

Who is Jesus Christ? Part 2

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As we come together to look into the word of God, we want to survey the cross and we want to delve more deeply into the death of Christ on our behalf. I invite you to take God's word and turn with me to the book of Colossians 1 and we want to bring to completion a message that we began last week out of this chapter entitled "Who is Jesus Christ?" Last time together, we looked at verses 15-20 and this Lord's Day we want to look at verses 21-23 and it's just a short, little, two-part message and today is the second part. Again, the title of this message is "Who is Jesus Christ?" This is part 2 and I want to begin by reading verse 21 and we will look through verse 23 today, and I don't know that there's really a more important subject matter that we could be looking at today than this focus upon the Lord Jesus Christ. If you find yourself visiting with us today or this is your first time to be here, this is a red letter day to be at Christ's fellowship as our whole focus in this exposition is upon the person and work of Jesus Christ.

The word of God reads beginning in verse 21,

21 And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, 22 yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach-- 23 if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.

We live in a world that presently has a population of some 6 billion people. Every day on this planet there are over 70,000 people who are born into this world and every month there are 2 million people born on this planet, every year there are another 25 million people who enter the human race. It has been estimated that in the history of the world from the beginning to this present hour, there have been a total of 60 billion people on this planet most of whom have lived very obscure lives. A few have made a small ripple effect upon the world scene and a very very few have been known in the annals of human history, but of all the people who have ever lived, of all the some 60 billion people who have ever entered the human race, there can only be one who is the greatest who has ever lived. No other human being in history other than this one has attracted more attention, has garnered more devotion, has been subject to more opposition and criticism, nor has

become the object of more worship than this one who is the God-man, the Lord Jesus Christ.

He lived 2,000 years ago in a small little nation in a sliver of land known as Israel. He was born of relatively unknown parents and lived a life of very mundane and common existence, yet no one has affected the human race like this one individual, Jesus Christ. No one knows the exact date of his birth and yet the entire human history is divided by his time of entrance into this planet. He never wrote a book and yet more books have been written about him than anyone who has ever lived, no one else is even close. He never raised an army and yet millions have marched in his army and have given their lives for him. Except for one brief period of his childhood, his travels were limited to an area the size of Dallas/Fort Worth and yet today his influence is global and reaches around the world. He never spoke to more than a few thousand people at any time and yet his words have been translated into over 1,000 languages and are made available to some 2,000 people groups. He had no formal education yet today there are thousands of schools and colleges and major universities and seminaries that are founded upon his name. He never painted a picture, he never composed a song or poem, and yet today he is the subject of more paintings and the subject of more songs than any man who has ever entered the human race. It is absolutely impossible to overestimate the influence and the impact of this one solitary life that was lived by Jesus Christ.

None of us here today can afford to be even one or two degrees off on precisely who he is. It would be to live in ignorance. It would be to live in the shadows of darkness. For us to know precisely exactly who he is and our entire eternal destiny hinges upon our relationship to Jesus Christ. It's really not important that we know hardly anyone else or even anyone else if we do not know Jesus Christ. The entire Christian life is a growth in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Eternal life is to know him.

As we have read these verses in Colossians 1, Paul is writing for a specific purpose and that purpose is as he is in jail in Rome, word has been brought to him that there has been false teaching that has come into the church at Colossae regarding the person and work of Jesus Christ. You cannot recover from that. If you're wrong with the person and work of Christ, then everything else is wrong in your life in time and eternity. So in the first chapter on the very front doorstep of this book, Paul belabors the point of the person and work of Christ and are we not glad that he has because this is a treasure for us, this is such sacred ground for us to look at these verses and have spelled out for us in great detail who Jesus Christ is.

We normally don't have such a concentrated section of Scripture where line upon line and layer upon layer and precept upon precept, it is jammed in together so tightly worded. In fact, I told you that it is believed that these are actually the words of an early hymn in the early church as they are singing their theology about Christ. There are hardly any verbs, there are prepositional phrases, there are nouns, there are clauses, and there is no wasted motion in this regarding who is Jesus Christ. If some Jehovah's Witness, some Mormon, some Christian Science person comes and knocks on your door or engages you in

conversation, this is one of the choicest plots of Scripture to go to to stake out our claim regarding who is the true Jesus Christ.

