through Paul. And so it is for each and every one of us here tonight and this is both the miracle and the mystery of the Christian life. In some ways, this is much like the Trinity, impossible to fully understand, yet we bank our soul upon its truth. And so it is here, our mystical union with Christ.

I cannot get my arms around all of this but what the Bible teaches, I believe, and what the Bible teaches is a blessing to my heart. Therefore for Christ to live in Paul means far more than Jesus is just hanging out with Paul, kicked back, casually taking up a residence in Paul's life. Instead, what this means is now Jesus Christ is the Lord of Paul's life. Jesus Christ now is the one providing the direction for Paul's life. Jesus Christ now empowers Paul and enables Paul and energizes Paul, providing everything and all that Paul needs because he is living in Paul. The same is true for every one of us here tonight, that Jesus Christ by his Holy Spirit resides in our lives and wherever we go, Christ is with us, whatever we say, Christ hears, whatever we think, Christ reads, and whatever we need, Christ is ready to provide. This is Paul's communion with Christ.

I trust that tonight you realize what a vital living relationship you have with Christ. You have come not just to the institution of the church, you have come to the intimacy of the person of Christ and you have fellowship with Christ that is far deeper than any human relationship you will ever have on this earth. Christ is far more real, far more living, far more personal, and far more intimate than your own family or your own friends. What a privilege it is for us to know Christ.

Paul says in Philippians 3:10, "that I may know Him," meaning that I may know him more and more and more. Paul says in Philippians 1:21, "For me to live is Christ." May it be so in each of our hearts.

Finally, as we look at the last part of this verse, Galatians 2:20, I want you to see Paul's confidence in Christ. Paul wants us to know that it is Christ who lives in him and he is putting his faith and his trust moment by moment in Christ. The end of the verse says, Paul says, "and the life which I now live in the flesh." He's talking about his new life in Christ. He's talking about his new pursuit of Christ. He's talking about all that transpires now in the Christian life, worshiping Christ, praying in Christ's name, serving Christ, witnessing for Christ.

"The life which I now live in the flesh," and by the way when he says "flesh," he's not talking about sinful flesh, he's talking about simply his mortal body. "The life right now that I live in this body," he says, "I live by faith in the Son of God." Paul every step of the Christian life, he says, must be a looking to Christ and a leaning on Christ and a reliance upon Christ. As a branch would abide in a vine and rely upon the vine to supply everything that the branch needs in order to bear fruit, so Paul says, "I live by faith in the Son of God." And Paul is saying that as he trusts Christ moment by moment, Christ is working in him and Christ is working through him and Christ is enabling him to do all that Christ requires of him.

This certainly speaks of the sufficiency of Christ, does it not? That everything that he needs he finds in Christ. He says, "I live by faith in the Son of God," and there is no "and" after that, and anything or anyone else. To have faith in Christ is to access the source of everything that anyone could ever want: joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, self-control, spiritual power, wisdom, understanding, guidance, direction, stamina, endurance, perseverance, patience. Everything that one needs in living the Christian life is found in Christ therefore one could be placed in a prison cell in Rome as Paul was and be by himself alone, cut off from all of the accompaniments of life, and to have all that his soul requires because he has Christ in him.

That's what he is saying and when he mentions the Son of God, he is saying that this Christ loved me and he demonstrated this love for me, love that was unconditional, love that was sacrificial, love that was intentional, love that was eternal, love, this love of Christ for Paul and for all of us who are in Christ was supremely demonstrated at the cross when Jesus was nailed to that rugged cross and when Jesus was lifted up to die, all of our sins who believe upon Christ were transferred to him and him who knew no sin God made to be sin for us, and Christ became a curse for us upon the cross. He shed his blood which satisfied the righteous anger of God toward us. He reconciled us to God. He redeemed us and bought us out of the slave-market of sin into our ownership and slavery to Satan. He bought us to be his own possession. It is there upon that cross as he loved us, he gave himself up for us.

Salvation becomes real in conversion when one realizes that Jesus did not die merely for many but that he died for me. That is when faith is personal faith. That is when Christ becomes a personal Christ. That is when he becomes our personal Savior and our personal Lord, that Jesus did not merely die for a world of Gentiles and Jews around the globe, that he did not merely die for the many out of every tribe and every tongue and every kindred, but that Jesus died for me upon the cross, that he loved me upon that cross, that he gave himself up for me upon that cross as if there was no one else that he was dying for, as if there was no one else upon the earth. He died for me. He loved me. He gave himself up for me. That is when salvation is real and that is when it is personal and that is when it becomes my possession and my experience savingly of Christ.

Can you say tonight as I look back 2,000 years ago and as I see the Son of Man, the Son of God lifted up upon that cross, as I see that crown of thorns upon his head, as I see the blood flowing down, as I see the sun darkened, and by faith I see the sins of all who would believe in him laid upon him, can you look at that cross and say, "There He loved me. There He gave Himself up for me." That it is just you in Christ and Christ in you. Can you say, "I was in Christ when He died upon that cross. I was crucified with Christ."

When I was in a youth group many years ago, we used to sing a chorus, "Were you there when they crucified My Lord?" Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Oh, oh, oh, sometimes it makes me tremble. Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

As we come to the Lord's Table tonight, as we remember his death, let us say, "It was there that He loved me. It was there that He gave Himself up for me. It was there that He bore my sins. And it was there that I was in Him and I was crucified with Him." There's no going back to our old way of life. I've known most of you since you were saved. I did not know you before you were saved for most of you. Whatever it was your life was like before you were saved, that old life has been nailed to the cross. It has been buried and there has been a resurrection of a new life and you are now seated in heavenly places with Christ upon his throne.