

Christ's death restores us in the image of God

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[0 : 00] Good morning, church family. Today we are reading Colossians chapter 1, verse 13 to 23. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For 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. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And 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. 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. And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body or flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above re-approach before him. If 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.

I want to start with just that phrase that most of us knows, the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence. I want to ask the question, why is it always greener?

Well, I think it goes something like this. When we look inside, we actually don't like what we see.

We're not the people we want to be.

We're not in the circumstance of life that we want to be in. And we make it worse because we look around and we think that others have the good life that we crave but haven't been able to get.

And so that leaves us feeling restless and unhappy and unfilled and empty. We long to be somewhere else.

[2 : 45] We long to be transferred or transported to that happy place. But even then, at the same time, I think we fear that even if we could get to the place of our dreams, the place of happiness, of deep connection, of security, I think we fear that, well, when we get there, we're just going to mess it up again.

And others will bring the same pain and hurt to us as we've experienced in this place. So, a new place, no matter how wonderful it is in our dreams, will mean little if we get to that new place and we're the same old broken person.

So, we long to be transferred, but we also long to be transformed. We want to be free to build and experience the dream life in all its fullness or satisfaction.

But then again, you see, we might, at that point, we might then act as though we have freedom and resources to make our dream life a reality. But even as we're acting that out, deep down again, we know or we fear that we're stuck in a cycle.

We're stuck in a cycle of dreaming of the good life, which then just gets bitterly shattered and disappointed because we can never get there. We can't actually change ourselves.

[4 : 24] And so, we're stuck because of our, we're stuck in our emptiness. We're stuck in our disappointment because our inability to be different.

Now, that that I'm trying to describe, hopefully you already picked that up. Hopefully, that's not just me feeling that. But I think advertising have really done a good job of exploiting exactly those longings.

So often, they use really powerful before and after images in advertising. There's lots on the TV at the minute, if any of you still watch TV. Maybe that's just an old person's thing.

Anyway, there's one on the TV at the minute by dairy farmers. And so, just a mouthful of their flavoured milk transports you from being stuck in a long queue at the supermarket checkout, which I

think depicts the boring dullness, routineness, unfulfilledness, emptiness of ordinary life. You'd have a sip of your flavoured milk. And lo and behold, you're bright. You're in a sexy, tropical beach party scene. Yeah. And that's just dairy farmers.

[5 : 36] I tell you, you need to buy some. I've been drinking it by the gallon. And I tell you, advertising is cruel. It's cruel because, at very best, it can only offer you a temporary fix.

And that's probably more to do with sugar than actual transportation. See, promises are not reality. And what we need when we look inside, that desire, that longing to be transferred and transformed, that tells us that what we need is a new reality.

We need someone with the power to deliver us into that good life of fullness, that good life of our dreams, that dream life.

My friends, as I say this morning, we need Jesus. And we need the renewing power of his gospel. Paul wants the Colossian Christians to be convinced that they already have fullness of life in Jesus.

[6 : 55] And by extension, he wants every single believer here this morning to know that we also have fullness of life in Jesus.

And he wants to challenge anyone here this morning who is not yet a believer to know that you can have fullness of life in Jesus.

He wants to say this morning. He wants to be with you. He wants to know that you can have fullness of life. Fully restored to being our authentic selves. Restored to have freedom to be who we truly are.

Restored to being true image bearers, living life to the full. and in the text that I'm looking at this morning short three verses but so jam-packed with things Paul also uses a very powerful before and after image that Jacob's really helpfully picked up in the children's segment before and after image to help people realize, help empty people realize and discover fullness in Christ he starts off in verse 21, that's the focus of 21, 22 and 23 are my focus this morning he starts off in verse 21 saying what you once were, you who once were alienated and hostile in mind doing evil deeds what you were, once you were in a persistent state of total rebellion against God in our natural born state every single person is effectively at war with God it's as if we've all made a declaration of independence from God the consequence of which is that the relationship has been fractured we're alienated, we're estranged we're cut off from relationship with God what's the controlling drive for that declaration of independence?

it's the drive for autonomy the drive to be separate from God to create life under our own resources in our own way and it comes from our inmost being it starts in our minds it's in our attitudes it's in our heart it's in our desires hostile in mind and then all of that overflows into our actions described here as evil deeds why are they evil or offensive to God?