Last time together, we looked at verses 15-20 and just to remind you, we noted four designations of Christ. Today's message will be the fifth and final designation of Christ that I want to just remind you, I want to make sure you got this, I want to make sure that you've written it down. If you wrote it on a piece of paper last time and that piece of paper is someplace, write it in the margin of your Bible. Why not?

Now we noted four designations of Christ and what we will look at today will really stand on the shoulders of these first four. We saw, first, in verse 15, that he is God, "He is the image of the invisible God." Now there are so many passages that we could turn to that just pointblank state that Jesus Christ is God. You could go to John 20:28, you could go to Titus 2:13, you could go to Romans 9:4-5, just straightforward, pointblank Jesus Christ is God. Period. Paragraph. Here it is couched in these terms that, "He is the image of the invisible God." When you look at Jesus, you see everything that God is. That can only be said of one who is fully perfectly God. I would refer you to last week's message and the recording of that for all of the exposition and the exegesis of that.

Second, he is Creator, verse 16. This is a staggering statement, "For by Him all things were created," and at the end of the verse, "all things have been created through Him and for Him." Everything in the universe has been spoken out of his mouth, all things exist by his will. He is the mighty God who has created everything out of nothing.

Then, third, we saw in verse 17, he is sustainer, all that he has created, he maintains and upholds and oversees and governs and directs, and he is the great power of providence as he sustains and moves all that he has made to its appointed end. We see in verse 17 that, "in Him all things hold together." Were it not for the Lord Jesus Christ everything would just fall apart, everything would disintegrate, everything would unravel, everything would come apart, nothing would hold together. All the physical laws of first and second thermodynamics and gravity and inertia etc. etc., all of those laws, we would just be spinning in outer space in what would appear to be just random disorder and all of our lives, there would be no purpose, there be no aim, there be no intentionality. We would be reduced to living in a world of luck and chance and random occurrence and all of that, but Jesus Christ seated at the right hand of God the Father who has all authority in heaven and earth, he does continually moment by moment every day, he is upholding all things. He's got the whole world in his hands. He's got the whole universe in his hands.

Then, fourth, we saw last time, he is Lord. In verses 18 through 20, he is the head of the body, the church; the beginning; the firstborn from the dead. All of these are statements of Lordship, supreme authority, sovereign authority, that through his death we read in verse 20, that he has reconciled all things to himself. That does not mean that he has savingly reconciled all things to himself, we'll get to that in verses 21 and 23 today, but in verse 20 it is saying that he has reconciled all things into a position of accountability before him; that every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. He has – listen to this – he has brought all things into

submission under his feet. That is what verse 20 is saying. Or if we take it in a redemptive way, then we're left with Universalism and he has reconciled everyone, even the devil, to himself. Verse 20 does not speak of that, it speaks of bringing all the created order into subjection and subjugation under his feet.

So we have said he is God, verse 15; he is Creator, verse 16; he is sustainer, verse 17; he is Lord, verse 18-20. Now it is on the basis of this we come now to verses 21-23 and the fifth designation, Jesus Christ is Savior, or if you like, reconciler. This final designation is really the result of the four previous titles. No one can be Savior who is not God, who is not Creator, who is not sustainer, who is not Lord. Any other supposed Savior is only a wannabe impostor. The only one who can be Savior of sinners is one who is God, who has created all, who maintains all, and who is Lord over all. That one alone is qualified to bring about the reconciliation of sinners to a holy God.

So as we look at verses 21-23, I'm going to give you three subheadings here. I want you to note in verse 21 our past alienation. Our past alienation and we read in verse 21, "And although you were formerly," stop right there. The "you" refers to believers in the church. Now this is true not only of believers in the church, it's true of everyone out in the world as well. For everyone out in the world it's present tense and past tense, for us it's only past tense. These are what we would call our BC days, Before Christ. Everyone's life here today could be written in two volumes, BC, Before Christ, and AC, After Christ, and this is true of everyone's life before they came to a saving knowledge of Christ.

