

The Mystery of Christ

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Preacher: Rev. Daniel Beilman

[0 : 0 0] Welcome to Church of the Advent. Some of you are brand new. Some of you have been here just a little while. You should know that our senior pastor, Tommy Hinson, is away on sabbatical. He has finished three months out of a four-month sabbatical. During the summer, we have a chance to hear from a diversity of voices, and whenever they are not preaching, it'll be me. And yay!

While I've been preaching, we've been looking at Colossians chapter 4, verses 2 through 6. Four weeks ago, we looked at chapter 4, verse 2. Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. Continuous prayer and contemplative prayer moves God's people out into mission. After verse 2, Paul instructs the Colossians to pray for the spread of the gospel, specifically that God may open to him a door for the word to declare the mystery of Christ, that he may make it clear. Paul then gives further instructions about their role in spreading the gospel. Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

So we find here, chapter 2, verses 3 to 6, the mission of God's people to spread the gospel. And we're going to find—we're going to look at those later clauses in about a few weeks.

Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt. But before we do that, it would be helpful to first look at the gospel to answer the question, what is the gospel? We come from different backgrounds.

Some are relatively new to Church of the Advent. You've been coming for a few weeks or months. Some of you are new to church altogether. Many of you have been at Advent for a while and have heard Tommy or me or Blake Johnson before me teach and preach about the gospel. Some of you have taken the essentials course way back when, and so a lot of what I'm saying tonight you'll already have heard.

[2 : 1 7] But Martin Luther gives preachers permission to be repetitive. When he wrote, the truth of the gospel is the principal article of all Christian doctrine. Most necessary is it that we know this article well. Teach it to others and beat it into their heads continually. That's what Martin Luther said. Now, I watched a lot of the World Cup, probably too much of the World Cup, and one thing I kept hearing over and over is, this team knows their identity. This team really knows their identity.

This team, when they get down at the beginning, they don't forget their identity. This team, they know who they are and they know who they're not. Lots of talk about identity in soccer.

Interesting. I've never played soccer, but I am a bit skeptical that identity is that important to a soccer team. But for the church, it's crucially important. Crucially important that we understand our identity, and our identity centers on the gospel. It tells us who God is and who we are. It tells us why we exist and what our mission is. Why does Church of the Advent exist? Why do we exist here in Columbia Heights, in Canaan Baptist Church, in Washington, D.C., and not somewhere else?

So tonight we're going to look at the gospel. Just one point tonight. We're going to look at the gospel. What is the gospel? So let me pray. We may not have known it, Lord, when we arrived, but we all need to hear the gospel tonight. Your gospel has a lot of work to do in each of our hearts.

Lord, would you accomplish that tonight? As we hear the gospel, as we taste it, as we see it, we look forward to your activity here, Holy Spirit. Holy Spirit, do come. Amen.

[4 : 38] So we should know what the gospel is, after all, because our vision and value statement begins like this. As a church, we seek the flourishing of Washington, D.C. by building gospel-centered communities. Gospel-centered communities. We should know, well, what we are centered on. And we're going to use the book of Colossians to guide us. So what do you think of when you hear the word gospel? Well, you might think of a certain style of music. You might think of it as an adjective, as in the gospel truth. You might think of it as a belief, or a set of beliefs, or an idea that the gospel is the minimum doctrine one has to believe in order to go to heaven when one dies.

Well, the word gospel literally means good news, and it is a translation of the Greek word evangelion, which was a great announcement of a mighty victory, or a new king. It was a word that already existed in Paul's day when he used it. According to legend, after the Greeks defeated the Persians at the Battle of Marathon, Pheidippides ran 26 miles back to Athens to deliver the evangelion, the good news of victory. He proclaimed, joy to you, we have won, and then he immediately had died, again proclaiming joy to you. We find an inscription which was found chiseled on the ruins of an old government building in Asia Minor, dated around 6 BC. The most divine Caesar we should consider equal to the beginning of all things, for when everything was falling into disorder and tending toward dissolution, he restored it once more and gave the whole world a new aura. All the cities unanimously adopt the birthday of the divine Caesar. That's the new beginning of the year. Has brought our life to the climax, perfection, and giving to us the Emperor Augustus. He has put an end to war, and to set all things in order. And having become God manifest, Caesar has fulfilled all the hopes of earlier times. The birthday of the God Augustus has been for the whole world the beginning of

Evangelion. The birthday of Augustus. It's the gospel. It's the good news concerning him. So Paul is using this word gospel correctly. It's a royal announcement. Paul is making a royal announcement. The gospel is about a royal affair. It concerns a king. It's King Jesus, the Christ, the anointed one. And the gospel reports an event, the death, burial, and resurrection of this king.

It's an announcement that Jesus Christ is king. And that through his death and resurrection, he has secured a victory over sin and death.

Colossians 1 says that he is the image of the invisible God. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. And through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. In chapter 2 of Colossians, Paul writes that God raised him from the dead, and that the Colossians were made alive together with him, having forgiven them all of their trespasses.

[8 : 12] The book of Colossians is a proclamation of the gospel. It's an event. The death and resurrection of Jesus. Now many other religions are founded on a set of teachings, or philosophies, or private revelations.

Christianity is unique in that it is founded on a proclamation of an event in history, which makes it falsifiable. Paul says that this event brings about reconciliation to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven.

Well, why is reconciliation required in the first place? To answer that question, we need to go to the beginning. Colossians 1 says that by Christ, all things were created.

All things were created through him and for him. And when we read Genesis 1, we read that all things were created good, including humanity. Yet things went terribly wrong.

