

**The Gospel Is for People  
from All the Earth & All the Ages  
Sermon on Colossians 1:21-27  
Saint Mark's, Watertown, WI  
Pastor Karl Walther  
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Scripture says: *Because of his great love for us: God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ—even when we were dead in transgressions. It is by grace you have been saved!* Amen.

God's special Word to us this morning is Colossians chapter one, verses twenty-one through twenty-seven:

*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 -- 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.*

*Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness -- the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.*

This is God's Spirit-inspired Word of Jesus Christ.

### **Introduction: What Is Your Goal For Life?**

Dear fellow Christians—for whom Christ suffered, and who are willing to suffer for Christ:

What's the goal for your life? When you wake up in the morning, what are you looking to accomplish?

Is it only to make it through one more day? Is your goal simply to make it through one more day of school or one more day of work—not thinking too much about that, until at last: you're done with school or work? And then, when you're done with work or school, is your goal to keep yourself sufficiently amused—to entertain yourself sufficiently? Is that really you're goal for life?

Personally, I think that is about as far as an awful lot of people go. But finally, these thoughtless little goals are pretty empty, aren't they? I mean: one school day follows another; one work day follows another. And even if you amuse yourself enough one day, it seems like it takes more energy to entertain yourself the next. And then, finally, school and work and amusement end—and you die.

### **Theme: The Gospel Is for People from All the Earth & All the Ages**

That's not the sort of existence God wants for you, though! Could I share with you today the kind of life your dear Lord desires to give to you—and to all people? In his Word to us today, our Savior assures us: **THE GOSPEL IS FOR PEOPLE FROM ALL THE EARTH AND ALL THE AGES.** And here's the Gospel: (1) **CHRIST SUFFERED TO RECONCILE US TO GOD.** And here is the implication of that for our lives: (2) **WE SUFFER TO RECONCILE OTHERS TO GOD.**

## **Exposition One: Christ Suffered to Reconcile the Colossians to God**

As God's Word to us today opens up, the Apostle Paul is writing under inspiration of God the Holy Spirit to the Colossians, the Christians in a city called Colosse, in modern-day Turkey. It's about the year sixty AD. And so, it's about thirty years after Jesus suffered, died, and rose on our behalf.

It had been a busy thirty years! For fifteen years or so, the good news of salvation through Jesus had spread three hundred miles up the eastern Mediterranean coast—mostly to Jewish individuals. In the past fifteen years, the gospel had spread as many as thirteen hundred miles to the west—into Asia Minor: during Paul's first missionary journey, into Greece: during Paul's second and third missionary journeys, and finally all the way to the capital city of the world in those days: Rome, Italy.

That's where Paul was at this point, although he was a prisoner. The Jews had decided to put him to death for spreading the gospel to the Gentiles, and Paul had appealed for protection to the Roman Emperor. And so it was that the apostles' gospel got to Rome. It's from there, in chains, that Paul is writing back the thousand miles to Colosse—to Gentile Christians, many of whom he had not met.

And how does he start? – *Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior.* That's a sober start, eh? Not only were the Colossian Christians originally *alienated* from God—sitting there in Asia Minor, not knowing nor worshipping the true Lord. But they were *enemies* of God because they were *evil*—and a good God has got to hate evil! That's bad news; that's God's Law.

But here's the good news; this is God's gospel: *Now God has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.* What a relief! *Christ's physical body ... reconciled* the Colossians to God. Christ's physical body suffered for their every sin to present them to their Heavenly Father *holy, unblemished, and unassailable.*

This is, in fact, true for every soul. But it benefited those Colossian Christians only: *if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel.* And Paul sums it up: This good news of Jesus your Savior: *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.*

## **Appropriation One: Christ Suffered to Reconcile Us to God**

So, my friends: Have you ever been alienated from anyone? It's a dreadful feeling, isn't it? I mean: you enjoyed a warm relationship with somebody, and then it went kaput—cold as winter ice. Worse yet: Have you ever been the cause of that?

The answer is “yes”, you know! God had a warm, Father-ly relationship to us. But we refused to do his bidding. Our evil behavior brought disrepute on his family name. And we left him. We shoved our Father away from the door of his house, sinfully stormed out, and shouted angrily all the way.

Or as Paul put it: *Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior.*

But God's Father-ly heart still yearned for you. I mean: He's still God. He's still fair. He still had to exercise his righteous vengeance upon your transgressions. But God devised a plan that led to your survival. Oh, and how it cost him! You see: God took his dear, obedient, natural-born son – Jesus Christ – and punished him for the sins of us, his adopted children. By the blood of Jesus Christ, by the physical death of the very Son of

God, your Father threw open the doorway of his house and prepared for your return. He meets you at the door and says, “Welcome home!”

Or as Paul put it: *Now God has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.*

So, my friends: Have you ever been reconciled to anyone? It's glorious, isn't it? I mean: it's like springtime sunshine, springtime light, springtime warmth after an icy winter. And that's the relationship with your Heavenly Father that Jesus restored to you!

So: *Continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel!*

## **Exposition Two: Paul Suffered to Reconcile Others to God**

Now, there's a worthy goal for your life! You need to keep trusting Christ. You need to keep bathing yourself in the cleansing water of his mercy. You need to keep banqueting yourself upon his sacrifice. You need to spend time enough with Christ – by way of his Word – that his mindset becomes your mindset. Now, that's what life is about!

