

The Supremacy of Christ in the Death and Resurrection of Christ Colossians 1:15-23 (2:11-15)

Intro: [pray]

- **Illst:** “Before and After” pictures taken for a fitness center or weight loss program . . .
 - **Good Friday is our “Before Picture”:**
 - During our Good Friday service we reflected on suffering and crucifixion of our Savior Jesus Christ. It was a service designed to leave us in the tomb but with hope.
 - **We need to remember** Christ’s suffering and crucifixion in deep contemplative ways.
 - **We need to consider** Christ’s suffering in our place and for our sin.
 - **We need to think about** the darkness that surrounded that day and horrible experience He went through as He was beaten for us, humiliated and shamed for us, tortured for us and nailed to the cross for our sin.
 - **We need to be reminded** that He did this willingly because He loved His people.
 - On Good Friday we are left in the tomb and it seems like we have no hope and little assurance. The disciples certainly felt that way. To grasp the magnitude of victory we need to go to the darkest spot, the lowest point in order make us feel the wonder and amazement of what Christ did.
 - **The Resurrection is our “After Picture”:**
 - Jim read **John 20:1-18** for us this morning because Jesus has risen from the dead. We are not left in the tomb. We are not left without hope! We are not left without assurance in our faith!
 - On Good Friday Jesus’ was being tortured and killed for His people and buried in a tomb but on Resurrection Sunday, Jesus is alive! **Colossians 1:18** says that Jesus is the *firstborn of the dead* so when the Gospels tell the story of Jesus’ resurrection they are unpacking that phrase. So this morning we celebrate **Colossians 1:18 and 2:12-13** because Jesus is alive.
- **If this is your first Sunday with us we have been working our way through Colossians** and we have been in **Colossians 1:15-20**, which is a hymn written by the Apostle Paul. Of all the glorious things Paul said the heart of this hymn is **v. 18** where he said “*Jesus is the . . . firstborn from the dead.*” **This morning we will be in vv. 21-23**. Colossians is a letter about Jesus’ physical death and resurrection. It is one of the letter’s main emphases because Gnostic false teachers of that day were saying it was not a physical death and resurrection.
- **Main Point:** In particular, **Colossians 1:21-23** is about the resurrected Christ reconciling sinners to God in the gospel and calling them to build their lives on that gospel.
- **Two points this morning’s sermon:**
 - *The Supremacy of Christ is seen in His reconciling all things to Himself by His death and resurrection (vv. 15-20, 2:11-15)*¹
 - *The Supremacy of Christ is seen in the transformed lives of those who hope in His gospel (vv. 21-23)*

I. The Supremacy of Christ is seen in that Jesus reconciled all things to Himself by His death and resurrection (vv. 15-20, 2:11-15)

¹ *This is an oxymoron . . . this is the greatest story every told. Victory through death. It ought not be true but it is. All other stories that depict victory through defeat or death is simply copying what God did in Christ for His people.*

- **The crucifixion of Jesus looks like a huge defeat but what we find is that what should have been a defeat was actually victory.** Jesus, by humbling Himself and dying on the cross, set His people free from the power of sin and the penalty of sin. It required His perfect, sinless life and His death on the cross. Yet Jesus also had to rise from the dead. If Jesus had not risen from the dead there is no victory. Jesus' resurrection from the dead is the evidence of the supremacy of Christ in the death of Christ. Jesus' resurrection is the death of death. When Jesus rose from the dead He killed our last enemy, death. It no longer had any hold over His people.
- **Jesus enemies could pretend that He did not rise from the dead but everybody knew that Jesus had been raised from the dead.** The governor knew it, the executing soldiers knew it, the women who buried Him and went to the tomb knew it. Everyone knew it. His adversaries knew Jesus had risen from the dead, that was why they fabricated a conspiracy about the empty tomb and how Jesus' disciples stole the body.
- **It didn't work!** The disciples were ablaze with boldness about the glory of God seen in the risen Christ. Their hope and confidence in Christ overflowed and they began to risk their lives by preaching the gospel and that Christ is alive. These disciples would not knowingly die for a lie. They began to preach in the face of death because death had no hold over them. They knew Jesus had power over death. They knew that no matter what their adversaries did to them that every bad and horrible thing would be undone by their resurrection in Christ. Jesus would set all things right. This emboldened them to deny themselves, take up their cross and follow Christ where He leads.

