



Christ Our King

Colossians 1:9-20 | J. Austin Becton | November 20, 2016

Today is what is known as Christ the King Sunday, which is also the last Sunday of the church calendar year. On this Sunday, we are reminded that, as Christians, we are subjects of Christ and of Christ alone; that Christ's power transcends and supplants all other powers that vie after our lives. And, what God has in store for the new heavens and new earth is being realized in the Church today, as we sit under the reign of Christ, our King! So, we are going to be looking at Colossians 1:9-20 – a rich passage, which there is no way I will be able to speak to everything, let alone do it all justice, so I'm not going to try. As my last sermon as one of your elders at City Life, I want to leave you with three encouragements we find in our text: (1) **walk in a manner worthy of the Lord**; (2) **persevere with joy**; and (3) **hold fast to Christ the King**.

Walk in a Manner Worthy of the Lord

This Christian "walk" can be challenging. With all the competing opinions regarding what it means to be a Christian this is not, in the least, surprising. In recent days and weeks, nothing has brought this to light more than the election. We have seen a growing divide within those professing themselves as followers of Christ, as they have debated and argued over which presidential candidate best models Christian values. Needless to say, the result of the election has left this divide even more glaring. Perhaps, it would be appropriate and timely for us to pause, take a step back, and look at what it means for us to "walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him." In our passage, we see St. Paul point to two key components: (1) increasing in knowledge and (2) bearing fruit. First, increasing in knowledge. Paul desire for the Colossians is that they would be "filled with the knowledge of his [God's] will," which we see also leads to growing in, knowledge of, or intimacy with, God, himself (v.10). So, how do we come to this knowledge of God? Paul prays that they would come to this knowledge "in all spiritual wisdom and understanding." Think of this preposition "in" as being a bubble or sphere. The knowledge that Paul is prayerfully seeking is knowledge found only within the spiritual sphere – the sphere of the Holy Spirit. Ezekiel reminds us that we have been given the Spirit so that we can walk in God's will and obey his law (Ezek. 36). And so, we can read every Christian book out there, we can serve until our fingers bleed, we can give everything we have away, become the sharpest theologians, we can ask the right questions and make the right declarations, be biblical scholars, and even declare the gospel to those around us, BUT if we do not walk in the sphere of the Holy Spirit we cannot know the wisdom of God. Paul affirms this in Romans 8, "Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him" (v.9). But, how do we walk in the Spirit? He goes on to say that those who are dead in Christ have received the Spirit of life! You see, if you are walking in the sphere of the Spirit it means that you have become a subject in the kingdom of Christ. This is why Paul reminds them that they have been delivered "from the domain of darkness and transferred [...] to the kingdom of his beloved Son" (v.13). He's saying, "In Christ, you died to the old wisdom of the flesh – a failing kingdom, but now you've been raised to life in the spiritual wisdom of a new, victorious kingdom." Jesus says in John 14, that the Father will send the Spirit in "my name" and "he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you." In fact, under Christ's reign the Spirit will prompt, remind, and convict us [ILL.]. And so, as subjects of Christ, we are given the Spirit who enables us to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord fully pleasing to him. Pause and ask yourself: Am I walking in a manner worthy of the Lord? Am I walking the sphere of the Spirit? Am I living a life of faith submitted to the kingship of Christ? Or am walking in the sphere of Self, or submitting myself to some other fading king? Do you desire spiritual wisdom this morning? Not merely book-learning or human traditions, but a deep inner sense of who you are, now, in Christ, of the new kingdom life which you have received from God in Christ, and of what will nurture and strengthen it or of what will harm and destroy it. Then, Paul is saying, put your faith in Christ and come under his glorious reign and you will walk in the sphere of the Spirit with spiritual wisdom and understanding! You see, it's not what you do for him, but what he does for you as King! Second, bearing fruit. Paul never intended this to be an abstract spiritual experience, rather he knew that as members of this new Kingdom their lifestyle would surely change, so he prayed that they would "bear fruit in every good work." This is the second time this phrase has shown up in the first chapter



