

September 2023 Communion - Sunday Evening Service

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Date: 17 September 2023

Preacher: Rev. Colin F. Macleod

[0 : 00] If you have your Bibles open at Colossians and chapter 1, the passage you read there together, Colossians and chapter 1, which has much to say to us of what the gospel is and what the gospel does, particularly from verses 21, that passage from verses 21 to 23, where Paul is writing, remember, to young Christians, to a new church. They were brand new in the faith. They were standing alone in a pagan city that was awash with pluralism and atheism and secularism. There was all sorts of pagan rites and practices going on that utterly rejected the claims of Christ and the sovereignty of Christ and the heart of the gospel. And they're trying to stand, and they're trying to grow, and they're trying to witness, and they're trying to be faithful, and it's a struggle. Things are going hard. And so Paul writes to them this magnificent letter that focuses on the preeminence of Christ.

The whole letter is about the Christ of the church. And he's saying to them, look up. Remember who you are. Remember whose you are in Christ. And that's where we find the emphasis particularly coming through here in verse 21 in chapter 1. You who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds. 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, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable, steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven. It strikes me that being distracted or being forgetful, it's part of life, isn't it?

Sometimes we can just simply get things wrong by not remembering what we meant to do, what we set out to do. Being forgetful is just part of the fabric of life, isn't it? And that unfortunately can have a real impact in the church as well. Spiritually, we have to fight against being forgetful.

And I think I've said possibly before, maybe even yesterday, I'll say it again anyway, forgetfulness is an enemy of faithfulness. That's why we sat together at the table this morning.

What does Jesus say? Do this in remembrance of me. We're so prone to forget. We're so prone to take things for granted. We're so—it's in our DNA. It's in the lawlessness that is within us that we are born with. This wickedness, this sinfulness, this nature to rebel and turn away from God and forget how often we read in the Old Testament that the children of Israel, they turned aside, they turned back, they forgot, they abandoned the Lord. Read through the book of Judges if you have time, and I warn you, it should come with a health warning. It can be quite upsetting. It's a tough read because you see time and again the cycle repeating where the people turned away, they turned back, they abandoned, and they forgot the Lord. Forgetfulness is an enemy of faithfulness, and here we find Paul addressing that. You who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death. He's reminding them who they are.

[3 : 31] Christian friend, tonight, here is a wonderful reminder, a powerful summary of the gospel, if you like, as to who we are and whose we are in Christ. And it was timely. Chapter 2, verse 8.

See to it, no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ, for in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily. Here it gets really interesting. Here's the challenge. Here's the language of the Bible describing, defining Christian men, women, and boys and girls as people who are in him. It's Paul's favorite way of referring to Christians. You are in him. Again and again in his letter to the Ephesians and here in Colossians, we find him there, in him the whole fullness of deity, the deity, the deity, the fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you've been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority, in him also. He goes on and on referring to the Christian men and women who have come to Jesus and through repentance and faith are now united together through him and enjoying union with him. So let's pause and let's ask right away the question, is this language that describes you this evening? Are you in him? Have you come to Christ? Have you put your trust and hope and faith in him? Have you prayed the New Testament prayer, Lord be merciful to me a sinner? And it would seem that people had come in after Paul, or after the church in Colossae had been founded, and grounded in the gospel. The hope of the gospel refers to over there in verse 23 we've read together, and now in chapter 2 in verse 8 he said, wait, make sure no one leads you captive by philosophy and empty deceit according to human tradition, according to the spirits and the wisdom of the world, not according to Christ. And what's happened is young Christians have been pulled and drawn away from Christ.

They've been pulled and drawn away from the cross, from the hope of the gospel upon which they have stood. And Paul comes in with both barrels. He doesn't spare the horses. He says, don't make that error. Why? Well, if we go wrong at the cross, everything else will be wrong. And there were people coming into the church there in Colossae saying, well, Jesus is wonderful and a teacher and a healer and the Son of God, the Messiah, but... And they were bringing in philosophy and teachings and traditions of human elements and human wisdom, things that were being caught up in the world, things that had worldliness at the center instead of holiness. And so the church is facing a battle to survive.

