

Christ Presbyterian Church
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Matt Moberg
Reconciled by Christ | Colossians 1:19-23

Good morning! How's everyone doing? You good? Fully alive? Fully woken up? Yes? Good. My name is Matt Moberg. I'm thrilled to be with you this morning, especially when the flutes are out, and I love this series that we are doing here at CPC on Colossians. Let's not waste too much time; let's go straight to the text. If you have your Bibles, pull them out now, and turn to Colossians 1. We're going to go back to the text that Laura touched on last week because it's so good. So, Colossians 1:19-23. If you don't have your Bible, we have the text on the screen, and you can follow along there. It reads like this:

¹⁹For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him, ²⁰and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. ²¹Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. ²²But 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—²³if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and you do not move from the hope held out in the Gospel. [Colossians 1:19-23]

Will you pray with me? Jesus, Spirit, wake us up to this moment. God, help us to be here with You. Say what You want to say. Gives us ears to hear, eyes to see. In Christ's name, we all pray. Amen.

This is one of Paul's finer works. Paul has a lot of great works as you and I both know, but the Christ hymn in Colossians 1:15-23 is pure poetry. It's profound. It's beautiful. There's so much that we need to extract out of it and understand, but before we do, let's just do the right thing and let Bob Dylan speak for a moment. Let's watch this film please.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2g-RDQ-2AaE>

So, obviously this morning we're going to talk about the dangers of drug use and the importance of staying on the straight and narrow. What's going on here? I mean, some of you are like, *that was the 60s man, that's just what we did. We didn't have Xbox, we didn't have video games, we looked at signs and played with the words.* It's a weird thing though, right? It's complicated, it's confusing, it's Dylan. It's a building that has a sign attached to it and the sign is very straightforward, very clear as to what the building is all about. The sign says: WE WILL COLLECT CLIP BATH (and by bath I think they

mean bathe) & RETURN YOUR DOG / KNI 7727 / CIGARETTES AND TOBACCO (and we will also sell you cigarettes). It's very straightforward. We understand what this building is all about, but then the building interacts with Bob Dylan and words get moved around, and the once simple straightforward meaning of the building is now a little complicated. It's all a little confusing, and we no longer can remember what the original sign is all about. And so, as uncomfortable and weird as that video may be and as concerned as you might be for Bob Dylan's health, when you think about that—a sign, an original meaning that then interacts with life and words get moved around and things get confusing—that strange video suddenly feels a little familiar, because like a sign on a building, you too were capable of understanding what you were all about. You knew who you were, but then you turned two and maybe your neighbors stole one of your toys and you got angry and you said some things, and then you turned five and you had to put your first dog to sleep, and then maybe you turned seven and you lost a grandparent, or you turned ten and (this is my story) and you start getting afraid of the ball in baseball and all the other kids made fun of you, you turn thirteen and steal your first bike, you turn fourteen and that boy stole your heart, you turn sixteen and you think that you've finally found freedom, you turn seventeen and you can't wait till you find freedom, and then you turn eighteen and you're looking at all your college applications and they're asking you essay questions about who you are and the problem is you have nothing to say because you can't remember—all your words got moved around as you were once a simple sign, but now you interacted with life and the simple sign is simple no more. It's confusing. And in the midst of all those interactions, we carry our past into our present; we're trying to understand what it's all about. What am I all about? And there is this longing, which I would argue is probably at the core of every human being, who just says, *man, I wish we could just go back. I wish we could start over.*

I told this to our people at The Table. Last month, Lauren (my wife) and I went out to dinner after a Table service. My two boys rode home with my parents. When we got home, Lauren was standing in the living room talking with my mom when all of a sudden she heard a thud in Sawyer's room (Sawyer is ten months old). So she goes to Sawyer's room and he is lying on the carpet, he's not in his crib, he's lying on the carpet. He has made a leap from the crib to the carpet. Lauren freaks out. We picked him up and took him to the hospital and he's fine, but when I brought him into the emergency room—there were old people, young people, sick and sore people, people of every kind in that room, but when we walked through with Sawyer—it was like there was something about Sawyer that made even the sick people even a little bit more sick. Like they looked at him and there was this guttural “no”. There was angst. People would come up to us and they would go, “Why is he here?” “He's too young to be hurt.” “He's too young to be in a hospital.” “He's too young to be bruised up.” You see, when people see a baby they see possibility. When people see a baby they think, *he's not supposed to have his words misunderstood, yet. He's not supposed to be lied about, yet.* Babies aren't supposed to feel ugly, yet; lonely, yet; like failures, yet. When people see a baby they think what it would be like to have high school back. What would it be like to start over again? To no longer have to carry all of these things that we've been carrying? What it would be like to have our parents back together again? When people see a baby in the hospital, they say, *it's not supposed to be that way with you—you're*

supposed to get the clean slate, because once you start interacting with life, your words get moved around and you'll never get that clean slate again.