But there's more.... Listen to the striking thing which Paul says next: *Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you* (by Christ), *and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.*

Whoa! Wait a minute! What's this?!? Paul is saying there was something *lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions*? Didn't Christ himself declare: “*It is finished!*”—Salvation is won?!?

Of course! And it is! Christ's sacrifice paid for every last sin of every last soul who has ever lived anywhere on the face of this planet. And that's the point! Paul felt compelled to get the message to those souls. And Paul knew that would mean self-sacrifice. But moved by Christ's sacrifice, Paul was also willing to sacrifice himself.

So, while preaching the gospel, Paul said: *I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.* And it did cost Paul some pain. Even before the Jewish leaders had nearly torn him apart and had put him in chains, Paul wrote this: *Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned* (and left for dead), *three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea.*

Paul sums it up: *I have become the church's servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness -- the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.* That *mystery* that so mystified the Jews of Jesus' era and Paul's time-period: that God loved all people, Gentiles included, so much that he sacrificed his Son for them—that *mystery* was one Paul was willing to suffer, self-sacrifice, and even die in order to proclaim.

## **Appropriation Two: We Suffer to Reconcile Others to God**

And doesn't that also give us a real goal, every day of our lives? Besides continuing to trust Christ, we need to proclaim Christ, so that all others might trust him! And that's a life worth living!

Not that it's not going to take sacrifice, though.... I mean: you and your friend will be kicking back, discussing the events of the day, and your friend will say, “Yeah, you know, you can't control other people anyway. I mean: if two guys want to get married, let 'em; if the local video store wants a pornography room, let 'em; if some poor lady needs an abortion, finally, let 'er get one.” You do risk some sacrifice to your

friendship when you say, “Now wait. That’s not love. We can do better for those souls than that. Sin is serious. And as much as we can prevent it, so much the better. And yes, it’s forgiven. So, as much as I can tell those souls about Jesus their Savior and encourage them to serve him, so much the better.”

There’s some self-sacrifice there. But take a look at Christ on the cross.... For him, you can sacrifice yourself!

Or here’s another one.... You’re married. And it’s a rough marriage. Your husband, your wife, really is just really difficult to get along with. I mean: He doesn’t seem to care about you at all, or he’s downright mean. She’s so bossy you about can’t stand it, or her mood swings are absolutely incredible. Well, you are genuinely sacrificing some ease-of-living to remain within your marriage. But didn’t God put you into your marriage to say, “Hey, Hon, I really wish you’d let me share with you how Jesus helps make me happy.” Or: “Hey, Hon, Jesus has made you a fine Christian soul – he’s forgiven you all your sins! – please, don’t misrepresent him like you are.”

There’s self-sacrifice there. But take a look at Christ on the cross.... For him, you can sacrifice yourself!

Will you allow me one more example...? (You have no choice, do you?!) God lavishes upon each of us hundreds of dollars a week—and in many cases, when you total it all up, it’s more like a thousand. True: some has got to go to feed the family and provide a residence and all. And hey: every penny of that serves the Savior, who gave us our families. But can’t we take a truly generous chunk and sacrifice that to church?

I mean: let’s say I give a hundred dollars a week to the operating fund. Sixty of those dollars (a couple hundred times over, that is: from a couple hundred families) puts teachers in their classrooms across the street, every morning of the week, to share with hundreds of children the incomparably great news that Jesus’ sacrifice has made them right in God’s sight. Forty of my dollars (again, a couple hundred times over) gives us – what, maybe – seventy sets of worship services a year, maybe five hundred Bible classes or Catechism classes a year, I’m guessing probably more than two thousand pastoral visits of some sort or another each year, and a whole lot of other things.

Now, there’s some sacrifice there. A hundred dollars a week might buy me a better house or a better car, after some weeks I could get another tv or another computer, or I certainly could eat out more. (Or on the other hand, God could decide not to bless me so richly either.) But if my money means that other souls get to hear of Jesus Christ, and so: some of them are saved—well, I can do without so much money; my Savior certainly did.

Or take mission money. Let’s say I give thirty dollars a week to missions. Two weeks ago, three seminarians from this congregation led our worship; ten of my dollars went to support their training. Last summer at synod convention, an African pastor named Salimo Hachibamba preached in this very pulpit, thanking our church body for sending missionaries to tell him and his family about Jesus the Savior; ten of my dollars went to support that kind of work. This coming summer, one weekend of vacation, I’m going back to Topeka, Kansas—now no longer a mission congregation, but when I was there: it was, and we (through our mission offerings) helped establish that church; ten of my dollars went to support efforts like that.

Now, there’s some sacrifice there. But take a look at Christ on the cross.... For him, we can sacrifice ourselves!

### **Conclusion: What a Satisfying Goal for Life We’ve Got!**

Enough, eh? So, when you wake up in the morning, what are you looking to accomplish? ...Yes, you’ve got to feed yourself. And yes, there’s school or work. But

the purpose of all of that and your purpose is, finally, two-fold: that you trust Christ, and that you proclaim Christ, so that others may trust him, too.

What a satisfying goal! What a rich life! And after all is said and done: What an eternity we are going to share with Jesus!!! Amen.

Scripture says: *God raised us up with Christ, and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. Amen.*