And Paul is searching for the pulse. He's bringing them back to the cross. And he's saying, if you go wrong at the cross, everything else will be wrong. And so he brings them back and he says, you once were alienated, you once were hostile, you once lived according to doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled you in his body of flesh by his death in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him. The whole focus of the letter is the preeminence and sufficiency of Christ. And so we go there. He urges us, don't stray. And he presents you this wonderful, powerful reminder of the power of the gospel. I want us to think about a few things as we consider these verses this evening. The first is that he presents and describes a dilemma that is real. A dilemma that is real. He addresses our condition, describes our condition out with Christ. He speaks to people who as yet are unconvinced, uncommitted, unconverted, and therefore not saved. To people who are not in Christ. And he describes them as being alienated, hostile in mind, doing evil deeds. This is quite devastating language. This is, there's no middle ground here. There's no room to maneuver, discuss, debate. This is a declaration that if you are not in Christ, you are alienated, hostile in mind, and your life is given over or dominated by wicked, evil deeds. The word group is quite staggering. To be alienated is to be estranged.

It means to be a non-participant in the life of God. Then he speaks here about being hostile. And that's a word that means to have a hateful enmity in your heart. It's really strong language.

[8 : 24] And Paul is using this language that by the grace of God we would come to understand, this is us unless and until we come in faith and repentance to Jesus. So while some might find fault with the New Testament here and pick it apart and accuse the New Testament of being heartless and harsh and hard, friends, isn't it good to know that this is how God sees us?

Not Paul, not Colossae, not the free church of Scotland. This is how God tonight sees us as he looks on our heart. And if we are not in Christ, if we are not in his Son, if we have not come to Jesus in repentance and faith, we are alienated, hostile, and wicked in the sight of God.

And this is what makes this dilemma stand out. It's a dilemma that's real. This is the truth of our situation. We are at enmity with God. We are opposed in our mindset, in our decision-making, in our lifestyle. In other words, in our natural state, there is no room for God, no love for God, no desire to honor God. There is no closeness, there is a distance, and there is a hardness of heart that is, at times, frightening. One of the most disturbing conversations I ever had, a number of years ago, while still an army chaplain, I was with a young soldier on exercise overseas, and we were having a remembrance service. Now, usually, I'd love to say all the soldiers loved services, and they flocked into the services when the Padre was going to open the Bible. No, they weren't. They were not angels. But when it came to remembrance, every man and woman was there, front and center, not a problem, because we were there to remember our own. We were there to remember the fallen. And so, I was shocked to be told by one of the commanders on the ground at the time, we've got an issue with a soldier who doesn't want to come to the service. I was stunned by this, what's happening. So, we got this guy aside, and he was really agitated. He was really, you could see the anger in him. Turns out, he was a Satanist. Now, I know this is an extreme example, but the conversation with that young man left a mark on me, because I saw in him this utter refusal to listen to common sense, and say, we're standing here before the living God to remember in prayer. The families of those who have lost loved ones who were our colleagues and comrades.

The band of brothers should bring us together at times like this. But he was adamant, you Christians, you Christians, you just down-talk the devil all the time. And I remember a phrase he used, he said, we have a Bible too, you know. And his eyes were so angry. It was just oozing from him.

And that young man is a living memorial to the language used here by Paul, alienated, hostile, doing evil deeds. Now, we can stand back and say, that's an extreme example. I'm not a Satanist. I would never be, I would never indulge in satanic rites and engage with the things of the devil. No.