Now look at this triad. Alienated, that refers to our status before God. Hostile in mind, that refers to our attitude towards God. And engaged in evil deeds, that refers to our actions before God. Here's the total package right here. Everything tucks neatly into these three headings. This was our status. This was our attitude. And these were our actions before God. And all of this is to underscore how desperately we needed to be reconciled to God in a salvific way.

So let's look at each one of these very quickly. Alienated, and of course, this is a set-up for reconciliation. Alienation is the antithesis or the antonym of reconciliation. The only people who need to be reconciled are those who are alienated and alienated means to be estranged from; to be separated from; to be cut off from. And the object here is, from God. Everyone born into this world is not born into some covenantal relationship with God. Everyone born into this world is born alienated from God, cut off and detached and removed from God. That's why everyone needs to be born again because your first birth, you were alienated from God. Ephesians 2:12 says "you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world; you formerly were far off." This is a picture of Luke 15 and the prodigal son who went to a far away country. That was us, far away from God, a long way from God. Even when we were sitting in church, even when we were sitting under the word of God, even when we had Christian parents, in our heart and in our soul we were alienated from God. And it speaks that God is a holy God and we are sinful creatures and there is an enormous gap that separates holy God from sinful creatures. Alienated.

Then our attitude, notice, "hostile in mind." At the very core of our being, as a man thinks in his heart so is he. In the very depths of our soul, notice we weren't neutral, we weren't one foot in, one foot out, we were hostile in mind, every Christian for the entirety of their existence before they became a Christian. All unbelievers, let me just tell you this, hate God. You say, "No, they don't. They love Christmas. They love Easter." I'm going to tell you again: they hate God. They hate any moral restraint that is placed upon their lives. For further input on that, read Psalm 2 when you get home.

So "hostile in mind." John 3:20, "everyone who does evil," alright, that covers the field of sinners, "everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed." So that's the state of every lost person and all of this is the black velvet backdrop to set up what he will tell us in the next verse. We didn't need just a plus on our A in order to get into heaven. We were alienated, we were hostile in mind towards God, and then finally, "engaged in evil deeds." No one had to teach us to be sinners. No one had to teach us how to be engaged in evil deeds. We were birthed into this world with a radically corrupt sin nature and there was a bent and an inclination and a propensity towards doing evil deeds and we did it to the full. That's what he's saying here, that evil deeds flow out of a hostile mind. This summarizes our past alienation.

Now let me tell you, it's not just that we were at enmity with God, let me tell you something even worse than that. You may think, "What could possibly be worse than that I was at enmity with God?" God was at enmity with you. God is a holy God and God cannot look upon evil with approval and God is not some doting grandfather in heaven passing out birthday gifts to everybody. God is a holy God and God hates sin and God hates sinners who are outside of Christ. God even hates the elect before they come to faith in Christ. Psalm 5:5 says, "You hate all who do iniquity." Psalm 5:6 says, "The LORD abhors the man," not just the deed, not just the act but the man, the person, the individual, "of bloodshed and deceit." Psalm 11:5, "the one who loves violence [God's] soul hates." Romans 1:18, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men."

I was in a Q & A session at the Ligonier conference this past week and I was on the platform with R. C. Sproul and Al Moehler and Michael Horton and a pretty sharp group of people and I was trying to hide at the end, and sure enough, the first question and I hear R. C. saying, "This one is for Steve. How do you reconcile Psalm 5 and John 3:16?" You see, this was to get me prepared for you today. How do you reconcile, "God hates sinners," and, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son"? I said, "Well, there's a lot for us to talk about here. First of all, Romans 9:13, 'Jacob I loved and Esau I hated.' Eternally, redemptively, salvifically there is a discrimination in the saving love of God and the love of God is demonstrated only towards his elect." You say, "I don't understand how God could hate the non-elect." Listen, I don't understand how God could love the elect. That's the hard sell for me. But even within the elect who have been loved with an everlasting love, while they are in a pre-conversion state before they have even come to faith in Christ, don't think that God is in heaven with a smile on his face towards them. The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness and all