Then Saul, the Pharisee, was converted and went from killing Christians to preaching the gospel. He says in **1 Corinthians 15:14**, "*And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.*" Everything we believe as Christians rests on the fact that Christ has been raised from the dead. The whole system of Christianity rests on this fact.

- **Bottom line: if Jesus has not been raised from the dead then He is not supreme.** He is not God. He cannot save. He did not pay for sin. There is no hope for us and all is lost. If Jesus has not been raised from the dead then it is reasonable to doubt His deity and His supremacy but He was raised.
- **BUT**—the One who spoke the universe into existence did die on a Roman cross for His people and paid for their sins and then rose from the dead and by believing in Christ and turning from your sins and to Him for life, He will reconcile you to God.
- The world may doubt Jesus' lived and died, they may deny He was raised from the dead, they may ask for all the proof in the world. You may be able to show them solid biblical reasons to believe but it will never be enough. Only the Spirit of God can make a person believe willing and ready from now on to live to Christ.
- **All you need to know is what the old hymn says,** "*I have no other argument, I have no other plea it is enough that Jesus died and that He died for me.*"
- **Application:** Is this your testimony this morning? My prayer this morning is for Christ to give your dead spiritual heart resurrected life.

II. The Supremacy of Christ is seen in the transformed lives of those who hope in His gospel (vv. 21-23)

- **Remember the "Before and After" illustration?** Let's walk through our text thinking of "Before and After" for we really see it clearly in this text.
- **Verse 21—The Before Picture, "And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds"**
 - The idea of reconciliation is key in vv. 15-23.

- Look in v. 16, *all things were created through him and for him*,
- then in v. 17 we see that *he was before all things and in him all things hold together*. This is language of reconciliation.
- Then in v. 18 we see *he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead that in everything he might be preeminent*.
- This is functional language of reconciliation that is building up to v. 20 where we see *Christ reconciled all things to Himself making peace (between God and man) by the blood of His cross*.
- Next in v. 21, he gets historical and goes negative by calling us to remember who we were before Christ, *we were alienated and hostile in mind toward God doing evil deeds*. The Greek word for *alienated* in v. 21 is an unusually strong word that indicates a persistent and permanent condition. Our condition was compounded by the fact that we were *hostile in mind toward God*.

We did not want God speaking into our lives. We did not want Him telling us what to do. We did not want to submit to our Creator who called us to love Him with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength.

No . . . instead we wanted to continue to do what we wanted to do apart from Him and these things were evil deeds. We may **NOT** have been murdering other people like the Apostle Paul but we were not living for the glory of God who is our merciful Creator and lover of our souls and to ignore Him is not simply sin, it is evil.

Now this is a category we do not naturally have in our hearts and minds toward God. We think we are inherently good or in the very least okay, especially in comparison to those around us. Yet what the Bible teaches us is that apart from Christ we are in a permanent, persistent, miserable, corrupt, evil condition. Our condition before Christ was terrible and in a downward cycle of depravity.

- **Your objection may be: *I was never that bad!*** A lady once remarked at the preaching of the great 16th century Puritan preacher George Whitfield, *"It is monstrous to be told that you have a heart as sinful as the common wretches that crawl on the earth. This is highly offensive and insulting."* Most everyone responds this way when they are told they are a sinner and are hostile toward God. No one wants to be told that but it is what we need to hear because we need to hear the truth.