[11 : 44] But friends, the problem is this. The dilemma that is painted here is one that is so real and so vivid that we must take to heart that unless and until we come to Christ, we are out with Christ. There is no middle ground. There is no soft sell here. There's no no man's land. It's not that we can say, well, I've got this covered. I've got that to appeal to you. I've perhaps got this that might make me okay. The only thing that makes any of us okay, the only grounds upon which God accepts any of us this evening, is the death of Christ on the cross for the sins of the world. And unless and until we come to him and to the cross and say, Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner, unless we respond in faith and repentance to the message of this gospel, this gospel of hope that's described here in the preeminence of Christ and come to him as our Lord and Savior, then we remain out with Christ, and therefore under the wrath and judgment of God. Friends, I can't ask you enough. I can't appeal enough. I can't plead enough that you respond this evening while we are on mercy's ground, while the Lord in his grace has seen to it that, again, we would explore for a short time his gospel, the message about his son, and the sacrifice made by his son upon the cross, so that we tonight would respond to that message and come to him in faith. I've kept a news clip in that I came across a number of years ago as well because it too had an impact on me in a negative sense. It was someone who was describing that there'd been a bit of a ferrari down south. I think it was in Dorset somewhere or Devon, and there was a bit of a ferrari because one of the care homes down there had decided that the small chapel they had, they needed to remove the cross. So the cross was taken out, and it caused a great kerfuffle, and the mainstream media picked up on it, and one of their commentators wrote an article, and I kept it, and I want to read it to you to give again an example of this dilemma that is real. When someone you love has died, you face the prospect of mortality more starkly than at any other time in your life. In a Christian country, the cross symbolizes salvation and redemption. It comforts and reminds you of the possibility of eternal life. So far, so good.

She goes on, even if you know in your heart that believing in an afterlife is clutching at a straw from a fairy tale. That may come across as just a bit of argumentative journalism, someone who's a wordsmith writing an article for public consumption. To me, it's the heart of the dilemma that Paul is here describing. That is the language of someone who is alienated to God, hostile in mind, refusing and rejecting the claims of Christ upon her to come to him in repentance and faith. Why would she come to this clutching at a straw from a fairy tale? I wonder tonight, friends, how you view Christ, because that's what this comes down to. Is he your Lord and Saviour? Is he your friend? Have you come to him in repentance and faith to seek the forgiveness that only Christ can give? We sang there together, and a few moments ago, he put a new song in my mouth, our God to magnify. Many shall see it and shall fear, and on the Lord rely. Oh, blessed is the man whose trust upon the Lord relies. That's the way to go home tonight. Relying on the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Friend. A dilemma that's real.

And that brings us to the second verse here. In verse 22, we see this deliverance that is secured. 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. Now the tenor changes, the atmosphere changes, the mood lifts. This is wonderful. Now I don't often follow any of the popes that have been around in my own lifetime, but a number of years ago, there was a big splash in the media because the Vatican had begun to tweet. The pope was tweeting, and they made a bit of it, oh, this is interesting, what are they saying?

And Jim simply said, one of the popes wrote, even a few words can communicate great messages. Well, maybe not profound, but true. We won't disagree with the pope for saying that, for sure.

But what I want to say to you is here in verse 22, there are only 25 words. And here's the truth, that even a few words can communicate great messages. And this is the greatest of all.

[16 : 44] Remember who you are. Remember whose you are. You who once were alienated. 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.

Here, then, is the hope of the gospel. This is a deliverance that is secured. These words have eternity stamped upon them. Hear this what God has done about the dilemma we face that is real.

Back in chapter 1 and verse 13, we read, he has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

It's as good as it gets. This is wonderful. This is joyful. This is hope. This is peace. This is light, because it's the forgiveness of sins that we so desperately need. This is the deepest of our needs being described here. And that gospel is impacting everywhere. It centers upon and it flows from who Jesus is and what Jesus Christ has done. I can tell you also this evening about Rick Husband. Rick Husband was the commander of the shuttle Columbia, a shuttle that exploded on re-entry, on attempting to re-enter the atmosphere in 2003. All seven crew members instantly lost. Before every mission, the NASA astronauts, the full-out last request paperwork, and found among Colonel Rick Husband's last request paperwork was a personal note to his pastor. He was a committed, lively Christian. And in there, he had taken time to write a note to his pastor in case things went wrong as they did. And the note simply said to his friend and to his pastor, tell them about Jesus, he's real to me. What a testimony. He died in 2003, and we're still remembering him because he testified to his love for Jesus Christ. He was not just some figment of an imagination. He was not some upright theological blur of light. He was the living Son of