ungodliness of men whether elect or non-elect, and before the elect become experientially the object of God's love, they are under the shadow of God's fury. That's how bad you, sir, you, ma'am, needed to be reconciled to God even though you are numbered among the elect of God, before you came to Christ, God hated your sin and God had holy pure hatred of your contaminated and defiled life. The love of God is found exclusively in Christ. There is no love of God redemptively outside of Christ. That's why we were chosen in Christ and predestined in Christ because that is the only way that our election could have even come to pass, it was that we were chosen in Christ.

So not only did we need to be reconciled to God, but God if he is to enter into relationship with us, there must be reconciliation from his side as well. Now leads, second, to our present reconciliation. We've seen in verse 21 our past alienation, second I want you to see our present reconciliation. Verse 22, this speaks of the great change that has come about in our lives and as I look at verse 22, I want to break it apart this way, I want to use those familiar adverbs: who, what, where, how, why. I want that to be the headings for verse 22: who, what, where, how, why.

We begin with the "who." "Yet He has now reconciled you." Christ is the "He." Christ is the reconciler. We cannot reconcile ourselves. We cannot meet God halfway. We cannot contribute anything to our reconciliation. The "who" is Jesus Christ. He is the great reconciler. Holy God, sinful man, enormous chasm that separates us and there is only one way that sinful man can be reconciled to holy God and that is by the person and work of Jesus Christ. There is no other reconciler. There is no other way to be reconciled. There is one God and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, and a reconciler is a mediator who brings two parties together.

Now this leads, second, to the "what." "Yet He," now here's the "what," "has now reconciled you." This word "reconciled," let's pause just for a moment and consider what this word means. Literally it means to change. It's in the intensive form which means to bring about an enormous change. It means to change the status of the relationship of two parties that are estranged and have suffered a falling out, and their backs are turned toward each other, and to be reconciled means that there is the removal of this estrangement; there is the removal of this alienation. Reconciliation means the removal of the enmity between God and the sinner and the establishment of a new relationship of peace and acceptance and friendship between them, and it is all on the basis of the reconciler. Those once in dispute with God are brought into harmonious relationship with God. They have been changed from hating God to being sons and daughters who love God.

Now, I want you to think of this illustration, I want you to think of a triangle. Watch me here. A triangle and at the top apex of the triangle is God, and over here on the left corner of the triangle is Christ, and on the right corner is the sinner. God, Christ and the sinner and they are connected by straight lines that form the triangle. Now our salvation is so multifaceted that no one word encompasses the whole of the miracle of salvation. I'm going to give you a couple of words. Propitiation. That goes on the line between God and Christ. Christ through his death has propitiated God, that means, has appeased the

righteous anger of God toward us. Christ by his blood atonement has satisfied the righteous anger of God. He has placated the wrath of God. That is why there is now therefore no condemnation for them who are in Christ Jesus.

Now on the line that connects Christ and the sinner is the word "redemption," and Christ has redeemed us. He propitiated the Father and he redeemed us, meaning he purchased us, he bought us out of the slave market of sin at a great price. We have been redeemed not by corruptible things such as silver or gold but by the precious blood of a lamb. That is Christ towards us.

Then on the third line between God and the sinner, on that line write the word "reconciliation." By the death of Christ, he has reconciled God to the sinner and the sinner to God. He has reconciled holy God and foul, offensive sinner and have brought them together in sweet reconciliation.