You wouldn't want to go to your doctor and him discover that you have cancer but say to you, *"Well it is not that bad. Take a couple of Tylenols for the pain. You will be okay."* You would quit going to this doctor because he is putting a Band-Aid on a mortal flesh and you will die. You are bleeding out and you need a tourniquet and stitches.

- **Application: Is this your response?** Why would we reject God's diagnosis of who we are? It is because our minds are hostile toward God and so we keep doing evil deeds. This last phrase is the cycle of despair. We keep going from bad to worse because we are not grounded in the gospel and most likely do not understand the gospel at all.
- ***We must keep working on this text for I do not want to leave you in the tomb! We must look at the After Picture. It is depressing just to keep looking at the old photo of us before we got in shape.***
- **Verse 22-23: The After Picture—** *" . . . he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him"²³ if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister."*
- **"reconciled in his body of flesh by his death"** Since the Fall of Adam in the Garden of Eden we have been at war with God. Humanity's condition since the Fall is in a terrible and corrupt condition . . . and . . . although Scripture paints a very dark picture of us apart from Christ, God's reconciling purpose is glorious but the only way for us to be put back into a right relationship with

our Creator so that we might be presented before Him in holiness and without blemish and free from the Accuser's (Satan's) accusations before the throne of God was for His Son to come and set things back in order by dying on the cross and rising from the dead.

- **Jesus did this on Good Friday.** It was by His body being broken and His blood being spilled. Each time we take the Lord's Supper we are reminded of what Christ achieved on that Good Friday—our reconciliation to God is our resurrection in Christ. It is first a spiritual resurrection and in the end a physical resurrection.
- **Turn over to Colossians 2:11-15**
- **We will sing of our resurrection in Christ when we conclude: *Arise My Soul Arise* by Isaac Watts.** Consider the words that remind us of our reconciliation.

My God is reconciled

His pard'ning voice I hear

He owns me for His child

I can no longer fear

With confidence I now draw nigh

With confidence I now draw nigh

And Father Abba Father cry

Arise!, Arise!, Arise my soul arise!

Shake off you guilt and fears arise!

- **What is Christ's goal for our reconciliation to God?** It is to present us holy and blameless before God on the date of Judgment. The Accuser will not be able to make any accusation against us because we are covered in Christ's righteousness.
- **Let show you what I mean. The Apostle Paul does something interesting here.** We have to slow down to catch it. The words *holy* and *blameless* point to the Old Testament sacrificial system. The animal that was offered was to be holy and spotless—perfect. We are not the sacrifice, Jesus was.

Jesus was the perfect, sinless sacrifice offered for us on the cross on Good Friday. He was our holy, spotless, blameless sacrifice that purchased for us the legal state of holiness, blamelessness and free from accusation before God.

- Jesus through His perfect life and holy sacrifice on the cross purchased our holiness, our blameless state and freed us from the accusations of our enemy. Christ met the conditions for us to be reconciled to God on the cross.

Now that we are declared to be holy and blameless and reconciled to God we are called to pursue what Jesus has purchased for us —our holiness. So we might say it this way, if God in Christ has earned our holiness and blamelessness in Christ, He also purchased for us the means by which we will become holy, blameless and free from accusation.

- **Application: Here is how this works. Think of a sin you struggle with in your life . . . got it in your mind?** Now think of how many times you have committed that sin. Think of how many times you have struggled with it over and over and failed many, many times.

Do you feel the shame before God? You hear the voice of the Accuser in your head call you worthless. Do you hear the Devil say to God, "How can you let this one into heaven? He/she is not holy, not blameless; I have the goods on him/her. God see how many times he has committed this same sin over and over. He/she cannot be a Christians and God you cannot receive him into

your presence or allow him to be your child. You must disown this one. You must punish this one by sending him to Hell.” I have had this conversation in my head, have you?