of Colossians. Verse 6 reads, “[the gospel] has come to you, as indeed in the whole world, it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth.” So, what Paul says in verse 6 regarding the gospel of Christ he now says of the Colossian believers in whose hearts and lives Christ was presently at work. Paul understood that the gospel would result in more than a mere personal, inner working of Christ, but would actually flow out of both, their words and deeds – bearing fruit in every good work. Consider with me for a brief moment an apple seed. Let’s imagine that you have been given one apple seed. You plant the seed, you water, and nurture it and one day it grows and matures into a fruitful tree producing bushels of apples. You take two or three of those apples and plant an orchard. Before you know you have a full blown apple orchard. People are coming from all over the city to pay you to pick apples, to fill their bellies with caramel apples, candy apples, apple pie, apple cider, or simply juicy, crisp apples. And the orchard continues producing more trees, more fruit, and more joy. Fruitful and flourishing. [All analogies break down, but you get the point here.] Might our good works mirror the fruitfulness of the apple orchard. Might God take the seed of our knowledge of his will (even if the size of the even tinier mustard seed), plant it, water it, and tend to it in the sphere of the Spirit, so that through Christ, it would swell and reap an abundance of fruit in every good work: from discipleship to being on mission to working to the glory of God to caring for the poor and marginalized to treating people with dignity and honor to being a person of peace to those we intersect with daily. Is your life fruitful? Do wish your life was more fruitful? Are you hungry to see God produce a greater harvest in your life? Do you want to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord? Then Christ is calling you under his reign this morning (cf. Rom. 7:4). My second word of encouragement...persevere with joy!

Persevere with Joy

Paul prays that they too would be, “strengthened with all power.” Not physical strength, earthly power, nor the ability to simply bear fruit by brute force. Rather, Paul says that it is a power “according to his glorious might” [or, better translated: “the might of his glory”]. This brings to mind those glorious, awe-inspiring manifestations of God’s glory in the OT: burning bushes, quaking mountains, rumbling thunder, smoldering pillars of smoke and fire. He desires to shine his glorious power through you in Christ (cf. Heb. 1:3ff). But, why? Paul says, “for all endurance and patience with joy.” It was this glorious manifested power of God in their new lives under Christ the King that the Colossians had the ability to endure and have patience with joy, even in the midst of and despite hardship and suffering. Now, this is challenging for many of us to grasp. Joy in the midst of suffering? How can anyone experience joy with all the turmoil, prejudice, hatred, and bigotry of the world today? Shootings, bombings, death fills our headlines. Many as a result of this election are feeling the weight of being aliens of this world. Or, even fear due to the outcome. What about the more practical? Enduring in joy through the reality of broken relationships. Or finding joy in the midst of loss and grief. The point here is not white-knuckling your way through hardship and suffering. Rather, its succumbing to God’s glorious might who is at work in you, as James 1 reminds us, “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing” (James 1:2-4). It doesn’t mean that it’s not hard, it doesn’t mean it’s not painful, it doesn’t mean that it’s not challenging, frustrating, or even maddening. What it means though is you can rejoice in the midst of and despite it because God is at work and Christ is reigning. This isn’t a superficial joy that demands you put on a smile, but a deeper joy that’s found in Christ—a joy that is present in the midst of the swelling lump in your throat and the unending tears, or the churning knots in your gut. Look, I may not have suffered as much as some of you. But, I have suffered! I have experienced the utter gut wrenching pain of brokenness when I watched my underdeveloped twin daughters, born at 20 weeks, pass from life to death in a matter of seconds, unable to draw even one breath. I’ve experienced the feeling of not wanting to get out of bed. I’ve lived the days that are filled with weeping and trying to catch your breath. I’ve been through the times of prayer when all I can muster up to God is the question “Why?” or to remind him how “unfair” it all is. I remember all too well the fleeting moments of stillness, when all I wanted to do was run away from it all. Listen to me this morning, God graciously and lovingly brings hope into our suffering and hardship. What is this hope you ask? It was not hope in a promise that we would have children one



