

Colossians: The Supremes Part 2
Colossians 1:19-23
Preached by Rev. Craig T. Smith on May 21, 2023

The Bible says Jesus Christ came because we cannot save ourselves. There's a problem. He had to do something about it. God and sinners need to be reconciled. This little passage shows us our need for reconciliation with God, the way of reconciliation, and the results - the radical, thorough results of the reconciliation Christ affects. – Tim Keller

And The Band Played On

On April 15th, 1912, the White Star Liner *Titanic* began the slow descent toward the ocean floor after hitting an iceberg. As the stern was raised high above the frigid Northern Atlantic waters, it then slid silently into the deep darkness. That night a myriad of human behavior occurred. While there were instances of sacrificial love, there was also plenty of selfish cowardice to go around.

Over 1,600 people were not able to get into the eighteen lifeboats. It was estimated that the lifeboats were only around half-full. Of the 1,600 souls who floated in the icy water, only thirteen were rescued by the sparsely populated lifeboats. Not thirteen hundred. Thirteen.

In Boat No. 5, when Third Officer Pitman heard the cries of the drowning, he turned to the lifeboat and implored the occupants, "Now, men, we will pull toward the wreck!" But the passengers protested, "Why should we lose all our lives in a useless attempt to save others from the ship?" Pitman gave in. And for the next hour, No. 5 floated on the Atlantic, with twenty-five open seats.

In Boat No. 2, Fourth Officer Boxhall asked the ladies, "Shall we go back?" They said no and another boat at 60% capacity drifted away while drowning people cried out for help.

On Boat No. 6, it was actually the women who begged Quartermaster Hitchens to return and rescue, but he changed their minds by vividly describing how helping rescue a person could overturn the entire boat. The women on No. 6 pleased as the cries faded over the next hour.

Of the eighteen lifeboats, only one, Boat No. 14, returned to help, and even then, it was an hour after *the Titanic* sank. By then the splashing and thrashing crowd had thinned significantly.¹

For some, the drama of the sinking of the *Titanic* is a tragic parable revealing how the world has gone wrong. We see fallen, sinful humanity drifting in unfriendly seas. They are distant, alienated, unable to help each other despite a lot of individual effort to stay afloat. The entire wrongness of it points to a fundamental problem we face. People are estranged from each other and from creation because of Sin. The *Titanic* is a picture of a world that is overwhelmed by the power of Sin and in desperate need of reconciliation. People have been overwhelmed by Sin's wrongness and are alienated from God. They desperately need the harmony and rightness that Christ provides through reconciliation.

The Apostle Paul told us long before April 15th, 1912. Paul revealed how mankind is significantly and profoundly separated from God. That is as true today as it was back in the first century (Romans 3:9-18). And not just people. All creation is in desperate need of reconciliation. Paul has been building toward this in Colossians and I invite you to Colossians 1:19-23 to see where Paul takes us. (read text)

God's Reconciling Pleasure

Paul writes that God the Father found pleasure in having "all (his) fullness" dwell in Christ (v.19). "Fullness" is a loaded word that Paul uses and aims directly at the Gnostics, those heretics who believe that Jesus was a created god farther down the line in a series of created gods. Gnostics also used the same word that Paul uses (*pleroma*) that we translate as "fullness." The Gnostics used it to refer to the totality of thousands of divine emanations of lesser gods, and Jesus was one of those. Here is Paul clearly saying, "You are wrong. NO! Jesus is not one of the lesser gods of the fullness. Jesus Christ IS *the* Fullness."

Paul says it more explicitly in Colossians 2:9: "For the entire fullness of God's nature dwells bodily in Christ." Fullness means all of the divine nature, the totality of the divine essence that makes God GOD is fully realized in Jesus.

¹ Walter Lord, *A Night to Remember* (NYC: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1976) 70-71.

All of those unique characteristics and qualities that we read about and love in the Bible – omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence, omnibenevolence, eternity, infinite, imminence, immortality, invisibility, immutability, divine aseity etc. – are in Christ. The full fullness of God is found in Christ.

Moreover, Paul tells us that the fullness “dwells” in Christ. This is not a temporary filling. It was, and is, there to stay. Jesus possessed/possesses/will continue to possess the divine essence or nature of God forever. It remains in Christ.

For people looking for a lifeboat in terribly bleak, awful waters, this is great news! It means that when we look to Jesus, we see Christ fully reveal God’s character. Christianity is Christ and Christ is God. Despite all of those twenty-dollar theological terms I previously mentioned, this truth is not limited to those who understand reasoned theological language. If it was, then only the most brilliant and highly educated could understand Jesus. However, Jesus’s chosen inner circle consisted of people who barely had the equivalent of an eighth-grade education. Anyone can understand what God is like and how God can save them because the Gospels reveal Jesus and tell us what He said. Anyone can know what God is like because anyone can see and know Jesus.