I also think when we hear v. 22 and then read v. 23a it strikes fear in the heart of the believer and he or she begins to think, *“Well I must not be saved. I know I am still struggling with sin and don’t feel holy. I know I am blame-worthy. Am I really continuing in the faith and stable and steadfast in the gospel that I believed?”*

- **Listen to me . . . are you listening?** If you have placed your hope in Jesus and His work on the cross for you then you are holy and blameless before God and no accusation or condemnation by the devil will stick. To continue in the faith does not mean you are perfect but it means you will from the moment of conversion till the day you draw your last breath apply the gospel to your heart and life. You continue to believe the gospel and practice continually turning from your sin and turning to Jesus for forgiveness, hope, life and joy.
- **This is a real conditional statement in v. 23 so let’s address the question: “*What if a person decides to walk away from the faith, walk away from the gospel?*”** What if a person decides to not believe anymore and just quit? I have two answers for this and neither of them are simple:

- **First a genuine believer can struggle with his assurance of his/her faith and still be a believer.** He might be angry with God and want to quit and say things he or she does not mean in a moment of darkness and anger. He or she might be in a spiritual depression and wrestle with the fact that they are genuinely converted. However, it will not last and God will bring them back to repentance and faith and a state of assurance through the gospel.

These dark nights of the soul come to most every believer and they wrestle mightily with their faith, sometimes for a few years but they come through because their faith is genuine and being tested by God to grow them according to God’s plan for them. I cannot discern what God is doing in the life of this person, they must walk with God through the valley of the Shadow of Death and as a church we must walk with our fellow brothers and sisters in these moments.

- **Second** there is the person who says he has genuine faith and he walks away from Christ much like the person I just described **BUT** he never returns. This is the person who the Apostle John talks about in **1 John** when he said they went out from us to show they were never part of us.

Jesus addressed this person in the Parable of Soils in Mark 4. The seed grew up quickly and looked pretty good but because of the sun, the weeds, the thorns and the rocks the plant withered and died. It seemed like it put down root but it never produced any gospel fruit. This is what **Colossians 1** has been talking about and Paul has been telling them that he sees gospel in their lives. *It is not that this person lost his salvation; it was he never possessed it. He never really was born again.*

- You see genuine gospel faith does not mean you are perfect in the sense that you never sin **BUT** it means you desire to be like Jesus. It means you desire to grow in holiness and you take steps to grow because you want to be like Christ. It means you believe God when He says you are holy and blameless **even** when you do not feel like you. It means that you press on to become who God says you are.
- **I love what Milton Vincent says in his little book, *A Gospel Primer*.** Vincent says this is how a Christian talks to himself about struggle with sin and how he prays the gospel into his heart and life.

When my flesh yearns for some prohibited thing, I must die.

When [I am] called to do something [I need to do but] I don’t want to do, I must die.

When I wish to be selfish and serve no one but myself [but myself], I must die.

When [I am] shattered by hardships that I despise, I must die.

When [I want] to cling to wrongs done against me, I must die.

When [I want] to keep besetting sins secret, I must die.

When [my] wants that are borderline needs are left unmet, I must die.

When [my] dreams that are good seem shoved aside, I must die.

... preaching [Christ's] story to myself each day puts me in a frame of mind to trust God and embrace the cross of my own dying also.²

- **This is what it means to be *stable* and *steadfast*, not shifting from the hope of the gospel in v. 23.** The words *stable* and *steadfast* are construction terms. They mean to build on the foundation of the gospel.

These words help us understand what Jesus meant when He applied the Sermon on the Mount and He concluded by saying in **Matthew 7:24-27**, “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.”²⁵ And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.”²⁶ And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.”²⁷ And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.”

- **Finally when Paul uses the word *faith* in v. 23 he means both the body of doctrine of the right understanding of what we believe and also the dynamic of our belief in that body of doctrine.**

This may sound like a strange thing for Paul to say but we must remember what was going on in the Colossian church. False teachers were preaching another gospel. They were adding to the gospel and Paul was warning them to not abandon right doctrine, a right understanding of the gospel.

