

OAK HILLS MISSION

Part 2 - The Whole Gospel to the Whole Person

TEXT: COLOSSIANS 1:15-23 (ESV)



Rev. Russ Ramsey
August 30, 2009-Vision Sunday
Oak Hills Presbyterian Church,
Overland Park, Kansas

Oak Hills' Mission

Oak Hills' mission is to **proclaim the whole Gospel to the whole person** in our community and throughout the whole world, equipping individuals and families to:

- learn to know and enjoy God;
- respond to Him through authentic worship and godly living; and
- lead others to do the same—all by the grace of God and all for His glory.

Another Sermon about the Gospel

Vision Sunday is a day where we look ahead, asking the Lord to give us grace, wisdom, faith and love enough for all that He has for us in the coming months. This year, Vision Sunday coincides with a study of our mission statement. Last week we took up the point that as part of the visible Church charged with carrying out the Great Commission, ^(Mt 28:19-20, Acts 1:8) Oak Hills has a mission to know and make known the astonishing grace of God. Today we turn to the first action in our mission—to **PROCLAIM the whole Gospel to the whole person**.

Proclaiming the Gospel is not the sole responsibility of the elders, deacons, ministry leaders or Sunday School teachers. Oak Hills' leaders are charged with guarding the doctrine and purity of the Gospel, but by no means are they the only ones responsible to proclaim it. That responsibility falls to every single follower of Christ—no exceptions. We must begin the study of our mission with the call to proclaim the Gospel.

But why is proclaiming the Gospel our priority above all else? Because, more than anything—money, friendship, leisure, sex, family, food, or shelter—this is what we need. Why can you count on the fact that on every Vision Sunday our focus will be on the Gospel? Why don't we move on to something else? Because along with the truth that we need the Gospel more than anything lies another point of fact—we're all prone to wander and wonder whether or not Christ is really enough.

This was the question as Paul wrote to the Colossian church—is Jesus enough or is there more we need for right relationship with God? The Colossians weren't denying the Lordship of Christ or His resurrection. Rather, it seems they wondered if the unmerited grace of Christ was all well and good for their entry into the Christian faith, but of course the other shoe would have to drop sooner or later and they'd discover that while grace was sufficient for their entry into the faith, surely more would be required for them to *remain* in the faith.

Paul's opening words in this letter are strong. In the verse before today's text, Paul talks about the sufficiency of Christ in terms of what God has done for them through Jesus—He has qualified His people to share in the inheritance of the Saints. He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness. He has “transferred us to the Kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption and the forgiveness of sins.” ^(Col 1:14) In our text today Paul shifts his focus from what Christ has done to Who He is—and here we see why He is all we'll ever need.

Colossians 1:15-23

¹⁵He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. ¹⁹For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

²¹And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, ²²he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, ²³if 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.

The Gospel to the Whole Person

Our commitment to the Gospel flows from a Biblical conviction that to truly live the life we were created to live, we must live it in right relationship with God, and consequently, have a right understanding of what that actually requires. To believe, much less proclaim the whole Gospel, we must believe that some certain, ultimate universal truths apply to every last person on earth. We must believe—which can only come by a work of God's grace—that everyone was made for a relationship with God, and for everyone of us, that relationship is fractured beyond our repair. Christianity is an all or nothing kind of faith.

In our culture—and sadly even in the church culture—people look at their lives and think all they really need is a tweak here and a change of attitude there and they'll be fine. To believe the whole Gospel, we must reject at the start, as we focused on earlier this summer in our series on man's depravity, that the way to a satisfying life comes through behavior modification, more money, the right spouse, a well-paying job, the respect of others, power, well-behaved kids or any other place humanity has been trying and failing to find ultimate satisfaction since the dawn of time.

To proclaim the whole Gospel, we must accept a certain, fundamental, universal need common for every person—a need we believe speaks directly to what it means to be human in the first place. What is that need? God. As St. Augustine said in the opening of his **Confessions**, "God, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you." God has made us for a relationship with Himself, and for all of us, apart from Christ that relationship is hopelessly fractured.

Verses 21-23 from our text today show this in stark contrast. Sin creates a chasm between God and man. We need to be reconciled to Him, but this isn't something we can do on our own. Why? Because our minds are hostile to God ^(v. 21) In saying this, Paul asserts there is no such thing as a spiritually neutral person. We either celebrate and yield to the sovereign divine authority of God or we reject it, refusing to yield. And rejecting the sovereign, divine authority of God is by no means a neutral position. It is, Paul says, the position of opposition and hostility.

In order for any of us to know life as we were meant to live it, satisfying our deepest universal need for peace with our Maker, we need someone to make peace for us—to satisfy our debt, to span the chasm that separates us from God. Enter, the Gospel. The message of the Gospel is that our God has satisfied this need through the offering of His Son. What Jesus Christ has done is not to simply offer a tweak here or a change of attitude there because, remember, we weren't neutral apart from Christ. We were hostile in our minds, opposed to God.