In Colossians 1, Paul is saying, *on the contrary. There is a place to place your past.* There is a place you can put all these things that you've been carrying, so you don't have to carry them anymore. I bring all this up about new beginnings and babies and that longing because that is exactly what Paul is going after in our text today.

Paul writes to the Colossians,

¹⁹For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him, ²⁰and through Him (Him being Jesus) to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. ²¹Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. ²²But now you are reconciled by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in His sight, without blemish, without any accusation—²³If you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. [Colossians 1:19-23]

Alienation and accusation are no more; all things have been reconciled to God. And the Greek word there for *all*, actually does mean **all**. Like there is something in us that goes, *yeah, but not . . .* no, it is all things. All public things, all private things, all spoken things, all unspoken things, all the things you carry, all the things that have happened to you, all those things are now rearranged because they are reconciled, they are bound up in the body of Jesus—they don't have to be heavy anymore. Nothing is exempt from all. This is why the Cross is God's defining sign. It shows us what He's all about. Jesus is the revelation of God and what Jesus does on the Cross shows just how good God actually is. The love of God carries all the things that you don't have to carry anymore. That is the sign of God, and yet somewhere along the way we've got it twisted a little bit. We've taken the original sign of God, of reconciliation, and we've moved a few of the words around so that now when we think about the Cross, and we walk into this room and we see the Cross hanging up here we think, *that's where Jesus died to forgive us for our sins*. That's true. Forgiveness is involved in the Cross, but the main storyline is reconciliation. Put it like this, forgiveness is the "alley", but reconciliation is the "oop". Forgiveness is your mom standing on the front porch yelling at you to come in for dinner, but reconciliation is when you're actually sitting at the table with a plate full of meatloaf. Forgiveness is the first step in the right direction, but reconciliation is the full arrival.

The word that Paul uses here for reconciliation is *apokatallassō*. Say that ten times fast. It means a recovery of perfect harmony. It means getting your sign put back together again. It means that all the things you have been carrying and looking for a place to rest, now have found that place. All the words that got bumped, and twisted, and shifted around—they're back in order again. And what Paul's not saying is *forget who you were*. Paul's not saying *none of these things have happened to you, they don't matter*. No, they do matter. You know, when you think about your past, when I think about my

past, there are things that have happened to us that were hard, and things that were unfair, and we did some things that were hard and we did some things that were unfair. There are things that have happened to you that should not have happened to you, but they did happen, and so instead of letting them float in our heads, indicting us, calling us things that are not true, what Paul is saying here is *give them a new name. Name it and claim it. It is reconciled. Put it under a new storyline because the old storyline is dead.* This is the good news of the Gospel. See, a lot of people, when they hear the word “Gospel” they hear a religious program, an invitation to take the one-two steps and you might become something, somebody, someday. But the good news of the Gospel is the announcement of who you are right now. This is your truth. You are not a reject; you are reconciled because of what happened on the Cross. The Gospel is not an invitation in who you might be someday; it’s the announcement of who you are right now.

The Gospel is reconciliation. It’s the recovering of perfect harmony. So what the Gospel does then, it takes a world full of noise and it creates a song, and it takes a life like yours and like mine, a life full of noise and chaos and all of our words being confusing, and it creates a perfect song. It rearranges it so it makes sense, redeems it. But a song only matters if it’s sung, which is why Paul goes on to say, “Continue in your faith, established and firm, and you do not move from the hope held out in the Gospel.” Be fixated on that good news about who God says you are in a world that tries to tell you to something different every day. He says “continue on” because the truth of the matter is that whether or not you buy into the Gospel, we’re all going to continue on in some form. So Paul is saying, *why not take the best story out there and call it your own? Why not continue on in something that actually tells you who you are, not depresses you with lies?* Paul says, “Continue on in your faith”. That’s a good word, because if you have a crooked past, if you’ve got some shadows in there, it might take a lot of faith to believe that you are redeemed, that you are a new creation. It might take a lot of faith, but the Gospel says, who you are is true. There is a Cloud Cult song that I love, and this is a line from it: “Someone tell the devil that we don’t need no hell because we’re all pretty good at beating up ourselves.” Right? The Gospel says *Stop! You don’t need to do that. There’s a better story to live in now.*

Jesus talks about what Paul is saying in a story of His own. He has a crowd around Him and He tells one of my favorite stories in the Gospels. It’s a story of a dad with two boys, you might know it . . . it’s called the Prodigal Son. One of the boys goes up to dad and says, “Dad, give me my share of the inheritance”, which is to say, “Dad, I need you to die so I can have my money.” I mean, you won’t find that on a Father’s Day card, right? It’s not a kind thing to say to dad, but the dad is like the God character in this story, and he says okay. And the boy takes the money and he goes off into a distant land and he spends his dad’s money on women, and whiskey, and Fantasy Baseball, and all these different things that kind of fill up his life until he hits rock bottom, and his rock bottom moment is when he wakes up one day and realizes that the job I have, where I am clocking in from 9:00AM-5:00PM, is I am working in a pigpen. Now, for Jewish people that’s about as low as it gets. You shouldn’t be touching pigs in general, let alone have your livelihood in a pigpen. So, he gets to the bottom spot and he says, *all right, maybe it’s time to go home. I mean obviously I can’t be a son anymore given all that I’ve done*

in my past. Being a part of the family probably isn't in the cards anymore, but I can maybe go back and help out on the farms like a hired hand. And, he comes up with this speech and he says:

¹⁸Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants. ²⁰So he got up and went to his father. [Luke 15:18-20]

Son's headline of the story is "I'm no longer worthy of being your son." That's how he understands his whole life right now. Does that sound familiar?

