**This is the Gospel**

June 9, 2013

Colossians 1:1-23

Key Verse: 1:23 “If you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.”

The epistle to the Colossians was written at about the same time as Paul’s letters to Philemon and to the Ephesians, when Paul was in Rome under house arrest. Paul himself had not visited

Colosse before then, but had heard about their faith from his fellow evangelist, Epaphras, who was with Paul at that time in prison. Paul’s intention in writing this letter is to communicate clearly to the Colossians and to us who Jesus Christ is, and what his gospel means to us. Today, many people do not know what the gospel is. Many pastors do not teach the clear gospel. Instead of calling people to faith, repentance and submission to the supremacy of Christ, many of us tell people that Jesus wants to give them a happy marriage or a stress-free life. While Jesus will certainly change our lives, our marriages, and our stress levels when we bow before His preeminence, we must move away from “What Jesus can do for me” to “Am I living in light of His lordship?” We don’t simply “add” Jesus to our lives; we worship Him with our lives through our obedience.  
  
Much of the false teaching taking place in Colosse had to do with the minimizing of Jesus. Many people thought He was important but not essential. They had given Him a place in their lives, without recognizing that He demands first place. Jesus was prominent to them, but certainly not preeminent. What is the gospel? Gospel means good news. Is it good news to you? Why is it good news?

After believing in Jesus, many people are troubled by simplicity of the gospel, paradoxes of man. Man is dual existence. It seems as though we are living a double life. Even though God made us holy through his Son Jesus Christ, we are wretched sinners. We feel like hypocrites. We question our identity just like Jean Valjean in Les Miserables, singing, “Who am I?” He struggles with his identity; He is a holy child of God, yet he is a fugitive.

Some people cannot take this double life, and try to find an earthly solution. They are tempted by false teachings. One false teaching is to justify our sins: Matter is evil, and what we do with our bodies does not matter. They take God’s grace of the forgiveness of sins for granted and use it as an excuse to stop struggling against sin. They say, “God is love,” and he will forgive me no matter what I do. The opposite extreme teaching is to make all kinds of rules for their lives. They are not comfortable with all the freedom we have in Jesus Christ. They are more comfortable with all the rules such as praying 5 times a day, not eating pork, etc. Once I was surprised to see someone doing a daily bread which was from 5 days earlier. He said that he missed daily bread due to conferences and he was making up missed daily bread. I was impressed by his discipline but at the same time was sorry for his legalistic attitude.

**First**, the supremacy of Jesus. In order to know the gospel, we need first to know who Jesus is, and what he has done. Look at verses 15. “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.” Jesus is the visible image of the invisible God. Hebrews 1:3 says, “The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of His being.” Someone has said that Jesus is God with skin on. That’s a pretty good word picture. Jesus is not only God; He is the “firstborn over all creation.” Here the phrase “firstborn” is most frequently translated as “heir or owner.” In ancient time it meant the “ranking one, or supreme one.” Jacob was not born first but he was the heir. This is strongly supported in Psalm 89:27, where we read that God appointed King David as his “firstborn,” even though he was the youngest of eight brothers. This verse concludes by saying that David will be the “most exalted of the kings of the earth.” “Firstborn” therefore is a title of honor or position, not chronological order.

Jesus is the image of God and the exalted one over all creation because He is the Creator. Lest anyone misunderstand what “firstborn” means, in verse 16, Paul explains that all things were created in, through, and for Christ: “For by Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by Him and for Him.” Jesus is not a mere man. He is the creator of all things, those things we can see and those things we cannot see. The context of Colossians 1 declares that Jesus is the Sovereign Creator, not one who was himself created. Jesus is not only the Creator, He provides the purpose for His creation: “all things were created by Him and for Him.” The goal of all creation is to glorify Christ. Revelation 4:11, in the New Living Translation, puts it this way: “…For you created everything, and it is for your pleasure that they exist and were created.”

Look at verse 19. “For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him.” Here Paul emphasized “all his fullness.” This means that Jesus is the final, complete, perfect revelation of God. This refuted the false teaching that Jesus was insufficient, that something else in addition to Jesus was needed. Paul proclaims that Jesus is sufficient for our salvation, for our spiritual growth, and for everything that we need. Jesus possesses all of God's attributes, such as wisdom, love, holiness, power, Spirit, glory, compassion, righteousness, justice, eternity. John 1:16 says, “From the fullness of his grace, we have all received one blessing after another.” We can receive fullness through Christ. We can be happy and satisfied with Jesus alone. We do not need anything other than Jesus. When we feel something is missing in our spiritual lives, we are greatly tempted by false teachers who say that we need some supernatural experience such as speaking in tongues. Or sometimes, in seeking satisfaction, we sin, and suffer from guilt and despair. Let’s accept that in Christ there is everything we need. Christ gives us inexpressible joy, peace that passes all understanding, and life to the full (1 Pe 1:8; Php 4:7; Jn 10:10).