[9 : 50] because all our actions are designed to suggest that God doesn't even exist that we live life apart from God we answer only to ourselves everything is designed to reject God's claim to authority in our lives and so as Bo said in his introduction contrary to what we want to believe and contrary to what our society and culture tells us people are not good at heart quite the opposite is true in our natural born state we have a bad heart towards God and as a consequence a bad track record before God but there's another aspect of alienation mentioned back in verse 13 which is a really important one to get hold of so just look back in your text to verse 13 where it says he, that is Jesus has delivered us from the domain of darkness now that word domain has to do with authority being captive you see in our natural born state our perception of autonomy from God is that we actually have freedom to do whatever the heck we like freedom to build something good in life freedom and fullness of life apart from God but we're told in verse 13 that the reality is that rebellion autonomy puts us into the domain of darkness that is it's a jurisdiction where we're held captive so our perception of autonomy and freedom is just that it's actually a perception that deceives us and masks what is really a captivity it's a distorted reality the truth is that we've been deceived and taken captive by sin and are heading for a showdown with God's justice that's a pretty heavy point to stop at isn't it a breakout but

I do that to introduce the next sentence thankfully God has not left people in that distorted deceived alienated guilty reality he has done something totally left field so we continue in verse 21 he had verse 22 actually he has now reconciled so you who once were alienated he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death see the before and after starting to come out God has done something totally left field God has now reconciled in and through Christ's death now I'm just going to unpack the words God has reconciled now we're so familiar with that word and that was my

problem when I started to prepare this

I looked at that and I thought what am I going to say oh man that's familiarity breeding contempt God has reconciled in other words God has rescued us from rebellion and hostility God has made his enemies into his friends now where does that happen in our world dog eat dog world God has restored us to full relationship of peace with him and all of that is something that God has graciously done for us it's an action that's sourced in God's love and God's determination not in us in any shape or form something we have not deserved God has done for us something we have not no part in

God has done for us to be reconciled by God and to God is to have a totally new standing before God characterized not by enmity but by peace not by alienation but by inclusiveness and closeness and intimacy it's characterized by total blessing and my friends it is something that we simply accept thankfully because God has done it for us and all this is the result verse 22 all this is the result of Jesus' death on the cross the second word by which he has redeemed us now in Paul's word in Paul's in Paul's world slavery was common so this picture would mean much more to the Colossians than it means to us so in the world of slavery you could change and transfer the ownership of a slave by paying the slave owner a price so you paid your price you bought or redeemed the slave and then you became the owner of that slave the slave's master now when that sort of thing happened and again this is where we won't actually be able to get into this illustration really easily the consequences for the slave were life changing he or she would have a new master he would be transferred to a different place he would have different conditions of living now here's the rub and this was often true in the ancient world if the new master was kind and good and generous then redemption was a wonderful thing it meant deliverance from a terrible empty life into a wonderful new life of fullness a new sense of freedom to enjoy and serve their new master in delight quite literally in many many instances in ancient world that transfer would see a slave brought into essentially being one of the family and treated like a child and this is what

God has done for his people in the death of Jesus if you look back at 13 and 14 again read that verse again he has delivered us from the domain of darkness and here's the word transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved son in whom we have redemption the forgiveness of sins everything changes the direct result of Jesus' death is that God has transferred rebels from a position of alienation and living under condemnation condemnation to the domain of life darkness to life captivity to freedom and if you look at verse 22 back to 22 sorry I made you jump back and forward I'm sure you can handle it it says that he's reconciled us in his body of flesh by his death in order to present you that word present was a word that was used in the courts and it's as if