I used to work at TreeHouse, a beautiful organization, and one day I asked one of the kids, "Will you tell me about your life? Tell me the story of your life—who you are and what you're about." He wrote three sentences. The three sentences were: I was born cursed, I am cursed, and I will always be cursed. That's how he understood his life. Somewhere along the way his words got real twisted up, his understanding of self got real confusing. He maybe had a speech like this one, "I'm no longer worthy to be called your son."

So the boy goes home, he's turning up the road to go back to his house, he's got his speech in hand and he's ready to give it, but now, here are some of the best words in all of Scripture . . .

²⁰"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him." [Luke 15:20]

You could say it like this, while he was in alienation and accusation, the father went after him. And then the son starts to give the speech he had planned and he says, "Dad, look, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am not worthy of being called your son anymore." I love this text because the father doesn't argue with him; he just doesn't listen to him at all. He just blows right past him.

²²But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and let's celebrate. ²⁴For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate. [Luke 15:22-24]

While this person was covered in shame, God put a robe around him. While this boy was looking at his hands thinking about all the different things that he had done, God put a ring on his finger. When this boy was staring down at his feet and thinking of the places I have gone, how far away I went from home, the dad slipped new sandals on his feet and then they celebrated. That's the call of the Christian life—do we understand that? It's about celebrating what has happened. If you want to know whether or not salvation has arrived in someone's house, you ought to see if there's a party going on or

not. Are they celebrating? Are they living lives of celebration? People get uncomfortable with this. People will say, *well I understand that that's grace and that's good, that's a gift, but what's going to get people to change then? Don't we need to get people to stop doing dumb stuff? Don't we need to get people to clean up?* And I think that's a misunderstanding of what grace is, because grace is a gift, grace is comfortable, but grace also has teeth; when grace tells you about who you actually are, it reminds you that you're probably better than some of the things you're doing. If you can get a grasp on who you are, you're not going to want to play to any lower-level games. That's not your story anymore; you're better than that. See, the good news is always intertwined with the bad news in this way. It's two messages in one. This is like Jesus who both says, "Come to Me and I will give you rest. Take on My yolk, it's easy and light", but Jesus also says, "Pick up your cross every day." So when you see the gift of grace, it's about the awareness of who you are and what you are about, which means that old stories have to die. Reconciliation is letting old lies, old stories, old definitions die so that you can claim your one true story. It's the process of death and reconciliation that we see all over in the Scriptures. This is why Jesus says, "Today you will be with Me in paradise" to the one who is dying next to Him. It's not the people clinging to their old lives and their own lines, it's the ones who are willing to say *that's done. I need something better. What do you have for me?*

There's a movie that came out a few years ago. I'm sure many of you have seen it. It's an amazing movie called *Blood Diamond*. It's a story of a family—they are in this African village. It's the dad and mom and their kids, and while they're there, these rebels come into town and start looting and pillaging and tearing up the place, and then they take the youngest boy and train him into being a child soldier, one of the rebels. They essentially brainwash him, and they tell him over and over again, *you are dangerous, you are dumb, you are broken, you're angry, you are violent, you are nothing. Your purpose is in how violent you can be for the cause.* And they make him do some terrible things. Essentially, the story is about this father who, while this boy is a long way off, goes out looking for him. He's wondering where he could be. And there's this moment where the boy comes up on his dad, brainwashed and thinking of his own father as an enemy because of all that he has gone through, and because of how rearranged his original sign got, and he pulls a gun on his dad.

The call of the church is that when we get brainwashed, we get confused about who we are. We remind people who the Gospel says we are and what we're all about. You are not who you were. Will you close your eyes with me as we end this time? I just want to speak some truth from the message. I don't know what you brought into this room with you this morning because I think we bring thousands of different things, but according to Scripture, according to the Cross, you're not a bad person. You're not a liar, you're not a cheat, you're not a failure, you're not toxic, and you're not weak. You are strong, you are reconciled, you are redeemed. You are not defined by the thing you said years ago that still keeps you up at night. You're not defined by that thing that happened to you or that thing you did to somebody else. You're reconciled. Christ has washed you clean—all things, all of your things, all of my things—have been bound up in the body of Jesus. And all we have to do now is celebrate.

Jesus, we thank You for the gift of the Cross. Lord, help us stand firm and hold on to the hope of the Gospel. Help us to believe that what You did was enough. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.