**Second**, why the gospel is good news. God is perfect, and Christ is perfect in his supremacy. God could have left us in the darkness of our sins, forever cut off from our hope in his kingdom. But God was pleased to make himself known to men through Jesus Christ in the flesh. God was pleased to bring his perfect love down to men, and to redeem men with that love from the power of sin and darkness. God was pleased to sacrifice his perfect Son on the cross and shed his blood for sinners. God gave himself over to death, so that all men who believe might have life and peace. Look at verse 13. “For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.” When we are in the dominion of darkness, we don’t know what is going on. We don’t know why life is so miserable and meaningless. We don’t know where to go or what to do. We only grope around and gradually die. But God, in his great mercy, rescues us from the dominion of darkness. Thank God! Not only did God rescue us, but he also brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves. When I was young, I did not have the hope of God’s kingdom. All I could think about was how I was not smart enough to win a Nobel prize. My wife was born to godly parents. But she was in the dominion of darkness because she thought that she was trapped by authoritarian God and could not enjoy her dream. But by his grace, God brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves. Wow! God transferred us to a totally different world. What kind of world did he bring us to? The kingdom of the Son he loves. This kingdom is the kingdom of light, the kingdom of love, and the kingdom of life. Here the “light” is contrasted with “darkness.” All the elements of the dominion of darkness are gone and we experience their good and godly opposite. Instead of condemnation, there is forgiveness; instead of hatred there is love; instead of lies, there is truth; instead of despair, there is hope; instead of sorrow, there is joy; instead of shame, there is honor. It is indeed good news.

There is an another reason why the gospel is good news. Look at verse 21-22. “Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.” The false teachers at Colosse were teaching people that they could get closer to God through the worship of angels and by observing certain rules and regulations, but they couldn’t promise total and complete reconciliation. Unger’s Bible Dictionary defines reconciliation this way: “The restoration of friendship and fellowship after estrangement. It also means to change thoroughly from one position to another.” Reconciliation happens when someone or something is completely altered and adjusted so that a relationship of peace can begin with the one with whom estrangement had taken place.

Before we experienced peace with God, we were “alienated.” One dictionary defines “alienate” as “to estrange; to withdraw; to make indifferent or averse where love or friendship before existed.” We use the word “alien” to refer to strangers or outsiders. Apart from the grace of God, all of us are estranged from God. We were “enemies.” We were not just alienated; the Bible says that we were actively hostile to God. Our behavior was “evil.” Bad thoughts often lead to bad behavior. What’s inside will come out. Despite these negative traits, God took the initiative and reconciled us through Jesus’ death on the cross. Let’s look at the three results of our reconciliation: Firstly, “Holy in His sight.” We are “set apart” and declared holy by God. Secondly, “Without blemish.” This word was applied to the Temple sacrifices, which had to be free from any faults or defects. When God looks at you, He sees no blemishes! Thirdly, “Free from accusation.” This is a legal term, which literally means, “not to be called in.” No charge of condemnation or sentence of eternal death can ever be brought against believers in the court of divine justice. Paul’s emphasis on our holy standing before God was a direct attack on the false teachers. They promised a kind of “perfection” for those who had secret and mystical knowledge. In essence, Paul is saying, “You already have a perfect standing in Christ, you are holy in His sight, without any blemish, and free from any accusation. Why seek for it anywhere else?”

**Third**, how we should live a life worthy of the Lord. Look at verse 9. “For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.” Paul’s prayer for the Colossian Christians is a little bit surprising. One might think from Paul’s thanksgiving for the Colossians that they were OK as Christians. But evidently, Paul saw their faith, love and hope as a good beginning toward a life worthy of the Lord. Now, however, the Colossian believers must take the next step to build on that foundation of faith and love. Therefore, Paul prayed continuously for the Colossians to take that next step. What was it? What did the Colossians need in order to please God? Look again at verse 9. “For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.” Paul prays earnestly that the Colossians might be filled with the knowledge of God’s will for them. Look at verses 10-12a. “And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father.” God’s will for the Colossians and for all believers is precisely what we want for ourselves. We want to live lives worthy of what Christ has done for us. We want to bear fruit through many good works. We want to know God more and more so that his image is shining within us. We want to be strong in doing what is right, and in rejecting what is wrong, patiently waiting for our true reward. In short, God’s will for us is to grow in the character and image of his Son, Jesus Christ.

May God bless you to grow in the knowledge of God. When you feel that you are a wretched sinner, remember the good news that you are holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation. When you feel like you are super Christians, remember that you were enemies of God in the past so that you can know God’s grace.