[18:11] God has legally and publicly declared and committed himself to the fact that he would had paid the price of rebellion and that he would no never again abandon or hold those people to account for their sin because it had been dealt with we were in that context we were stuck we were done for but Jesus has paid the price of our rebellion he's paid the penalty for our rebellion Jesus died in payment of my sin as a consequence I am forgiven I am restored to full relationship in peace I am delivered from the domain of darkness and transferred into God's domain or God's kingdom in light and life that's a massive before and after thing isn't it but there's still more and God has verse 22 again

God has transformed rebels back into his image God's intention in salvation or redemption where as you see there in verse 22 to make his people holy what is that well it's to restore their ability to live obedient blameless delighted lives before God as I said before the word present present in verse 22 is a legal word so God has legally bound himself always to treat his reconciled people just as if they'd never ever sinned my friends put those two words together now in Christ we experience not just a new position a new orientation before God we actually experience a change of heart transfer transform our bad track record is wiped clean and we're changed from the inside out by God's spirit living within us we have a new heart new DNA which results in new attitudes new desires new actions new freedom to live as happy obedient children before our gracious God again look back at verse 12 we didn't read this earlier but look back to verse 12 another interesting concept in there given thanks to the father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light in Christ

God has done everything required to qualify rebels to become part of his family with the same rights and the same inheritance as Jesus himself that's huge but we become so familiar with it I become so familiar with it I miss it what a before and after picture what a contrast previously in our natural

born state we were guilty rebels set apart for condemnation and destruction that was in our natural born state now in Christ restored to fullness of life and relationship with God we are set apart for obedient committed lives of service and worship the contrast couldn't be greater so we've been asking each week through this series what is fullness in

Christ well fullness in Christ what is our fullness in Christ well it's new identity as those qualified to be in God's eternal family it's a new standing before God now viewed as beloved sons and daughters who will never be abandoned or rejected it's a new freedom through new spirit controlled hearts to enjoy life as we were originally created to do it's new passion to worship Jesus as both Lord and Savior in all of life and we cannot separate those two even though we've had to do it for the sake of preaching breakdowns so Dave last week took us through verse 15 to 20 where Paul established the lordship of Jesus in everything in this world wherever you can think or whatever you can think of this world Jesus is there he's today we're saying

Jesus as Savior the two cannot be separated because he is lord of everything in the universe verses 15 to 20 because of that he is qualified to be our Savior Jesus is God come into the world as a sinless human being and so he is an acceptable sacrifice for our sin that's the picture that Jacob had in the children segment this morning because Jesus is lord he is qualified to be our savior now add the second part because he has been a savior of such enormous proportion then he must be our lord because he is saved at such enormous cost to himself as part of God's salvation purpose then he must be our lord he must be our lord personally as individual christians and he must be our lord demonstrably as a church community a church family unit the new resurrection community or the church church no what might prevent us from experiencing this fulness again that's the second question we're committed to asking each week well look at verse 23

[25 : 12] Paul highlights two things which might rob us of confidence to live in fullness in christ now the likelihood is as soon as we start to read verse 23 we might start thinking of a performance based response we'll read it so all that's been stated in verse 21 and 22 and then it goes on comma at the end of verse 22 and 23 if 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 so here's the question the if suggests a contingency based on what Paul has already said the question is what is it that Paul expects of the believers at Colossi as they live day by day in this knowledge of having been reconciled that's the question you have to ask as you start to read into verse 23 what does

Paul expect from them well I say this very very simple expects nothing except loyalty to the gospel they already know and have received and experienced it's very emphatic there in verse 23 it goes on there is only one gospel there is only one gospel yes it's the gospel that brought newness to you guys at Colossi when you heard it and understood it in the past yes it's the gospel which is producing similar results wherever it's spoken around the world the same gospel the same result and ultimately it's the same gospel that had taken Paul captive to serve Jesus Paul's point here is not to put us on a performance treadmill fullness of life was not about their performance in response to what