Man rebelled against God, and everything broke. Every week in our liturgy, we say this. The priest confesses, Yet we did not give thanks to you or honor you as God, but turned away.

[9 : 25] Falling into sin, we and all your works became subject to misery and death. Just a couple chapters later, when we read Genesis 3, We see four levels of alienation that require reconciliation.

We become alienated to God, alienated from God, which brings about spiritual death. We become alienated from ourselves, and we now experience things like shame, psychological alienation.

We become alienated from each other, bringing about all kinds of social alienation, on the personal level and on the macro level.

And we were alienated from creation itself, which means the world is broken on a cosmic scale. And I don't need to prove that last point to you, do I? It doesn't feel like the world is functioning the way it was meant to function, from ongoing war in Syria and ethnic cleansing in Nigeria, to an overturned duck boat in Missouri and wildfires in California.

We look all around and see a world that is not the way it is intended to be. So which of these did Jesus come to fix, of those four? Is it spiritual, psychological, social, or cosmic alienation?

[10 : 46] Well, it's all four, right? He came to fix it all. Well, Colossians says that through Jesus, God reconciles to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven.

How? By making peace by the blood of his cross. The gospel is good news for us psychologically. He frees us from fear and shame.

It's good news for us socially. He brings a palpable peace between people and puts us into community, rich, thick community with one another.

And it's good news for those suffering from the forces of poverty, injustice, racism, and war. God intends to fix all of these things.

And it's good news for us personally, spiritually, between us and our creator God. Colossians 1.13 says, Colossians 2.13 says, Here, Colossians describes our plot as belonging to a domain of darkness.

[12 : 12] God's power.

We've been delivered from guilt and shame. We're free. We're free. We're free. Not free from obedience. Not free from God's law, but free to obey God.

Just last night at the Revoice Conference in St. Louis, Wesley Hill said, We all stood under condemnation. Jesus did not combat shame by rewriting the rulebook, but by removing condemnation and liberating sinners to a new way of life.

So to summarize, God's gospel is the life-transforming message of salvation from sin and all its consequences through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is both a declaration and a summons, announcing what has been done for us in Christ and calling us to repentance, faith, and submission to his lordship.

[13 : 29] So let's look at those three things we've been summoned to. To repentance, submission to his lordship, and faith. You could say we've been summoned to do something, to confess something, and to believe something.

So what have we been summoned to do? It's repentance. Paul talks about repentance this way. Put to death, therefore, what is earthly in you, sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

On account of these, the wrath of God is coming. In these two you once walked, when you were living in them, but now you must put them all away. Anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.

Paul says that repentance is putting those away and turning to Christ. Put these off. Put on Christ. Put on love. Put on graciousness.

Put on peace. Now, the talk of repentance, it feels negative, feels dark, and the actual doing of it is difficult sometimes and painful sometimes.

[14 : 48] But the act of repentance is renewing. It's life-giving, not just to ourselves, but to the world. Repentance can be a missional act. Frederica Matthews, who's an Orthodox author, says, the ancient Christian literature on repentance is beautiful, full of simplicity, humility, and spreading peace.

There is nothing in it of masochism or despair. Those who know themselves to be so greatly forgiven are far from gloomy, but are flooded with joy and deep tranquility.

Those who are forgiven much love much. They find it hard to hold grudges against others. They find it hard to hold anything in this life very tightly. For the Christian, two things seem to be ever linked, sorrow over sin and gratitude for forgiveness.

Repentance is the source of life and joy. Now, I've talked to several people just these past few weeks who say they're embarrassed to be at church.

They're embarrassed to be at Advent. Because they've messed up in some way or the other. But the good news of repentance is that we're all a mess.

[16 : 05] We are all repenting. We are all in need of forgiveness. We cannot belong unless we confess we are a mess.

And we are all in need of God's grace. So there's something to do, which is repentance.

There's something to confess. If the gospel is a royal announcement, then as his followers, we are to confess that Jesus is Lord.

He is our king. We follow our king and obey him. And then there's something to believe. That God raised him from the dead. That the resurrection happens. That is where our faith lies.

If we confess with our mouth, Jesus is Lord, and believe in our hearts that God raised him from the dead, then you shall be saved. In the gospel, God forgives our rebellion.

[17 : 08] He rescues us and unites us to his son, Jesus. Colossians 3 says, you have been raised with Christ. Your life is hidden with Christ and God. We're united to Christ.

This means that when the father looks on you, he sees his son, Jesus. When you walked in here, did you think that the father was frowning on you, disappointed in you?

Did you even wonder if he was paying you any attention? Well, no. He was not disappointed in you. If you are in Christ, that he delights over you.

And you don't have to do anything to earn his delight and favor. Because when he sees you, he sees his son. And he's just eternally delighted with you.

Infinitely delighted with you. When we are united to Christ, we're also united to his mission. You could say the church doesn't even have a mission.

[18 : 09] The church is a mission because we are united to Christ. Therefore, wherever God's people gather in worship, they are an outpost of God's mission to the world, declaring the good news that God makes all things new.

The gospel is why we're here. It's good news for us, for our families, for our neighbors, for Canaan Baptist Church, for the poor in our area, for the flourishing of Columbia Heights and Washington, D.C., and its businesses and art studios, its nonprofits and charities, its agencies.

It's why we arrive early to set up and rehearse, why we play a guitar or run sound. It's why we set the table. It's why we greet at the door. It's why we teach our children.

It's why we sing God's praises. It's why we sit and hear his word proclaimed. It's why we share the table spread before us.

And after we've been fed, he sends us out to love and serve the Lord. Joined to his son, Jesus. Joined to his mission. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

[19 : 20] Amen. Let's pray.