

## **“The Hope of the Gospel”**

### **Colossians 1:19-23**

Sunday, March 12th, 2023

On April 15, 1912, the White Star Liner *Titanic* raised her stern high above the frigid waters of the North Atlantic and began a slow, seemingly calibrated descent as her lighted portholes and towering stern slid silently toward the ocean floor. That famous night saw the extremes of human behavior - from abysmal cowardice to the terrible beauties of sacrificial love.

But with the *Titanic* gone and her lifeboats spread upon the icy waters among the crying, drowning swimmers, the story was almost totally devoted to self-serving cowardice, for of the 1,600 people who were not able to get into lifeboats, only 13 people were picked out of the water by the 18 half-empty boats that hovered nearby. 13 people! 18 half empty lifeboats!

In Boat No. 5, when Third Officer Pitman heard the anguished cries, he turned the boat around and shouted, “Now men, we will pull toward the wreck!” But the passengers protested. “Why should we all lose our lives in a useless attempt to save others from the ship?” Pitman gave in. And for the next hour No. 5 with 40 people on board and a capacity of 65 heaved gently on the calm Atlantic, while the 40 listened to the fading cries of swimmers 300 yards away.

The story was much the same on the other boats. In No. 2, Fourth Officer Boxhall asked the ladies, “Shall we go back?” They said “No,” so Boat No. 2, about 60% full, likewise drifted while her people callously listened. On Boat No. 6, the situation was reversed as the women begged Quartermaster Hitchens to return to the site of the sinking, but he refused, painting a vivid picture of the drowning overturning the boat. The women pleaded as the cries grew fewer. Of the 18 boats only one boat, No. 14, returned to help - and this was an hour after *Titanic*’s sinking, when the thrashing crowd had thinned.

The parable of the *Titanic* is a case study of a world gone wrong. Fallen humanity is adrift on the unfriendly sea, alienated, unable to help one another despite a few individual half-hearted attempts. The wrongness of everything points to the fundamental problem of people’s estrangement from each other and from creation by sin. It is a picture of a world desperately in need of reconciliation and the harmony and rightness which that brings.

We’re a few weeks into our current Sunday morning sermon series through the New Testament book of Colossians. The Apostle Paul, though he did not plant the church that was then in Colosse, is instructing them so they can identify and fend off the false teaching that was then prevalent in that area.

Today's passage, **Chapter 1, verses 19-23** completes a section that teaches the preeminence and primacy of Jesus Christ. Let's look at them now:

**Colossians 1:19-23:**

"For it pleased *the Father* that in Him all the fullness should dwell, **20** and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.

**21** And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled **22** in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight— **23** if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister."

We've three things to highlight from this passage as follows:

**MP 1 - Our spiritual condition apart from Christ** (verse 21)

**MP 2 - Enjoying reconciliation with God** (verses 20a & 21b)

**MP 3 - Our spiritual condition in Christ** (verses 22 & 23)

As we begin exploring this text, I want to address the place of sacred Scripture in our lives as believers in Jesus Christ. *Do the words in this passage apply only to the church Paul addressed specifically, or do they apply to more than merely the church in Colosse? Do they apply to us as a congregation, even though this passage doesn't identify us as the "church in Aledo?" Are the words in the letter merely of historic value, or are they the commands and directives of Almighty God?*

The apostles, whom God inspired to write much of the New Testament not only accepted the Old Testament and Jesus' words as authoritative, they also began to see that their writings were on the same authoritative level. Being led by the Holy Spirit, they believed they were speaking for Christ.

The Apostle Paul certainly believed his message to be divine. He wrote, "If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord." (**1 Corinthians 14:37**).

He wrote to the church at Thessalonica - **First Thessalonians 2:13** "For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed *it* not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe."

*So, when did the Bible cease being applicable to modern audiences? If the Bible isn't authoritative in my life, then I am the authority in my life. That's precisely what we're trying to avoid - for we will worship something. We will worship God... or we will worship ourselves.*

Let's dig deeper into the text and see what God has for us. This passage, like many in the Bible, **shows us our spiritual condition apart from Christ**. Look at verse 21a, "And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works," The word "alienated" implies isolation, loneliness, and a sense of not belonging.

David Garland commenting on this verse notes, "Enemies in our minds by wicked works" reveals that thoughts and behavior are intertwined. Chronic sinful behavior twists the mind so that it becomes even more at enmity with God, and the twisted mind hurtles us into even greater depravity. The depraved mind then commends evil behavior as good or natural or as an alternative lifestyle. It produces and condones fear and suspicion of others and an urge to hurt and destroy them." (Garland, 96) Humanity's condition is terrible.

Apart from Christ, we humans are lost for eternity; we cannot do anything to help ourselves; we detest the God of the universe who created us and takes care of us. **Genesis Chapter 3** details the breach that exists between God and creature as Adam and Eve despised God and transgressed His command not to eat from the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

A childhood accident caused poet Elizabeth Barrett to lead a life of semi-invalidism before she married Robert Browning in 1846. There's more to the story.