Third, "where." That was "what." He has changed the status of our relationship, no longer alienated, now reconciled, now brought into right relationship with God. Now, third, "where." Where did this reconciliation take place. Look at the next four words, "in His fleshly body." That is where this reconciliation took place. Now there is a reason why he does not say the cross, that he says, "in His fleshly body," and it's unique to the false teachers at Colossae, they were the early seeds that were growing of Gnosticism and there was a form of Gnosticism called Docetic Gnosticism which comes from a Greek word that means "seems" or "appears," and what Docetic Gnosticism was teaching is that Jesus – well, behind it was there is this dualism in the universe between matter and spiritual things that are not physical matter, and Gnosticism said everything that is physical is evil and only what is spiritual is good. So therefore when applied to Christ, there was a total denial of the Incarnation. God could never become a man. God could never take upon himself a human body because all that is physical is evil in this dualistic Gnostic system. Now, they denied the full deity of Christ, they therefore denied the full humanity of Christ and you're left with a mere spirit-being, small "s," or a mere ghost of a person and Paul is wanting to stamp that out with a vengeance and you're in big trouble if you deny the Incarnation, if you deny the physical body of Christ because the wages of sin is, what? Death. Well, if Jesus is to die for our sins, God cannot die, he must become a man in order to die. No Incarnation, no crucifixion. No crucifixion, no reconciliation.

So the "where" is, "in His fleshly body." As Jesus was lifted up upon that cross, Jesus was the reconciler and as he was lifted up upon that cross, nailed to that cross – listen to me – our sins were transferred to Christ and the Father's wrath fell upon Christ and upon that cross it was as if he took holy God with one hand and sinful man with the other and he has reconciled us and has brought us together by removing the enmity between us, and in that death placating the righteous anger of God towards us, there is now no wrath towards us. Christ has appeased it infinitely, perfectly, eternally, and he has bought us out of the sin market of sin and through his shed blood, he has now also reconciled us to God in his fleshly body. That is the "where." It wasn't enough that he shed his blood in Gethsemane, it was there upon the cross.

Now, fourth, "how." The next two words, "through death." Death is the key word here and I really almost got a little bit ahead of myself. It wasn't enough that Jesus came, that doesn't save us. It wasn't enough that he lived here. It wasn't enough that he performed miracles. It wasn't enough that he raised the dead. It wasn't enough that he gave sight to the blind or healed the sick. It wasn't enough that he spoke as no man has ever spoken. It wasn't enough, it was not enough for my salvation that he reveal God to us. If I am to be reconciled to God, he must die. The wages of sin is death. The day that you eat of this fruit, you shall surely die. The soul that sins, it shall surely die. If Jesus is to stand in my place, he must die because the death penalty has been rendered upon my head by God in heaven, and do you know what? The death penalty is upon your head because the soul that sins, it shall surely die. Do you think God means that?

So for Jesus to reconcile me to God, he had to die because without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin. 1 Peter 3:18, "Christ died for [our] sins, the just for the unjust." 1 Corinthians 15:3, "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and He was buried." Why the emphasis on burial? Because he really did die. He didn't just go to sleep. He didn't go into a state of swooning. He didn't just go unconscious. No, he actually died and the reason we know that he actually died is because they buried him. Romans 5:6, "Christ died for the ungodly." Romans 5:8, "Christ died for us." Again and again and again this emphasis upon the death of Christ in our place.

Think of the finality of that death. He cried out, "It is finished!" meaning the reconciliation has been accomplished. Think of the sufficiency of it. There is nothing yet for us to do to add to this to bring about the reconciliation. Think of the exclusivity of it, that there is no other reconciliation by which I can be made right with holy God. Think of the eternity of it, that once reconciled I will never again be in a place of alienation from him. Think of the sovereignty of it, all for whom he died upon the cross, he reconciles to God.

Here's the "why." Look in the middle of verse 22. Here's the "why." Why did Jesus die? Now theologically there are 10 answers to this. Here's one of those, "in order to," here is the intent of the death of Christ, here is the reason why he died, "in order to present you before Him." The "Him" refers to God the Father and the presentation has to do on the time of our arrival in heaven whether by death or by the Second Coming. It refers to an official presentation before the Father and all of us will be presented before the Father. None of us when we die will be able to crawl up into the grave and pull the dirt up over us and nail down the coffin and hide from God. There will be a presentation of every one of us to God before him on his throne.