It was God’s pleasure to have his fullness dwell in Jesus. And it was God’s pleasure “through him to reconcile everything to himself, whether things on earth or things in heaven” (v.20a). God intends to one day reconcile creation to himself. Creation suffered a curse as well because of the fall (Genesis 3:17-18). Paul writes in sweeping terms that man’s sin has subjected creation to futility: “For the creation eagerly waits with anticipation for God’s sons to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to futility – not willingly, but because of him who subjected it – in the hope that the creation itself will also be set free from the bondage of decay into the glorious freedom of God’s children. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together with labor pains until now.” (Romans 8:19-22)

Paul is not using beautiful metaphors here. Creation actually does groan. To further clarify, he compares creation’s moaning to the pain of childbirth. But one day it will be brought back to its initial, primal obedience, just like it was before the fall. Have you ever wondered why we sing this lyric in the Christmas hymn, *Joy to the World*?

“No more let sins and sorrow grow/ Nor thorns infest the ground/He comes to make his blessings flow/Far as the curse is found.” One day the land and the seas will lose their hostility. No more hurricanes or tsunamis. No more thorny weeds. One day, everything in the universe will be reconciled. Well, not everything. Everything *except* anything that rejects God. Which leads us back into Colossians 1:19. That is the main focus of the verse: the reconciliation of sinners back to God through Christ.

God has taken the first step. The New Testament is clear on this. In every reference to reconciliation between God and man, God moves first.² Reconciliation to God is possible and it is an extremely one-sided situation. God does almost everything. All you and I have to do is respond. We will get to our response in a minute. But for now, just know that “God was pleased” to have His fullness dwell in Jesus and to reconcile us to him through Christ. While you consider that God was the first mover, remember this: God considers salvation to be joyous work.

God’s Reconciling Method

Two parallel clauses in verses 20 and 22 show us how God brings about reconciliation: “making peace through his blood shed on the cross”; “but now he has reconciled you by his physical body through his death.” God’s method for reconciliation was Jesus’s death.

An older couple in my dad’s church had divorced and the husband moved away. Sadly, their son passed and on one occasion, the husband’s business brought him back near my hometown. He went to the cemetery to visit his son’s grave and there, was startled by his ex-wife, coincidentally making a visit to the grave of their only son. Rather than follow their initial impulse and turn to leave, they instead chose to stay. They were drawn by a shared interest, a common-hearted interest in that grave. They held hands together and, in that moment, began their reconciliation to remarry. They were reunited and reconciled through the death of their only son.

Our own reconciliation required the death of God’s only Son; but Jesus’s death and its effects went far beyond any human death: “That is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and he has committed the message of reconciliation to us...He made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

² We see the same word used Ephesians 2:16. Also the verbs in Romans 5:10 and 2 Corinthians 5:18-20 and the nouns in Romans 5:11 and 11:15 and 2 Corinthians 5:18-19.

Jesus took the separation of sin upon himself so that reconciliation could take place. He made “peace by the blood of his cross.” God moved mightily and powerfully to prove to us that His love would go to any length. It is God’s pleasure to reach out through the cross of Christ to offer you reconciliation. What is your response?

Not Magic

The gospel doesn’t work like magic. Christian, your mind, your heart, and your will must be involved in responding to what Jesus offers. Our minds must be consumed with Christ and His Word. Our hearts must focus on Christ in love. Our wills are to surrender to Jesus and follow both his practice and pattern. Faith in the present provides results such as peace and power in the present.

If you are here this morning and you have not received Jesus as Lord and Savior, if you have never made the decision to ask Jesus to forgive you of your sins and then invite Him into your heart as Savior and Lord, followed by committing to serve Jesus in the best way that you know how, you have NOT been reconciled back to God. If Jesus is not the Lord of your heart, you are not “good to go” with God. You are still distant, alienated from Him.

D.L. Moody once wrote about an incident between his sister and her son: “My sister, I remember, told me her boy said something naughty to her one morning, when his father said to him, ‘Sammy, go and ask your mom’s forgiveness.’ ‘I won’t,’ replied the child. ‘If you don’t ask your mother’s forgiveness, I’ll put you to bed.’ It was early in the morning – before he went to business and the boy didn’t think he would do it. He said, ‘I won’t’ again. They undressed him and put him to bed. The father came home at noon expecting to find his boy playing about the house, having asked him mother’s forgiveness. He didn’t see the boy anywhere about, and asked his wife where the boy was. ‘In bed still.’ So he went up to the room, and sat down by the bed, and said, ‘Sammy, I want you to ask your mother’s forgiveness.’ But the answer was ‘No.’ The father coaxed and begged but could not induce the child to ask forgiveness. The father went away, expecting certainly that when he came home at night the child would have got all over it and asked forgiveness. At night, however, when he got home, he found the little fellow still in bed. He had lain there all day. He went to him and tried to get him to go to his mother, but it was no use. His mother went and was equally unsuccessful.