God who loved him and gave himself for him. Tell them about Jesus is real to me. And now Paul is saying, remember who you are, remember whose you are. He has reconciled you in his body of flesh by his death in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, before God the Father. Now we have an altogether different word group. The language here is so wonderful. He speaks of being reconciled and holy and blameless and blameless and having the hope of the gospel that has been proclaimed among all creation. This then is the deliverance that is secured. It's the deliverance that Rick has been knew. It's the deliverance that every Christian here knows tonight. It's the deliverance you can know tonight if as yet you are not a Christian. And so, again, the summons, the invitation, the plea, come to Christ. Come to him. Put your trust in him. Put your faith in him. Put your hand into his and seek from him the forgiveness that only Christ Jesus can give. Why is this so important? Why is this so necessary? Because of the problem of sin. The mind that is set in the flesh is hostile to God,

[20 : 23] Paul would write in Romans in chapter 8, for it does not submit to God's law. Indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. 1 Kings chapter 8 says there is none who do not sin.

Psalms 143, in your sight no one is righteous. Romans chapter 3, all have sinned and come short. And in 1 John chapter 1, if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves. There's no small print in the Bible. There's no terms and conditions apply in tiny little print tucked away at the back that doesn't actually tell us the reality of what it is we have to think about and know about this evening.

It's all here in bold print, accessible language, understandable terminology that spells out for us friends tonight that we are all sinners in need of a Savior. And that's why God sent his Son.

Because to meet our deepest need, we needed to have the guilt of our sins dealt with, covered, and washed away. Listen to how Psalm 32 puts it.

Describes the deliverance we receive in Christ. He lifts our burden. He covers our condition. He cancels our debt. Wonderful language. Embedded there in the Psalter. Psalm 32. He lifts our burden. He covers our condition. He cancels our debt.

[21 : 56] Isaiah chapter 43 has these words to warm our hearts this evening. I will remember your sins. That's what happens when we come to Jesus.

When we come in sincerity of heart, when we seek him until we find him, when we come to him and cry out for forgiveness and cleansing in repentance and look to him in faith, this is what happens.

He lifts our burden. He covers our condition. He cancels our debt. And the sin that has alienated us from God, the hostility of our hearts is removed. The heart of stone becomes a heart of flesh. He has reconciled in his body of flesh by his death in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him. This is a deliverance that is secured.

The toxic condition and death of sin removed. Obliterated. Deleted. instantly and eternally and all things are made new. The closeness we enjoy with God, the communion we enjoy with God displaces the estrangement of the alienation and hostility from where we were, the condition we were born into. Jesus, when he comes into our heart, changes everything in the blink of an eye, in a moment, in a heartbeat. We are transferred by the Father and presented by the Son. Christian friend, tonight, your deliverance is secure. Your deliverance is secure.

A number of years ago, I noticed driving through the north of Edinburgh, we had to do that quite regularly. We'd drive through Craig Miller on our way to Leith or back and forth. And it wasn't the kind of area that struck you as being one that might be very salubrious, but they had this tremendous library. It was a community library. And you'd have to drive past it on the main road whenever you were going through Craig Miller. And what caught my eye, and I've always remembered it, is that they had etched on the glass window on the frontage of the library this inscription, come in and be inspired. I thought that was tremendous. I thought, wow, what a motto that is. That should be above the door of every church of Christ in Scotland tonight. Come in and be inspired. And what's to inspire us? The gospel, the hope of the gospel that is here described in verse 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. Isn't it wonderful to think tonight that we are reflecting on the same gospel, the same

[24 : 47] Savior, the same message that drew these Colossian Christians together 2,000 years ago? That tonight, the Lord would say at 10 to 7 on Barabbas and Sunday evening, his gospel would again go forth. His gospel of hope would again be put front and center, and the claims of Christ would be put before each one of us, and that the preeminence of Christ, who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, would again be presented as the way and means of salvation set before us by the Lord God Almighty. This is what's inspiring. Come in and be inspired. And I hope, friends, the gospel inspires you and drives you and fills you with a hope and a desire and a purpose and a determination and a willingness and a vision to serve the Lord. And that's where we go next, finally, as well, because as well as a dilemma that's real and a deliverance that's secured, we see here, finally, this in verse 23, a duty that is clear. A duty that is clear.