In her youth, Elizabeth had been watched over by her tyrannical father. When she and Robert were married, their wedding was held in secret because of her father's disapproval. After the wedding the Brownings sailed for Italy, where they lived for the rest of their lives. But even though her parents had disowned her, Elizabeth never gave up on the relationship. Almost weekly she wrote them letters. Not once did they reply.

After 10 years, she received a large box in the mail. Inside, Elizabeth found all of her letters; not one had been opened! Today those letters are among the most beautiful in classical English literature. Had her parents only read a few of them, their relationship with Elizabeth might have been restored.

But, there is hope! God the Son is able to step in to repair the breach between Himself and unreconciled sinners. **Jesus brings reconciliation!** Verse 20 teaches Jesus "reconciled all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross."

Jesus brings *restoration*! "If there is to be reconciliation between man and God, the initiative and action must come from God. It is in Christ that God was reconciled to man. It was through His death that peace was made between God and man." (Wiersbe, 118)

"He (Jesus) is our peace" (**Ephesians 2:14**). As the late English author Dorothy Sayers once put it, "Whatever the answer to the problem of evil, this much is true; God took His own medicine." The cross is the ultimate evidence that there is no length the love of God will refuse to go in producing reconciliation. *Isn't that hopeful?* Consider Joseph.

Joseph, favored son of Jacob, was hated by his jealous brothers. He was beaten, cast into a pit, and sold into slavery (**Genesis 37**). Joseph was utterly wronged, and by the world's standards, had no cause to make peace with his brothers. But decades later, after Joseph had risen to power as governor of Egypt (**Genesis 41**), he exhibited extravagant, fully unexpected generosity by not only forgiving his brothers, but enabling them to have a new and prosperous life with him (**Genesis 45-46**).

As God brings reconciliation between Himself and you, He could also be affecting reconciliation between you and others - previously warring parties with little hope of addressing disappointments and hurts in a timely, gracious manner. Where the pain is raw; If anyone was justified in hanging on to his hurts it was Joseph. Oh, and Jesus. Go to Him, friend. He can work through some amazingly difficult and trying situations.

Once US Ambassador and congresswoman, **Clair Boothe Luce** wrote, "There are no hopeless situations; there are only people who have grown hopeless about them."

**GK Chesterton** helps us here. "Hope means hoping when things are hopeless, or it is no virtue at all...As long as matters are really hopeful, hope is mere flattery or platitude; it is only when everything is hopeless that hope begins to be a strength."

Finally, this passage shows us **our spiritual condition in Christ**. Verse 22b, God is able "to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight—if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel."

God is able to present you **Holy**, which is to be cleansed from all sin and separated entirely to God and His service. God is able to present you **blameless**, (faultless) which is without any blemish whatever, like a perfect sacrifice; and God is able to present you **above reproach in His sight**; which means that no one can legitimately rebuke you or make any charges against you that will stick.

Listen to J B Phillips' translation in the *New Testament in Modern English* for verse 23, "This reconciliation assumes, of course, that you maintain a firm position in the faith, and do not allow yourselves to be shifted away from the hope of the Gospel, which you have heard, and which, indeed, the whole world is now having an opportunity of hearing."

To be in Christ is to be in the best possible location and relationship. God has prepared you for the works He has in store for you to conduct for your good and His glory.

**MP 1 - Our spiritual condition apart from Christ** (verse 21), Before Jesus invaded our lives, we were alienated from Him; our minds were depraved, and how the mind goes, so does the mouth and body.

**MP 2 - Enjoying reconciliation with God** (verses 20a & 21b) God has brought peace where it was missing before.

**MP 3 - Our spiritual condition in Christ** (verses 22 & 23) God has made us holy, blameless, and above reproach.

When you think of the need for reconciliation in our nation's history, the War Between the States (the American Civil War) stands above even some of the conflict and division in our day. At least we don't have over 620,000 people dying!

President Ulysses Grant, the celebrated general over Union military forces, died in 1885. Then, four years later in 1889, Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederacy died. In 1893 there was a celebration at West Point where both men graduated in the first half of the 19th century. Both in their late 60's, the Widow Grant and the Widow Davis attended the ceremonies.

It turned out the ladies were both staying at the Cranston-on-Hudson Hotel, and it was Julia who learned of the coincidence first. She inquired of Mrs. Davis' room number, and knocked at the door. It was a pleasant surprise for Varina, who invited her in, and a friendship began.

The two iconic women of the Civil War discovered they lived within blocks of each other in New York City. They were seen periodically driving in an open carriage en route to lunch or a drive through the park, chatting away, as if they had known each other for years.

When Grant's Tomb was dedicated in 1897, Julia Grant sent a personal invitation to Varina Davis to attend the ceremonies. It has been suggested that in its own way, their friendship helped knit the North and South back together.

Reconciliation - it's the hope of the gospel!