Now here is the glory of the Gospel. Here is the good news of the Gospel. This is as good as it gets. It can't be any better than this. We once who were alienated, hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, solely because of the work of Christ upon the cross dying in our place, he will now present foul, unclean sinners like you and me, he will present us to the Father, notice these three words, this is the total antithesis of what we just read in verse 21, alienated, hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, look at these three, you talk about a change, "holy and blameless and beyond reproach." Do you think there's power in the

blood of Christ? Do you think there is power in the death of Christ for us? You can't have a bigger change than this. Impossible.

Holy means to be cleansed from all defilement; to be cleansed from all impurities and to be clothed in the righteousness of Christ. Now without this, when we're presented before the Father, we would be rejected. We would be turned away. We would be condemned. We would be sentenced to destruction were it not for Christ, the reconciler, presenting us holy before God, pure, spotless, undefiled because of the blood of Christ. Listen, this is a true reconciliation. The next word blameless means without moral blemish. Beyond reproach. Faultless. No liabilities in my debit side of the T square. Blameless. Then beyond reproach. Do you know what that means? No one can bring a charge against us in heaven and let me tell you, the devil is accusing us every day in heaven day and night of our sin. We don't know the half of it. Romans 8:33, "Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns?" We are cleared of all charges. We are freed from all accusations. God says, "Come, let us reason together says the Lord. Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

Now this work of reconciliation took place when we were enemies of God and hostile towards God. Christ by the power of his death at the cross has radically changed our status before God and it is all by our faith in Christ, by our trusting in Christ. Now some here today maybe are feeling a little uncomfortable and feeling like I'm going over the top, I'm going overboard on this thing. "I didn't come here today to hear about alienation, hostile. I want you to spray perfume on me. I want to hear something good. I want to hear something sweet." Fine, go to hell because this is the status of every one of us upon our entrance into the world and it becomes absolutely glorious to hear of a reconciler who has made us holy and without blemish and faultless before the Lord, and it means absolutely less than anything if were not alienated and hostile in mind and engaged in evil deeds. If you want someone to tickle your ears, be gone. We've not come here to play games and play church today. We've gathered for God to speak through his word. There was this past alienation, there is now this present reconciliation and it has been brought about by the God-man, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now our final verse, verse 23, our personal assurance. We all need to know this real in our lives, do we not? We can't just have our toes up to the narrow gate but never go through it. We can't just see others saved but not me, myself, being saved. I can't be deluded about this. I can't be self-deceived about this. I need to know that it is real in my life, don't you? So verse 23 speaks of our personal assurance.

Now this answers the question, "How can I know if this reconciliation with God has taken place in my life? How can I know that my faith is saving faith? That it is real?" So Paul tells us in verse 23. He is doing the work of an evangelist as well as the work of a pastor so he says in verse 23, "if." Now that word "if" should capture our attention. You have been reconciled if... You are no longer in alienation if... This has been made real in your life and were you to die today, you would be presented holy and blameless and

faultless before God if... If your faith in Christ is genuine, is authentic, is real. There is a counterfeit faith. There is a faith that falls short of true saving faith. There is a faith that is merely an intellectual acknowledgment and maybe even an emotional warm feeling, but if there is not the volitional commitment, it's not a true saving faith. James 2:19 says that the demons believe and they shudder.

So what is the mark of true saving faith? There are many marks. We could turn to 1 John and find 11 marks that accompany true saving faith but here is one key component of what designates true saving faith as that which rightly connects me to Christ: if indeed you continue in the faith. Now "the faith" here refers not to our faith, it refers to the Christian faith; it refers to the Christian doctrine; it refers to the truth of the Gospel; it refers to the truth about Christ. It is objective faith, not subjective faith. To continue in the faith speaks of perseverance and endurance in the objective Christian faith, meaning if you are pulled away from the truth about the person and work of Christ and you become hoodwinked by this Docetic Gnostic teaching about Christ, it is clear evidence that you've never been saved to begin with and your faith was a self-imposed faith. It did not come down from above. It was not sired in you by the Holy Spirit because if you have true saving faith, you would continue in the faith in spite of the proliferation of false teachers around you. 1 John 2:19 says, "They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us." I told you before the faith that fizzles before the finish, you can finish this, has a flaw from the first. It goes up like a rocket and comes down like a rock. It's not real. It's not how you start the race from the outward human perspective, it's how you finish the race and if you don't finish the race, in fact you never began the race.

