

Colossians 1:21-23

Sept. 22, 2019

Good morning. We are in a series on the letter written to the church at Colossae penned by Paul. Colossians is tucked in the New Testament between Philippians and 1 Thessalonians.

Last week, we beheld Jesus high and lifted up—we saw him for who he is—preeminently significant. We saw that he was the creator of all things, the sustainer of all things, the restorer of all things by means of his death and resurrection.

Jesus is cosmically significant but also he is of great personal significance to you and I as well. This becomes clear in Colossians 1:21-23. I'll start reading in verse 19 for a bit of context,

“For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. ²¹ And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, ²² 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.” Colossians 1:20-23

PRAY

Wars are won and lost by soldiers on the battlefield—but peace is brokered and negotiated in the corridors of power by diplomats. The most important peace treaty in the history of the United States is the Treaty of Paris in 1783 ending the Revolutionary War.

This peace treaty was agreed upon and signed 236 years ago this month. The American delegation was led by Benjamin Franklin and included John Jay and John Adams. Great Britain was represented by David Hartley and Richard Oswald.

A man named Benjamin West was hired was commissioned to paint the American and British delegation at the same table discussing the peace treaty.

If a picture is worth a thousand words, this painting tells quite a story with just a glance.



We've got the American delegation on the left plus a couple of more guys—but where are the British diplomats?

They refused to sit for the portrait. And so the painting remained unfinished and is unfinished to this day. In some respects this unfinished painting became an indication of things to come.

In other words, England and the US had agreed to a Peace Treaty but it is clear that hostilities remained. Sure enough, the two countries would be at each other's throats for the next three decades and eventually go to war in 1812.

The treaty of Paris was signed officially reconciling the two countries but their peace would prove to be

fragile and fleeting. It was a fake and temporary peace.

Do you ever feel that way when you think about the peace you have as a Christian with God? Do you ever feel that you are technically at peace with God through Christ, but it is a fragile and fleeting peace ready to melt away at your next failure.

Do you ever feel like your peace with God is a fake and temporary peace? That somehow God is putting up with you and that just under the surface he is simmering against you.

My goal is for us to walk out of this room today not merely aware of our peace with God but convinced of our peace with God. I want the peace we have with God to be something we enjoy, take courage in, gain strength from, stand on and otherwise gives us confidence.

We need to grasp the peace that is ours.

We can be tempted to think that our peace with God is little more than words on paper. Like a peace treaty signed but only fragile and fleeting.

Brother and sister Christian we must lay hold of the peace that is already ours with God.

PROP: You have an eternal peace with God.

To be able to properly lay hold of the peace that is already ours, we need to understand how bad things were with us originally.

1. A Peace for Enemies

In order for peace to be authentic, there needs to be two warring parties. Paul reminds the Colossians and all followers of Jesus what they were before they met Jesus.

First lets start in verse 20,

²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

Jesus made peace by the blood of his cross. Now, for peace to be real, there has to be two warring parties. The war was between mankind and God. Listen to the language here,

²¹ And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds,

Verse 21 is the sad state of every person who does not follow Jesus Christ. Alienated from God. Hostile in mind to God. And as a result doing evil deeds to everyone else.

What does it look like to be at war with God?

Alienated from God: estranged from their creator—running far away—wanting nothing whatsoever to do with God.

Hostile in mind toward God: either not regarding God at all or regarding him with outright antagonism.

Doing evil deeds: war with God will lead to war with others and lead to a string of broken promises and relationships.

All of those things add up to a mankind being at war with God. Paul wants the Colossians to understand that they were once at war. We need to understand—we who follow Jesus—that we were once at war with God too.

You might think—all this war language sounds a bit too dramatic. You might be saying—I wasn't that bad—I didn't follow Jesus, yes but to say I was at war with God seems to be overstating it be half.

OR

Maybe you are here and NOT following Jesus and you read this and think—wow. I don't feel like I am at war with anyone much less God.

How can we make sense of this?

Let's try and get there from a side door. Imagine if someone decides to do all he can to harm you in any way he can. He breaks into your home, steals all your valuables and beats one of your family members within an inch of her life. Further imagine as you stand vigil at the hospital as she hovers near death that you get a phone call from the police.

They call you and say, "We wanted you to know that we have apprehended the man."

You breathe a sigh of relief until the voice on the other line says, "He wanted to pass a message on to you saying he was sorry. He was very sorry. Because he gave such a clear apology we let him go. We just wanted you to know."

How would you feel? You would rightly be incensed. That would be wildly unjust.

Why?

Because the thug needs to pay for his crimes. He would need to be incarcerated to pay for the crimes he committed against you and your family. He is a criminal and he hurt you.

If dangerous criminals were able to get off with an apology, peace would vanish from our streets. Society keeps peace by enforcing its laws.

What happens when we break God's law?

Cosmic Peace is broken.

God is our creator and he has said that mankind must love him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and we don't we break his law. Is he going to be okay with us just saying, "Sorry."

No. Someone needs to pay for what we have done. The reality is that we have done much worse than just not loving God enough. We have rebelled against God's rule. He created us and we have acted as if we were our own creator.