Let me illustrate it this way. Imagine the gospel as a road and there are two ditches on either side of the road. What people tend to do is fall into one of two ditches:

- **The first ditch is to assume the gospel.** Let me give you some examples of how people assume the gospel.
 - **One and done.** They think because they understand the facts of the gospel, prayed the sinner's prayer, got baptized and became a member of the church that are all done and good with God. This person has concluded that he had responded to the gospel once and that is enough. He says to himself, “Well I have believed the gospel I don't need to hear it any more just tell me what to do so I can go on with my life.” This person is adding to the gospel because he thinks the gospel is not enough to transform his life.
 - **The other assumption is to treat the gospel like fire insurance.** This is also a *one and done mentality* because he thinks, “I have asked Jesus in my heart I can live however I want to live. There is no need to pursue God and to live a holy life.” This is the *one and done ditch*. This is a deadly ditch.
- **The other ditch is to think you must earn it.** This person believes that the dynamic nature of faith in a verse like **v. 23** means that he is doing something to ensure that God accepts and loves Him. He thinks he is earning his right standing before God with his hard work of stability and steadfastness.

² Milton Vincent, *A Gospel Primer*, pp. 40-41.

- **The gospel must be the center.** The gospel is not opposed to effort but calls us to strive to live in light of the grace of the gospel. The gospel is not opposed to effort; it is, however, opposed to earning right standing with God. Beware that you do not fall into either ditch.

Conclusion

The challenge with **v. 23** is that it can cause a genuine believer to not have assurance. When you consider the context of this passage you realize that Paul's tone is one of confidence. Yes he is giving a stern warning to the members' of the church to not return to their old way of life. He did not want to give them a false sense of assurance in case they began to mix true faith in Christ with the false teaching that was creeping in the church.

So to help us grow in our confidence in the gospel I want to close with an illustration I heard Dr. Don Carson give that I think will help bring it all together. Dr. Carson tells this story:

Imagine two Jews by the name of Smith and Brown. It is the day before the first Passover and they are having a little discussion in the land of Goshen. Smith says to Brown, "Boy are you a little nervous about what is going to happen tonight?"

Brown says, "Well God told us what to do through His servant Moses. You don't have to be nervous. Have you slaughtered the lamb and daubed the blood on the doorposts? Haven't you packed? Haven't you eaten the whole Passover meal with your family?"

Smith replies, "Of course I have done all of that. I am not stupid but it is all still very strange. I mean the plagues, the flies, the frogs and river turning to blood—it is all pretty awful! Now there is the threat of the first born being killed—it is all right for you because you have three boys. I only have one. I love my Charlie and the Angel of Death is passing through tonight. I know what God said. I put the blood on the doorposts but I will be glad when this night is over." The other man responds, "Bring it on! I trust the promises of God!"

That night the Angel of Death swept through the land, which man lost his son? The answer is neither because death does not pass them over on the grounds of the intensity of their faith exercise but on the ground of the blood of the Lamb.

The blood of the Lamb is what silences the Accuser. The blood is what silences the Accuser of the brothers before God. The blood of the Lamb is what silences our conscience when they accuse us directly.

How many times do we writhe in agony asking God time and time again if He can love us, care for us or forgive us when we have done such stupid, sinful, rebellious, things even after being Christians for 40 years.

What are you going to do? Go to God and say, "I tried really hard. It was a bad day, a bad moment." What are you going to do? What are you going to say . . . here is what we say:

*'I have no other argument,
I have no other plea
It is enough that Jesus died
And that He died for me'*

We overcome our Accuser by the blood of the Lamb. Here is the ground for all human assurance before God. Here is the ground of our faith. It is not the intensity of our faith . . . for . . . our faith is so very fickle. Instead . . . it is the object of our faith that is the key. It is the object of our faith that saves.

We overcome, we remain stable, we remain steadfast when the object of our faith in the blood of the Lamb—the gospel of Jesus Christ. You see it is not the supremacy of our faith that saves us but the supremacy of the death and resurrection of our Savior Jesus Christ that is the object of our faith that saves us.