So he says, "if indeed you continue in the faith." Perseverance, the bottom line, becomes the ultimate validation. MacArthur says truth and time go hand-in-hand. Over the long haul, continuing in Christian truth and pursuing that in personal holiness, then he says, "firmly established and steadfast." Firmly established means to be grounded like a building on a firm foundation in the Christian truth. That's why it's necessary for us to preach the faith, the truth, so that the true elect and those who truly know the Lord have a firm foundation for their faith. That's why we're not preaching how to have a happy vacation. That's why we're not preaching how to have your best life now. That's not the faith. It's too easy for you to give the appearance of being religious but you don't have the faith.

Then he says, "and not moved away from the hope of the gospel," meaning not lured away to other strange teachings about Christ. "That you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister." The Gospel is for preaching. The Gospel is for proclamation. Oh, it can be passed on in a book, it can be read in the Bible, it can be passed on in a one-on-one witnessing, of course, parent to child and co-worker to co-worker, but ultimately it's a message to be proclaimed, to be heralded, to be announced, to be taught, and Paul acknowledges that and he says, "Listen, you are really saved if you have actually heard this message and you

are anchored into the Lord by sovereign grace," and Paul says, "I was made a minister of this."

Reconciliation is the work of the Savior. He is God. He alone can save us from God, for God. He is Creator. He has made us for himself. He alone can make us a new creation. He is sustainer. He is Lord. He alone can reconcile us to the Father and present us holy and blameless before him.

In the 1860's the US Government embarked upon a very monumental task. Their task was to connect the Atlantic coast with the Pacific coast by way of a train; no longer to have to sail around the lower straits of South America; no longer to have to sail down into Panama and to crawl across with the cargo and then come up to California. Now at last in 1862, there was an Act passed by Congress to give millions upon millions of dollars to hire thousands upon thousands of people, most of them immigrants, to build this track and they began in Omaha, Nebraska and they started in Sacramento, California and there was a race to see who would win, and they met in Utah and there was a huge ceremony as the last spike was driven into the track and when they drove that last spike in, there was the news, "It is finished!" And it was telegraphed around the country that the two sides were now one. That is precisely what happened at the cross yet it was all the work from heaven. There was no race to meet in the middle. We were running away from God, we were at enmity with God, we were engaged in evil deeds, and yet God from heaven did all of the work and through his Son Christ at the cross, he has reconciled us to the Father. It is finished and there is no other way for the two to become one except through his death in his fleshly body.

Our great Savior, our great Savior, our glorious Savior, has undertaken the cause all by himself and through the shedding of his blood and as those spikes and nails were driven into his hands and the spear was thrust into his side, it was through that death in his fleshly body he was taking holy God and sinful man and reconciling us together and by faith in Christ, we who once were enemies, are now sons and daughters and friends of God through Christ. May you truly believe upon Christ and may you call upon him, and if you don't, all other ground is sinking sand.

Let us pray.

Father, we are in amazement and astonishment that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us, while we were alienated, you had already accomplished the work of reconciliation, when we were hostile and engaged in evil deeds, you had already built the bridge to yourself through the cross of Christ. May those here today who have never believed upon Christ, may they do so this hour, this moment, this second, and may those of us who have believed upon Christ, give us a new astonishment, a new amazement, a new bewilderment. Do not allow us to be untouched, unmoved by this. Do not allow us to be so commonplace with this that it does not stir our hearts and put excitement into our soul for through the death of Christ in his fleshly body we have been reconciled to you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.