If indeed you continue in the faith, this is what we must do. Stable, steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard. What does the world, the flesh, and the devil want above all tonight? That we would shift from the hope of the gospel that has been heard, that has been declared.

That we would shift from the cross of Christ as being the only means of salvation. That we would turn away, that we would do what the children of Israel did in the book of Judges. Read it through in Numbers, in Deuteronomy, in Joshua as well. They turned aside. They turned back. They abandoned. They forgot the Lord their God. What a devastating summary that is of a nation. We just need to look around, don't we? And we see it here as well. Tonight, across Lewis and across Scotland, people have turned back, turned aside. They have forgotten and abandoned the Lord. And the gospel of hope has become a message lost in the mists of time. Christian friends, there is a duty that is clear. And that duty is described in the word group here in verse 23. We are to continue in the faith, stable and steadfast and full of hope, not shifting. It's time to stand up and stand out for Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

What happens when we do so is where this word group takes us. There is an essential part of the process in the Christian life, and it's about growth and strength, being at the means of grace, being people of the word, people of prayer, people of the sacrament, which makes the table so special when we meet there. We meet there occasionally throughout the year to remember the death of our Lord. And there we receive grace and sustenance in a special way to fill our hearts and grant us the strength we need as we prepare to face a world that has turned from Jesus Christ and doesn't want to know. I think we can picture this as what I would call a spiritual accent. I think that as we are, as it says, if we continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope, what happens is we develop a lifestyle. Think of it as an accent. You can tell something about someone on their accent. You can tell where they're from, or perhaps you can certainly tell where they're not from. I'm sure many Lewis folks over the years have been asked, what part of Ireland you're from?

Well, because folk will think they're like, oh, are you Irish? And you can tell them, well, no, I'm not. So while accents don't always pin us down specifically to a six-figure grid reference, oh, that's definitely someone from Barvis, they can certainly tell you're not from London.

[28 : 45] They'll know you're not from Newcastle. They'll know you're not French because of your accent. And as we develop a spirituality, a vitality, and a commitment, and as we develop a nurture, an ability to continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, refusing to shift from the hope of the gospel, that will speak. That will be seen. It will be light shining in the darkness.

And friends, that's our duty, to continue in the faith, to grow, to show people that you are committed because you're convinced. And because you're convinced, you're committed. The two go together.

And people will see that conviction, and they will see that commitment in the path of lifestyle you develop, continuing in the faith, looking unto Jesus, holding on to the hope of the gospel, refusing, not shifting from that hope. You're stable. You're steadfast. It's language of being rooted and grounded, ready to go, ready to face the day, ready to face the week, ready to face the month, because you know who you are, and you know whose you are. And so we are to continue in the faith.

We are to look to persevere. We are to worship and pray and study. And we're to do all these things to the glory of our God. It is our duty, our joy, and privilege tonight, Christian friends, to side with and be identified with Jesus. That's what he calls us to do. Sometimes, of course, our imagination will run riot with us, and we'll think all sorts of things. We'll think of how people will react if they hear of our faith, how people might speak to us, if they know we're serious about the Lord, how people might, what they might think, what they might say, what they might do toward us, or think about us, or say behind our backs, because of our Christianity. And we can be so caught up with that, that we refuse to move forward, and we forget to make this progress, and we fail to continue in the faith. The very thing that the Lord calls us to do. But listen to these words as we close.