day. Even though, in his gracious kindness we did. It was not hope that we would one day see our daughters again. Although, I believe we will and I will be so overcome with joy when we do. But, the hope that we found was in Christ and his glorious reign. See, we were not of this kingdom; we were of a greater, better kingdom. And so, despite the brokenness and seeming hopelessness all around us. We could rest in the reign of Christ, who has defeated sin, death, and evil, and is making all things new. And so, all would not be in vain. God would graciously make use of this brokenness – both for our good and his glory. This is meant to be some platitude this morning. Your story may be different than mine in numerous ways, but I can assure you he cares for you...even more than you care for yourself. He knows your pain, suffering, struggles, trials...whatever it may be. He's asking you to let him do what he does best – to reign over your circumstances, giving you power to endure with joy and thanksgiving. When we come to the Lord in prayer with our sufferings or hardships; we are declaring that he is King over our circumstances and most importantly our life. Otherwise, without him, our pain, sickness, suffering, hardships, damaged relationships – they are all in vain. They are merely a product of a broken and sick world – the fading kingdom of darkness. And, we are stripped of hope. But, thanks be to God the Father, this morning, who has placed us in the Kingdom of Christ! My final encouragement: hold fast to Christ the King!

Hold Fast to Christ the King

Paul rests all that he has prayed on v.15-20, frequently referred to as the Christ Hymn. Let's read it again: 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. Now, there is so much here in this passage. We could spend ages going through it, but I don't want us to miss the forest for the trees this morning. Christianity is not merely about discovering the correct "religious path" to walk down, nor is it simply about a plan of salvation, nor is it a puzzle to be decoded. Christianity is about Christ, the King! The King, who reigns supreme, sitting upon his throne of glory, ruling the heavens and the earth, the whole of creation – old and new. Here's the point... If you want to "know" God then look to Christ, who is the very image of God and in whom the fullness of God dwells. If you want to endure and have patience with joy and thanksgiving, then look to Christ, in whom all things hold together. If you want to walk in a manner worthy and fully pleasing to the Lord, then look to Christ, for he is the very blueprint for the genuine humanity. If you want to see more unity and diversity in the church, then look to Christ, who is the head of the body, the Church. If you want to bear bountiful fruit in good works, then look to Christ, who is reconciling to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, and is making peace by the blood of his cross. If you want to lead your family well or be a worthy leader of some other sort, then look to Christ who created all things, including all thrones, dominions, rulers, and authorities. How do you look to Christ? Read and meditate on his Word. Commune with him in prayer - privately and corporately Strive to obey his word with humility and faithfulness. Speak truth in love to one another. Be faithful in gathering as the church, to which he is the head – celebrating in both Word and Sacrament. When we set our eyes upon Christ, we see that the true God is the God of utter sacrificial, self-giving love. We see a God who came to serve and not be served. When we set our eyes upon Christ, we see his creation in a new light – his workmanship – in all its beauty and wonder. Yes, it's broken, but when our eyes are set upon Christ we see that he is making all things new again, even you and me. When we look to Christ we see the wonder and grace of his body, the Church...filled with our family, brothers and sisters with Christ. Wright says, "The Jesus through whom the world was made in the first place is the same Jesus through whom the world has now been redeemed. For he is the firstborn of all creation, and the firstborn from the dead." And so, when we look to Christ we see that his reign is over all things, not just some, not just those that confess faith in him, not just the visible, but the invisible, the whole of creation. Christ our King, "we don't "fit Him in" our framework, nor do we validate Him through our philosophy. Jesus makes sense of everything else, not the other way around. So He is not to be viewed as merely a great teacher or a



wise man, but as the One who holds all things together.” As the One True King who is presently reigning. Knowing that one great and glorious day – we will all be gathered together, and every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess, “Christ the King!”