If God merely accepted an apology do you see that it would be wildly unjust? Sorry is not good enough. The Bible teaches that all sin before it is against anyone else is first and foremost against God. God is always the most aggrieved party when we do wrong.

- Speak hateful words to our sister? Against your sister but toward God.
- Steal hours from your employer? Against your employer but toward God.
- Cheat on an exam? Against your teacher but toward God.
- Drink and drive? Against all on the road but toward God.
- Use opioids? Against yourself but toward God.
- Lie to make yourself look better? Against whoever you are talking to but toward God.

Something more than, 'sorry' is in order to make things right with God. That is why it can be said of any who don't follow Jesus and of us before we began to follow Jesus that we were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds.

We were at war with God. Things were much worse than we thought. But Jesus has done more than we thought too. We go from a Peace with enemies to—

2. A New Position

We get that idea from verse 22.

Look there,

“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,”

He has reconciled (or made peace) how? ‘In his body of flesh by his death.’ That is a clunky phrase—‘In his body of flesh by his death.’ It is clunky but clear.

Jesus himself brought peace by dying himself.

Jesus has done the reconciling work with mankind. There was no delegation sent from humanity to barter or negotiate with God. Mankind was at war with God.

So God became man. To die and make peace with mankind.

Jesus is the answer to how God deals with broken laws and disobedience. How does God bring back the alienated? How does God end all hostilities? How does God reach those bent on doing evil deeds?

By the death of Jesus.

This should tell us that our disobedience was serious and if anything Paul is underselling our rebellion by saying we were alienated, hostile in mind and doing evil deeds. Mankind is that broken.

Additionally we should see that he did all the reconciliation work all by himself. Jesus died in the body of his flesh for our peace. Jesus did offer peace without our help. He died.

- He did not marshal us to fight all evil to gain peace. He died.
- He did not call us to religious tradition to gain peace. He died.
- He did not encourage obedience to gain peace. He died.

He died to win us peace.

But that is not all.

Look again at verse 22,

“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,”

We are not just reconciled with God—but did you see what else we have because of the death of Jesus?

We are holy
We are blameless
We are above reproach

Do you see what this means? At the death of Jesus in his body of flesh he had done more than just purchase for us peace—but we are presented to God TODAY as holy, blameless and above reproach.

This is SO important for us to understand, in order to gain confidence from the peace from God through the death of Jesus. You might be tempted to think—I might have peace with God that just means that I won't be punished. I'm still damaged goods.

False.

It is not just that the hostilities between us and God have ceased BUT ALSO that by the by the reconciling power of his peace we are holy, blameless and above reproach...toward who?

Each other?

NOPE.

Look again. Vs. 22,

“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,”

Before him = Before Jesus.

Remember we said that it sounded a bit dramatic to say that apart from Jesus mankind is alienated, hostile in mind and doing evil deeds?

If that was dramatic being holy, blameless and above reproach before Jesus is miraculous. Here in the word of God when we see verse 22 and allow it to speak to us we can gain a confidence in the peace we have with Jesus.

Those at peace with Jesus—what are you?

Holy: Set apart for God. Though we still struggle against sin, we are set apart for God. Do we sin? Yes, but our sins are no longer held against us, we have peace ‘in his body of his flesh by his death.’

Blameless: There is now nothing left in us that is a cause for blame from God. Do we sin? Yes, but our sins are no longer a barrier between us and God. We have peace 'in his body of his flesh by his death.'

Above reproach: No one, much less God can point the finger at you and say, you are unworthy. You are dirty. You have fallen short. You are not enough. We have peace 'in his body of his flesh by his death.'

We have a new position.

Once alienated, hostile in mind and doing evil deeds; NOW holy, blameless and above reproach. Jesus has granted us peace but also much, much more.

That is how it goes with Jesus. Apart from Jesus we were worse off than we knew but with Jesus we are better off than we would ever dare to hope.

Here is where our confidence can be undermined. Here is the thought process: You think, I don't feel holy. In fact, I had week where I can look back and see unholiness, lots of room for blame and I certainly wasn't above reproach. You might even look around and say, I can imagine some of the people in this room—they look like they have everything figured out—they are probably holy, blameless and above reproach.

Me? No way.

And you lose confidence in the peace of the cross.

What are we to do?

NOT rely on how we feel. This is so very important. One of the reasons we look at what the scriptures say about us is so you can see for yourselves where I'm getting this stuff. I can stand up here and say all kinds of things that might make us feel good but not be rooted in reality.

But here in the Word of God spoken by God to us today I can show you in print what God wants YOU to understand. He wants you to understand that any who genuinely follow Jesus have a forever peace with God.

Will you be perfect? No.
Will you be sinless? No.

I invite you to believe what the word says about you and not what you feel about yourself. Your sin is bad, but Jesus is better. You were at war with him but he has purchased peace for you.

No matter what you feel.

Do you hear this? The reason you can be confident in this peace we are talking about is because it is NOT because of anything you did. The ground of your confidence is WHOLLY upon Jesus.

That is one of the most important things we do on Sundays—force our eyes to focus on Jesus. We focus on Jesus by—

- Singing to Jesus.