Notice what Paul says Christ has done for those once hostile to God. Notice the place Jesus secures for those whose faith is in Him: "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" ^(v. 22) I remember being 15, hearing my youth pastor linger on those words. I remember even today how the Spirit of God opened a place in my heart to absorb just a little of what that meant—and it changed me. Beyond being given a second chance to begin again, beyond simply being forgiven of past sins, beyond going from God's enemy to someone He might tolerate eternally, Christ changed me in ways I still cannot fully fathom.

Paul says if we're covered by Jesus' blood, we are no more neutral in God's sight now than we were when we opposed Him. We are not merely tolerated. We are holy in His sight, free from accusation or blemish. And why? Because when God looks on His children, He sees the righteousness of His Son. I continue to fail. Every believer does. But that's part of the liberating joy of the Gospel—we are restored to God in such a way that we're not just cleansed of past sins, but of our present and future sins as well—and will be if we continue in our faith, established, not moved from the hope held out the Gospel.

TEXTUAL NOTE: Paul's grammar, when he says "if you continue in your faith" doesn't convey a sense of doubt. That would contradict Paul's other teachings that nothing will ever be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ. ^(Rom 8) The ESV Study Bible notes: "the form of this phrase in Greek (using the Gk. participle *ie* and the indicative mood of the verb *epimeno*) indicates that Paul fully expects that the Colossian believers will continue in the faith; no doubt is expressed. Nevertheless, the statement shows that faithfulness to the end is essential in the Christian life." ^(cf. Matt 10:22)

But Is Christ Able? He is Lord!

What we're saying Christ has done is cosmically astounding. Many martyrs before and since have claimed to die on their

people's behalf, but why do we believe Jesus actually redeemed those He died for? Where does our security in salvation rest—in our will to change or in Christ's power to redeem? For Christ to reconcile a fallen humanity to God, He must have authority over the created world in which we live as well as the credentials to represent us before God our Maker. There can be no place in either heaven or earth with the power to overrule Him before His Father. He must be Lord of Creation and redemption. ^(cf. Col 1:15-20 ESV Study Bible notes, p. 2294)

LORD OF CREATION: Christ is the firstborn over all creation. ^(Col 1:15) Paul isn't suggesting Jesus was a created being as some cults teach. In the same sentence Paul says Jesus was present at Creation and all things were created "by Him, through Him & for Him." ^(Col 1:16) Creation couldn't have been created by Jesus if Jesus Himself were a created being. Not only that, Paul also says Jesus exists eternally—"He is before all things." ^(Col 1:17) So what does Paul mean when He calls Jesus the "firstborn over all creation?" Authority. Jesus holds all the rights of the firstborn Son. God has placed on Him the right to rule, which Christ actively does—"In Him all things hold together." ^(Col 1:17) Here Paul gives us this glorious picture of Jesus' authority over creation.

LORD OF REDEMPTION: Jesus is the Lord of creation and also the Lord of redemption. All things were made by Him, through Him and for Him. If Jesus has authority over all creation, He has authority to redeem it. He isn't some outside defense attorney coming before God our judge in an effort to persuade Him on how to rule our case. "In Him all the fullness of God is pleased to dwell," or as the ESVSB notes, "All that God is also dwells in [Jesus]." He is One with the Father, our Judge. But notice His position in relationship to the church as well: "He is the head of the Body, the Church." And the "firstborn from the dead" ^(Col 1:18)—the first to be raised from the dead, bringing the rest of His Body to that same resurrected life. Christ stands as the perfect Mediator—one with the Father and one with the Church.

Paul is writing about something established before creation. See the glory of all God has done for us in Christ before any of us ever drew a breath, even before the world was made to secure our salvation. The Lord of Creation became the Lord of our redemption by coming to live the life of perfect righteousness we've all failed to live and by dying the sinner's death we all deserve to die (*the wages of sin is death*), and then by rising from the grave on the merits of His own spotless righteousness (*death could not hold Him*). By that death He presents us to God as "holy and blameless, above reproach before Him."

Proclaiming the Whole Gospel

On Vision Sunday, as we look ahead to a year of strengthening our children's ministries, community groups, online resources, leadership development and training and pastoral care (among others), we must not, and by God's grace, **will not** adopt a mindset that we should graduate from the Gospel to something else we might perceive to be more practical or advanced. To be rooted in anything other than the Gospel of Jesus Christ is to be rooted in something less than what we need and for what we are called to do and be as a church. By God's grace, we'll labor to mature as a church, ever growing in relationships, discernment, wisdom and experience—but never in such a way that we regard the Gospel merely as introductory material. I pray that for all of us, this good news would flow from our lives, lips and relationships—that God might be glorified as Christ is proclaimed to a world in desperate need of Him.