Warren Wiersbe, tremendous American commentator and preacher, said, unless our doctrine leads us to duty, it is of no use to us. So, Christians, we've enjoyed a communion season together. The Lord provides these weekends, these seasons, these moments to nourish and feed and enable us to grow in grace as we receive the grace and the blessing of grace that he has for us, so that our doctrine leads us to duty. And what is our duty? To continue in the faith, stable, steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that we have heard, that has been proclaimed, and that I know many of you know intimately and know well. You hear it week by week.

[31 : 50] Here in Barvis, and as you go around the place, you're going to hear the gospel. You know the gospel. The question tonight, my friend, is have you responded to the Lord of the gospel, Christ, who calls us from darkness to life, who calls us to commitment, who calls us to be serious about an eternal destination? Don't go into the world feeling alone, Christian friends. Don't go into the world tomorrow feeling intimidated. And please don't be afraid. If that's how you feel, talk to Murdoch. Talk to Murdoch. Talk to your elders. Talk to fellow Christians. Talk to someone about feeling uncertain, feeling intimidated, feeling isolated. And you will be amazed at what you hear when you're reminded again and again you're not alone. You have brothers and sisters around you.

You have Christian people to lean on and talk to and rely on. But more than that, you have the Lord himself with you. I'll finish with just one final thing. I remember years ago we visited in northern Belgium a town, I think it was called Beaumont Hamel. And it was a First World War, a tremendous First World War battle took place there. It was the Battle of the Somme. And in this particular village, a lot of Scottish soldiers went over the top and many of them never came back. It was a disastrous day in the British military. It was an awful bloodbath. And in order to mark the place where so many Scots fell, a monument was raised. And it's known as the Jock on the Rock. And there's a picture of a, I think it's a sergeant major from the Black Watch, one of the famous Scots battalions. And he's depicted in brass as a monument here and a statue above this rock. And on the rock, there's a simple inscription. It's in Gaelic. And someone here can tell me how to say it properly. But it translates as, in the day of battle, it is good to have friends. Now remember tonight, remember tomorrow, and this week, as the battle unfolds, as the war between the flesh and the spirit is experienced in your heart, as it will be. And as perhaps you come up against intolerance and indifference and unbelief, which is a powerful, powerful force. Remember, in the day of battle, it's good to have friends.

You have friends here. But most of all and best of all, you have the friend of friends, the friend of sinners, your Lord and Savior, who will be with you as you live for him and abide in him. And may that be our portion in the days to come. Let's pray for a moment together.

Lord, hear us as we call on you tonight, as we rely on you, Lord. We thank you for the clarity of the gospel. We thank you that there is no small print and hidden terms and conditions.

We must come to Christ to be right with God. We must come to Christ to have our sins forgiven, to have our debt cancelled. And we bless you that at that moment of doing so, you will remember our sins no more. Lord, be with us this night, we pray in Jesus' precious name. Amen.

[35 : 12] Amen. Well, we're going to close our service tonight singing from Sing Psalms in Psalm 36.

Psalm 36, page 44 in our psalm books. And we'll sing here from verse 5. From verse 5, we'll sing to the end of verse 9. Your steadfast love is great, O Lord. It reaches heaven high. Your faithfulness is wonderful, extending to the sky. Your righteousness is very great, like mountains high and steep. Your justice is like ocean depths, both man and beast.

You keep Psalm 36, verses 5 to 9, to the praise of God. Psalm 36, verse 5 to 10, verse 5.

To the sky. Your righteousness is very great, like mountains high and steep. Your righteousness is like ocean depths, both man and beast should keep. How precious is your steadfast love, what confidence it brings.

Both high and low, find shelter in the shadow of your wings.

[37 : 37] They face within your house and drink from streams of pure delight.

For with you, with the source of light. In your light we see light.

Almighty God, we bless and praise you tonight for your goodness toward us. We thank you for the food you have provided that we can share in together in fellowship. Now that we draw our service to a close, we pray, Lord, for your blessing upon that time of fellowship together.

We thank you for those who have provided the food that we can share now. So, Lord, be with us and part us with your blessing. May we know the grace and mercy and peace of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, now and always. Amen.