

## Sermon Colossians 1:21-23 | Living Life after Jesus' Death: Who Are You?

21 Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. 22 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— 23 if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move 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.

Homiletical Idea: **The death of Jesus changes who we are.**

### Introduction

This week I am going to preach a little differently; a little more interactive; a little less formal; I'll try to keep the attention of the kids too who are upstairs with us now through the summer. It's a holiday weekend, there aren't too many of us here, so we may as well push the envelope. And, although it is certainly not the point of a sermon, I am going to try and have my personality come through a little and let you learn about me since my wife tells me I never do that when I preach. Not sure I never do, but I do think preaching is serious business, and I like to have fun with everything I am doing in life, so maybe I don't look like I am having fun when I preach. I will try to work on that! Also, I probably tend to teach more than preach. This one will be a lot more preaching and a lot less teaching. I also tend to follow a strict outline and formula for preparing a sermon, but not this time. As an aside, today is my wife's birthday and our wedding anniversary, be sure to congratulate her on being alive and for putting up with me for well over half her life.

I am generally outgoing, fairly gregarious... okay, sometimes I talk a lot. I don't generally have trouble making friends or keeping the conversation going. I will attend get togethers where I don't know many of the people. However, I really don't like it when someone says, "tell me about yourself". How many of you can relate to this? I was in this position recently when Stephanie and I visited Moody Bible Institute. We were in a small room with the door closed with a student guide from the college. He turns to me and says, "tell me about yourself". I wasn't expecting that. I never have as much trouble talking as I do when someone hands

the floor over to me preceded by that question. Do I even know who I am if I can't answer that question?

A little information for those of you who do not know, one thing about me is that I really like the show Seinfeld. The characters in that show are great, and not just the four main characters, but all the characters. One great character is Sid. He has brief appearances in only two shows, and he apparently parks cars for a living, but he immediately came to mind when I was writing this sermon. He is sort of philosophical in his speech. Sid first appears in the episode "The Alternate Side", a tremendous season three episode I remember for Jerry's rant at the rental car agency and most people know for the famous line, "these pretzels are making me thirsty". In this episode, George fills in for Sid moving cars from one side of the street to the other while Sid is on vacation. Of course, George screws it up. Sid is expressing his displeasure with George and he says, "moving cars from one side of the street to the other doesn't take any more sense than putting on a pair of pants. If you can put on a pair of pants, you could move those cars. So my question to you is, who puts on your pants?" Sid appears in one more episode, "The Parking Space". In this episode George and Kramer's friend Mike Moffit are arguing about a parallel parking space. George was backing in while Mike was coming in forward. Well, Sid is not happy that they are messing up the parking situation on his street, and Sid comes over to clear up this mess. Mike had never met Sid before, and this exchange is the clip that immediately came to mind when I was writing this sermon. [PLAY CLIP 1]

So, do you know who you are? That is the question. Sid apparently knows who he is. Do you know who you are?

Well, it only gets worse when the question is asked to a group of people who don't know each other well, and you go around the room. Has anyone experienced this? What happens? Generally, however the first person answers, everyone else follows suit, right? So, if the first person tells you what they do for work, where they live, and how many kids they have, guess was the second, third, and fourth people are going to tell you. Yup, same information. Only once in my life have I looked back on such an encounter with satisfaction and pride that I answered this question well; I broke the mold. We were in a corporate setting going around the room telling each other something about ourselves. The first

person went with typical drivel and the next five people followed suit. Then a weird thing happened, the seventh person started talking about his childhood like he was laying on the couch at his therapist's office. He obviously valued his rags to riches story and found his identity in it. He talked about his hardscrabble life growing up poor. He ate chili and American chop suey for dinner, packed saltines for a snack at school (and they weren't even name brand), wore hand-me-down clothes, and on and on. I got to go next. I mustered up a few fake tears and said, "I'm sorry, I can't do this, I just found out I grew up poor."

Identity is an interesting thing. How do you define yourself? What defines you? What is your identity, or what gives you your identity? Do you know who you are? Facebook allows you to put a line under your name on your profile that describes you. I read a lot of them this week. Some of you have them. Forget for a moment how we define ourselves, and let's think about how we define others. I'll tell you Facebook is not a good place to look for that. And, Twitter is even worse.

Sometimes we don't know what we want to be, we only know what we don't want to be as evidenced by Jerry in these clips [PLAY CLIP 2].

What are some of the ways we define ourselves and provide identity?

Gender, Ethnicity, Geography: Male, Female, Black, White, Asian, Chinese, Ethiopian, New Englander, Bostonian, Midwesterner... How many times as Jonathan told us he is from Colorado? We often take pride in these things.