That father and mother could not sleep at all that night. They expected every moment to hear the knock at the door by their little son. How they wanted so badly to forgive him. It was a terrible night that neither parent had ever experienced before, as if someone had passed away. In the morning the mother went straight to him and said, 'Now, Sammy, you are going to ask for my forgiveness.' But the boy turned his face to the wall and wouldn't speak. The father came home at noon and the boy was as stubborn as ever. It looked as though the child was going to conquer. It was for the good of the boy that they didn't want to give him his own way.

It is a great deal better for us to submit to God than to have our own way. Our own way will lead us to ruin; God's way leads to life everlasting. The father went off to his office, and that afternoon the mother went into her son about four o'clock and began to reason with him, and, after talking for some time, she said, 'Now, Sammy, say, 'mother.' "Mother,' said the boy. 'Now say 'for.'" 'For.' 'Now just say 'give.'" And the boy repeated 'give.' 'Me,' said the mother. 'Me,' and the little fellow fairly leaped out of bed. 'I have said it,' he cried; 'take me down to papa, so that I can say it to him.'"³

So many people are just like that little boy. Stubborn, clinging to something like pride or shame or fear or confusion, when our response of seeking forgiveness from the Lord brings us to reconciliation and back to the Father.

God was the first mover, and it is His great joy to extend to you this morning the opportunity to be restored in harmony and rightness back to Him. Receive Jesus today. Ask Him to forgive you. Ask Him to restore you. Ask Him to be your Savior and Lord. And commit to live for Him.

³ Clyde S. Fant Jr. and William M. Pinson., eds., *20 Centuries of Great Preaching*, vol. 6 (Waco, TX: Word) 312-313.

FURTHER THOUGHTS

Paul pronounces that we were “alienated.” That is a powerful word that indicates a persistent and permanent condition. This continuous, ongoing alienation from God is expressed in a mindset that was hostile to God and eventually led to evil actions. Do you think that describes humanity? Does humanity like to be described that way?

Paul saying that people are “alienated...hostile...doing evil actions” may sound harsh to us too. But it is the truth. And all of that alienation, hostility and wickedness is revealed when we are adrift and floating in scary and cold waters. Have you ever been disappointed in what difficulty produced or brought out of you? If yes, explain?

Despite humanity’s condition being terrible, God’s purpose in reconciliation is to “present you holy, faultless, and blameless” before Him. What are the possibilities of life apart from God according to Paul in the passage? What are the higher and more noble aspects presented for those who know Christ?

If a person has been reconciled to God through Christ, what is that person’s standing in front of God right now? How does God view that person?

How does reconciliation make a sick sinner better? How soon does the process of getting better start?

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Wednesday Bible Study: 10:30AM – The Book of Mark. All are welcome.

Silver Wings Trip: Silver Wings Ministry is going to see *Hello Dolly* on Friday, July 21st at 2:30PM. The cost is \$38 per ticket, and this needs to be paid to the church office by Wednesday May 31st. They will carpool and leave the church parking lot at 11:30AM and enjoy lunch together before the show begins.

A Thank You Card was received from Bob and Patti Collins. *“To Our Friends and Family, We would like to express our grateful appreciation to our family members, friends, and church members for both attending and participating in Keith’s Celebration of Life service. Your presence, prayers, cards, notes, and expressions of love have undergirded us during this unexpected and extremely difficult time. Keith’s absence will be profoundly felt as the days pass. But we are assured that Keith is with the Lord, and we will see him again.”*

VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL: JUNE 19-23 – 6-8:30PM This is for all children Pre-K through completed 5th Grade. We still need volunteers, and we will also need donations for snacks, volunteer suppers, crafts, and decorations. Donation boards are out now. If you have questions, ask Pastor Craig for more info.

SUMMER WORSHIP SCHEDULE BEGINNING JUNE 4 THROUGH AUGUST 13:

9:30 - BIBLICAL COMMUNITY BIBLE STUDY/SUNDAY SCHOOL HOUR
11:00 – JOINT WORSHIP SERVICE

During the summer months, we shift the schedule to ease the volunteer burden for the worship service hours, particularly in the Children’s Church ministry. This allows a break and to stretch the volunteer pool a bit during June, July, and early August while so many are in and out for vacation. During these weeks, we will NOT offer worship at 9AM. We will adjust the Biblical Community hour to begin at 9:30AM to allow for more time to pass between Bible Study and worship.