- Praying in Jesus name.
- Believing the promises of Jesus.
- Seeing Jesus in the word
- Hearing Jesus preached

Our peace has been purchased by our savior. Be confident.

There are some cynical ones among us who are thinking right now, if Christians are already holy, blameless and above reproach no matter what they do—what does it matter how they live?

It matters greatly.

We've seen:

We were once enemies.
We are in a position of peace.

And lastly,

3. A Call to Stand

That comes from verse 23,

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.

If. That word introduces a conditional phrase. 'If you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast.'

Why would 'if' be here?

Paul just got finished describing this fantastic work of Jesus and the benefit for his followers—why say, 'if?' Because continuing in the faith is proof that your faith in Jesus is real. The greatest proof that you are continuing in the faith is that you continue to follow Jesus today.

One of the primary marks of authentic Christians is that they persevere to the end of their lives. That just means that they continue to follow Jesus and not stop.

To continue in the faith is to continue following Jesus.

You are able to remain stable as you continue to take in the truth of the word of God. The foundation of your life is to be the message about Jesus Christ and the word of God.

Stick close to his word.

You are able to remain steadfast when you remain loyal to who Jesus is and what he has done for you even if it comes a great cost to you.

Stick close to Jesus.

Being stable and steadfast means that we stay convinced that our only hope today, tomorrow and all the days of our lives is Jesus Christ.

The biggest danger for us in the room is that we 'shift' from the hope of the gospel that we have heard. It is a

great temptation to shift our hope to other things to try to gain hope from something besides the gospel.

We must not shift from the hope of the gospel.

How do we protect ourselves from shifting? How do we protect ourselves from shifting from the hope generated by the gospel of Jesus Christ?

By keeping our hope in him.

We **MUST NOT** put our hope in anything besides Jesus and what he has done for us. Our world is full of shiny alluring things that call to us telling us to hope in them.

Really we are looking at things that have the power to draw us away from the hope of Jesus and his gospel. Our world is full of things like that.

The bad things are obvious—but I think most of us struggle against good things held wrongly. Good things we ask to carry our hopes.

Like what?

- Money: How easy it is to think if I had just a little bit more money, I'd be okay. Another 5, 10, thousand dollars. More money would help me rest. Having enough money is not wrong but hoping in it always is. Don't let a love of money water down your love for Jesus.
- Family: How easy it is to define your hope by how your family is doing. Are the kids okay—if

they are then you are okay. It is good to want and even work for your kids good—but it is always wrong to place your hope on your kids always is. Family is a wonderful blessing but rotten savior.

- Career: How easy it is to all your hopes on your career to rise and fall with the advancement, respect, power and influence that comes with your job. It is good to have an enjoyable and fulfilling career, but it is always wrong to place your hope in what you do. No job can bear the crushing weight of your hopes.
- Escape: How easy it is to lost yourself in some escape, a hobby or pastime that you use to escape reality. Whether it be exercise, leisure, video games, projects around the house, cleaning the house, cooking or whatever—those things are good but insufficient. No hobby can bear the responsibility of delivering lasting hope.
- Relationship: How easy it is to determine your value based on who you are with. Relationships can be a wonderful blessing from God, but they are insufficient for carrying the weight of our hopes. No person can bear the responsibility of delivering lasting hope.

Hope in anything besides Jesus and you will not continue. You will not hold fast. The proof of authenticity in the Christian life is NOT perfection but faithfulness, continuing in the faith and the hope of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Followers of Jesus are far from perfect, but they stick by him.

What are we called to do today? Continue.

What are we called to do tomorrow? Continue.

What are we called to do next week? Continue.

Just continue.

Those who continue to follow Jesus are going to be the very ones who are able to lay hold of the peace of Jesus.

Let's put some of this together.

- *Recall what we once were.*

Does it seem strange you that Paul would remind the Colossians and us of just how bad we really were?

And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds

And all that? Why? Is it just to make us feel bad about our past?

No.

Why then?

To show how very much Jesus has done for you. If we weren't really that bad off and all we needed was a little nudge from Jesus in the right direction then what Jesus did for us was, 'meh.'

And the death of Jesus would seem completely unnecessary and foolish.

But if we were that lost—that alienated, that hostile then we have been impacted by the power of God. We were at war with God but God has made peace with us through his son.

That is a dearly won peace. One for us to prize.

When you see how bad things really were, you will see how much Jesus has done and you will confidence in his peace with you will grow and not be fragile and fleeting.

Be confident of your peace with God.

- *Ground your confidence correctly.*

You have reason to be confident that God is at peace with you because of what he did. We are not asked to measure our faith or find out if our faith in him is sufficient or enough.

The ground of our peace is entirely outside of us. We are NOT the primary reason for the peace we have with God. Do you see this? If some action you or I take is the ground of our peace, then we can lose that peace. It will always seem fragile.

But, if the ground of our peace is in Jesus Christ—we can be confident that our peace with God is not a treaty that hides simmering hostilities.

Be confident in your peace with God.

PRAY

“The grace of Jesus Christ be with your spirit, Amen.”
Gal. 6:18