What is often the first question adults ask each other, at least men, when they are forced into social engagement with someone they don't know?

Occupation: Stay-at-home Mom, Doctor, Lawyer, Electrician, Pastor, Author, Engineer, Carpenter, Accountant, Roofer, Comedian, Cashier

We may devalue, not understand, or not respect each other based on these occupational identities. Role gratuitous Seinfeld Clip [PLAY CLIP 3].

Social and Status Markers: Rich, Poor, Smart, Athletic, Attractive, Creative, Musical, Tall, Short, Fat, Skinny, Married, Single, White Collar, Blue Collar Young, Old.

Hobbies: Hiking, Biking, Woodworking, Reading, Knitting, Running, Writing, CrossFit...

When we know someone a little better, we talk about a little more controversial things we can use to divide us. What are some of these things?

Political: Republican, Democrat, Progressive, Liberal, Conservative

Religious: Methodist, Lutheran, Congregational, Pentecostal, Charismatic, Calvinist, etc.

You know in Acts Chapter 9:13-16 is probably one of the most interesting times someone was asked, who are you? 13 Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, "In the name of the Jesus whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out." 14 Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. 15 One day the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know about, but who are you?" 16 Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding. Talk about awkward.

A few weeks ago, on Easter I preached a sermon with a big idea that the death of Jesus should change the way we live. Now, this sermon has a big idea that the death of Jesus changes who we are. Let's read the sermon passage and look at it more closely.

21 Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. 22 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— 23 if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move 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.

This is not the only place Paul presents this. In fact, it is a recurring theme. This is probably Paul's most succinct presentation. Ephesians 2:1-10 says the same thing. Romans 6:1-14 has it as well, and really the whole book of Romans, particularly chapters 6 through 11 are on this topic.

But, Paul didn't make this up, Jesus himself preached this message in John 15:1-6, "15 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. 2 He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. 3 You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. 4 Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. 5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. 6 If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned."

1. Verse 21: Who are we without Christ?

- a. 21 Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior.
- b. Paul is writing to Christians in the Church in Colossae, and in Verse 21 he tells them, and by extension us, about our condition and identity without or before Christ. Because of our sin, without Christ we are alienated from God, separated by sin, and enemies of God. Before Adam and Eve sinned, God told them the punishment for their sin would be death. Sin is rebellion towards God and God cannot be in the presence of sin. Sin is what separates us from God. Apart from God, we cannot live.
- c. Look at what happened with Adam and Eve; before the fall, they had communion with God. After the fall, they were exiled from the Garden.
- d. Without Christ, the Bible says we are lost, without hope, can do nothing are dead. Jesus said apart from him we can do nothing.

2. Verse 22: Who are we with (in) Christ?

- a. 22 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—
- b. In Christ we are made holy. 1 Peter 1:16 in most English translations says as it does in the NIV, "Be holy, because I am holy." This is a

quote from three places in Leviticus where our same translations say the same thing. This has been used so many times by so many people to create devotions imploring people to try harder to be holy in their living like God is holy. I want to tell you something I learned that has helped me a lot. It is not that the English translation isn't good, but our modern thinking causes us to read this as a command when it more accurately intended as an encouragement, a promise. The Lexham English Bible translates the Old Testament occurrences as "You shall be holy, because I am holy" and the New Testament occurrence as "You will be holy, because I am holy". In order to dwell with God, to be in his presence, we need to be holy. It is not our trying harder that makes us holy, it is the blood of Jesus.

- c. We are without blemish and free from accusation. Who is it that likes to accuse us? Revelation 12:10-11a says, 10 Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. 11 They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony;
  - d. We like to believe the accusations of Satan or the people around us. You can't be a Christian if you did that. God can't love you now that you did that. You've made too many mistakes. You'll just cause problems. The Bible talks a lot about Jesus setting us free. This is what I believe it means the most. We are free from accusation, free from guilt, free from worrying about past or future mistakes. Another thing you can learn about me, besides how much I enjoy Seinfeld, is how much I enjoy Christian music. I believe listening to God's truth and being able to remember it in song is powerful. Here is a clip from a song that came to mind on this point [PLAY CLIP 4].
3. What is our role?
- a. 23 if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move 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.