God has done for them and in them rather it was accepting what God has done for them and living in the light of that living in the light of what is now true for them given what God has done for them my friends it is not about being driven by our feelings on any day by day basis I don't feel renewed therefore I can't be renewed that moves away from what God has done for us Paul's point here is very simple when they came to believe when they came to faith in Christ they experienced fullness in Christ or the full benefits of Jesus as Lord and Savior God has acted in their lives in the past fullness has already become part of their lives in the past and they live every day into the future on the basis of what

God has done for them they have been rescued perfect passive if you're interested in grammar they have been redeemed please tell me I got that right yes no don't say anything alright they have been rescued they have been redeemed they have been transferred they have been reconciled they have been given peace new identity new standing before God new freedom to love and serve new passion to worship in the past now it's something they already experience now the problem is that many Christians seem to think that as they move forward into the future they continue to have one each of one foot in two boats you ever tried to straddle two boats one foot in each it just doesn't work but

I think that's how lots of Christians think of life oh I don't know which boat I'm in that's impossible according to what Paul has said here a person can only be one or the other either you're alienated and in the domain of darkness or you've been brought in to the kingdom of his son in light God has done it for you either you're in Adam alienated hostile and pursuing autonomy from God or you're in Christ rescued transferred into God's family transformed from the inside out so your heart's desire is to love and serve God and live under the rule of Jesus now do you hear what I'm saying your heart's desire I'm not saying perfection in the accomplishment of that your whole new orientation is that you now want to love and serve Jesus okay where have we got

[30 : 41] I've just lost a page here now that was a bit of a shock to me I'm sure there's going to be an climax here it's still here put it down to 14 weeks and a lot of rust second thing second place where we might not experience fullness in Christ is verse 23 again is that we're not single minded in serving Jesus as Lord and Savior Paul uses very specific words here he says you're to be continue stable and steadfast again it's not a performance thing the words there just mean you're to be single minded don't change don't allow yourself to be dissuaded from trusting that you have fullness of life in Jesus and start looking for it somewhere else that's what Paul is saying what you do going forward as a Christian is keep your eyes firmly fixed on the reality of what

God has done for you again fullness of life is not about performance in response to the gospel but fullness of life is there for us providing we refuse to entertain any thought that anything or anyone other than Jesus can deliver fullness of life the Colossians now lived in God's kingdom where Christ is king they placed themselves under the lordship of Christ and so the question for Paul is very simple will you continue to do that tomorrow and next week and next month will you continue to serve him as king gladly or would they settle back into thinking sometime again well maybe maybe there's more fooling somewhere else maybe there's better satisfaction in some other place and subtly shift their focus to those things my friends in summing up then before before the foundations of the world our lives were inextricably tied to

God our hearts and dreams were always meant to belong to him when our hopes and dreams are taken captive by anything else they're bound to fail because they lead us away from Jesus or encourage us to add something to what God has done for us in Jesus but in Christ our greatest dream of being acceptable to God of being with him in heaven forever has already become our new reality that's a truth to live by isn't it that's a clarity to see and hold on to and navigate life by in a confused world that's true fullness of life well pray with me please as Bo said at the very start Lord so often our concept of you though strong may just be that you're useful and not beautiful Lord your beauty is shown in so many places in your world but in the greatest most obvious place it's shown in your action to reconcile us who previously were alienated and facing condemnation we thank you that you have transferred us from the domain of darkness into the kingdom of your son from darkness to life to light from death to life we thank you Lord that not content with that you've also transformed us and continue to transform us may it never be Lord that either individually or as a church family we are guilty of taking our eyes off you and starting to find and look for fullness somewhere else once again in Jesus name

I pray Amen thank you much for listening to me