- b. It would have been easier to just preach on verses 21 and 22, but I didn't want to stop mid-sentence. I think the Bible is clear that our salvation is through faith alone and that Jesus is the author and finisher of our faith. However, Paul tells us to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, James tells us that faith without works is dead, and Jesus modeled obedience as important. I do not think this verse is talking about losing one's salvation, but rather how we might be able to discern the faithful Christians among us; those who continue in their faith and hold firm to the hope we have in Christ. We are given other ways to discern true followers of Jesus in Scripture as well such as the fruit of the Spirit and love for one another. In addition, Jesus told a parable about separating the sheep and goats which focused on care for the poor. All of these are different sermons for a different time. I think Paul is exhorting us to stay the course, continue in our faith, and hold on to the hope that we have.
- c. Paul also says in verse 23 that this is the gospel, the good news. You were dead in sin, now you are alive in Christ. That is the gospel. And, it truly is good news when presented that way.
- d. We can share the gospel with those around us by encouraging them to trade in their identity found in temporary things and take hold of an identity offered to them in Christ that cannot be taken away from them.

### **The death of Jesus changes who we are.**

So back to the opening of the sermon. When I read the blurbs on Facebook, when I talk with people, when I see their discussion, read bumper stickers, observe how people act, etc. I can see what is important to people. You can too. Dan Kasey preached a great sermon on identity at my Mom's funeral. I didn't know what his topic would be less than a week before my sermon. Too late for me to change. Some people have the bulk of their identity in their career, some in their family, some in their athletic ability, some in their good looks, some in politics, etc. What happens to those people when they lose their job, lose their family, grow old and are no longer athletic or beautiful, or lose the next election? They are lost; they don't know who they are. I think in American Christianity, we put a lot of

emphasis on family. Family is good, but it is not God. It is a gift from God. You know that a week and a half ago my mom passed away. You might not know that one week ago Keri, Stephanie, and Anna were in a car accident they couldn't avoid that totaled Keri's car. Some or all of them really could have been killed if things were just slightly different. Most of you don't know that just a few days ago Mubeshire was hit by a car while riding his bike home from bringing a flower to my mom's grave. If a car was traveling east on King Street at that moment, Mubeshire's accident would have ended up completely differently.

If our identity is in Christ, we are free to live knowing that we are a beloved child of the King of the Universe. And, nothing we do can change that fact if our identity is in Christ. I think the hardest thing is believing it. We are not defined by our actions, but his. We are holy, because he says we are. We are without blemish, because he says we are. We are free of accusation, because he says we are. Steven Curtis Chapman has been one of my favorite singers and songwriters since the late 1980's. I want to share this song clip with you [PLAY CLIP 5].

Hallelujah, we are who you say we are. Do you believe you are who God says you are? Listen to that song as part of helping you believe it. There is one last song, I am going to share with you. I have been enamored with Lauren Daigle's voice since I first heard it. And, her song "You Say" immediately came to mind for this sermon too. [PLAY CLIP 6]

Another great song to put on repeat when you are feeling Satan's accusations that you are not good enough and you want to reinforce your identity and embrace who God says you are.

Not that I am better than any of you, but I want to encourage us to think about what people would conclude about our identity based on our conversations, or Facebook posts, our bumper stickers, how we spend our time, where we spend our money. What would an independent auditor decide your identity is? How can we infuse our lives with conversations, Facebook posts, and other things that will not only tell of our identity in Christ, but point others to him as well? Can we come across as a sinner saved by grace and so thankful for it rather than a Christian that looks down on the world? I have a lot of thoughts if people want to talk about it some other time.

Since my sermon on Easter weekend, I started and finished “Love Does” by Bob Goff. Thirty amazing chapters of stories that happened because he chose to love and live like Jesus. I recommend the book. I might listen to it again and take some notes.

Let me close with this

Early eighteenth-century crowds came to hear George Whitefield by the tens of thousands. When this traveling minister came to town, his meetings were not to be missed. In Philadelphia, a crowd cheered and yelled for George as he stood on a hill outside the central part of the city, mesmerizing the audience with his dynamic message.

"Father Abraham, whom have you in heaven?" he shouted. "Any Episcopalians?"

"No!" the people roared.

"Any Presbyterians?" Whitefield danced around the stage as he spoke, jabbing at the air with his hands.

"No!"

"Any Independents or Seceders. New Sides or Old Sides, any Methodists?"

"No! No! No!" the crowd shouted in reply

He called out, "Whom have you there, then, Father Abraham? We don't know those names here! All who are here are Christians-- believers in Christ, men who have overcome by the blood of the Lamb and the word of his testimony . . . God help me, God help us all, to forget having names and to become Christians in deed and in truth."

Prayer, and don't forget the offering.

Benediction: 1 Thessalonians 3:12-13 "May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones."