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[0:00] Well, if you do have a copy of God's Word, do turn with me to Colossians chapter 1 and verses 21 through 23. So we've been working our way through this section of God's Word.

And this morning we were awestruck at the supremacy and the sufficiency of the Lord Jesus. Paul had us hooked, as it were, captivated by Christ and all His majesty.

Well, now Paul wants to bring the reality of Christ home to our hearts. So when I was growing up, I don't know what it was like for you.

One of the favorite things in my life was when the postman came. I loved hearing that familiar rattle of the letterbox, the sharp snap as it closed, and then that soft thud as envelopes hit the mat.

And I don't know what it was, but something just leapt with excitement within me. So I'd push my brothers out of the way and I would sprint to the door. I just wanted to see what had come. Now, more often than not, it was junk mail.

[1:06] Sometimes there was official-looking letters. Other times there was those blue and red airmail envelopes that said, this envelope has come from a distant country. And that was always very cool.

But almost always, as I picked up the envelopes, there was nothing addressed to me. And then one day it happened.

There was an envelope for me. I don't know what age I was. I think I may have been seven or eight. I remember the date, 14th of February. I opened this envelope, and I had been sent a Valentine's Day card.

Now, you know that moment when I saw my name on that envelope? My mind caught fire.

Someone, I'm loved, fancies me.

I'm known. I'm loved. And for a few electric seconds, I was blushing and filled with joy.

[2:11] I remember showing it to my brothers, only to be told, yeah, mum sent you that. Very sweet, but slightly less romantic than I thought.

Now, you see that feeling that I had? That feeling of wonder? That feeling of thrill of being personally addressed? The reason I mention that is because Paul wants us to feel that wonder in Colossians 1, verse 21.

You see, it's here he addresses us. He's been speaking about Christ in the most breathtaking language. He's supreme over creation.

He's sufficient in his work. Of salvation. Everything he said about Christ is vast. It's cosmic. It's almost overwhelming. It left us probably this morning feeling very small.

But having painted that picture, Paul now says these words. And you. It's though an envelope drops through the letterbox of our minds and written across it is our name.

[3:24] And you. Paul wants to make this personal. The cosmic king of the universe has something to say to you and me.

The Lord of the galaxies. The Lord of the galaxies. The reconciler of heaven and earth. The head of the church has a message for you.

Now, it's one thing to know this. Christ reconciles all things in heaven and earth to himself. It's quite another thing to know.

Christ reconciles me to himself. Christ reconciles me to know this. The gospel is only truly good news for us when it moves from being cosmic truth to personal reality.

Yes, the cross is a cosmic event as we saw this morning. But Paul says tonight, I want you to know the cross is also a very personal event.

[4:32] And it has got life transforming implications for you and I. Now, Paul's going to do this in three short verses. So, I've got three points. In verse 21, he's going to show us who we once were apart from Christ when we're in Adam. And then he's going to show us in verse 22 who we now are in Christ.

And in verse 23, he's going to say how we now live by faith in Christ. So, who we once were, who we now are, and how we now live by faith in Christ.

In verse 21, Paul takes us somewhere we probably would rather not go. Paul wants to take us back to the past. He wants to open, if you will, the spiritual photo album of our past.

And he wants us, for a few honest moments, to look at who we once were. Before Jesus. When we were in Adam. Now, if you've got a Bible, the key word you could circle here is that word once.

[5:43] Notice it's in the past tense. We're not thinking about now. We're thinking about back then. And as we take a look at this spiritual photo album, Paul isn't going to separate us from being the rebellious kid or the respectable kid.

Now, that word once, all of us, there was a time when we were once apart from Christ. There was a time when we were once in Adam.

I appreciate that in a room like this, there will be those of you who, when you think of your past and the images that come to mind, perhaps you had a colorful past. And there was a decisive moment of turning.

Perhaps for others of you, you were raised in a Christian home. You were raised in the fear and admonition of the Lord. You don't ever remember a time where you didn't believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. It just gradually became a reality where you knew I'm trusting him and I'm loving him.

All of that is true. And what a mercy that is if that is you. Whatever our background, here's one thing we cannot deny. There was a point in our life where every one of us was once a sinner in need of a savior.

[7:03] And so Paul says, okay, let's open up the photo album. Let's look at before Christ. And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds.

The first thing I want to say about this verse is it kind of jars. We've just been thinking about the infinite glory and majesty of Christ. The next moment, it's like Paul pulls down his camera from the heavens and he pulls it down to the earth and he zooms in.

And what he zooms into is not flattering. Alienated? Hostile? Doing evil deeds? First of all, Paul says we were alienated.

You know, that word, it's a relational term. You know, you talk about someone in a family being alienated from their family, estranged from their family.

There's distance when everyone knows there should be closeness and intimacy. Because we sinned in Adam, we were supposed to live and be at home in God's presence.

[8:25] But God removed us from his near presence. He evicted us from the Garden of Eden. He closed the door and there was a cold silence where warmth once belonged.

Cut off from the very source of life. Now living in a cursed world. But then we turn the page in the photo album and it's not just that we were alienated, it's that we were hostile in mind.

Now, I don't know about you, but there's a part of me that wants to react to that and say, hostile in mind? I can't remember a time where I was hostile in mind. That seems a little extreme. Surely not.

There wasn't a time when we were shaking our fists to the heavens.

That was neutral. But Scripture leaves no room for spiritual neutrality. There is no, if you will, spiritual-speaking Switzerland.

The camera doesn't lie. Listen, you can have a hostility in your mind and it doesn't look like hostility to you and I, but it's indifference.

[9:35] It looks like postponement. Later God, not now. Sometimes it looks like polite religion when the reality is we've got self enthroned and at the center.

You can go through photo after photo and what you see is God pushed to the margins, self in the middle. The expression may vary for us.

Some of us rebellious, others of us respectable, but the stance is the same. Hostile. I put the name, you turn on another page and it gets worse.

Doing evil deeds. Some of you can remember your past and you can remember the evil deeds and the photos are not flattering.

Public. Choices that have left visible wreckage. For others of us, we look at the pictures of ourself and there's no headlines, there's no scandal, but we look closer, we zoom in and what do we see?

[10:46] There's pride in my eyes. There's self-righteousness in my posture. There's jealousy beneath the surface. There's lust behind the religious facade.

There's disorder. The photo album tells us that we are alienated in relationship, hostile in mindset, sinful in practice.

Now listen very carefully. Here's why Paul wants us to linger here. Because sometimes you and I forget what we once were.

Let me illustrate it like this. Imagine there's someone who truly loves you. I mean truly loves you. They pursue you.

They write to you again and again, letter after letter. They plan a costly gift chosen carefully for you, wrapped thoughtfully.

[11:48] They come to you. They stand at your door and they knock, waiting for you. You see the envelopes, but you ignore them. You hear the knock on the door, but you turn up the music.

You see the gift, and you set it aside. Now you don't need to imagine that, because that is our reality. That is our story. God did not love us casually.

God loved us generously. He gave us life, breath, beauty, and joy. He placed us in paradise, in Adam. He gave us His very self.

He made us in His image. He made us like Himself. He wanted divine fellowship. He wanted us to be at home with Him. And what did we do? We turned in on self.

We redirected our affections. We preferred self over God. And you know the staggering thing?

[12:53] Is the photo album. It may be hidden from our gaze. We might want to put it into a drawer. But it was never private to God.

Every thought. Every thought. Every motive. Every quiet act of resistance. Every unopened letter of grace.

There's nothing airbrushed. Nothing deleted by Him. No retakes. The holy God saw it all. He's not a distant observer. He's the one who saw it all.

Now here's my question, right? If God saw all of that. Who we once were. Alienated. Hostile. Doing evil deeds. Here's my question. What should happen to us?

If we were in a courtroom. And the evidence was placed in front of the judge. Here are the photographs. What should be the verdict? We've committed cosmic treason.

[14:00] Alienated from God. Hostile in our minds. Rejected His love. Well, the wages of sin. It's death. Justice would demand condemnation.

The judge would be right to close the album. Look at us and pronounce this sentence. He is condemned to eternal death. But here is the breathtaking.

Here is the surprising twist. Instead of verse 22 saying, He has condemned us. Verse 22 says, He has now reconciled in His body of flesh by His death.

That doesn't make sense. That's not what we deserve. What we've been told here is that the judge steps out of his seat. He comes down and He does for us what we do not deserve.

Instead of moving away from us, He moves towards us. He has spurned His love and He acts to restore us.

[15:08] This isn't mild mercy. This is magnificent, majestic, mind-blowing mercy. And it's only when we feel the weight of our album.

It's only when we see who we once were that we'll ever feel the wonder of these words. He has now reconciled you.

Once hostile, now reconciled. Once guilty, now accepted. And here's where we come to point two. Who we now are in Christ. If that is who we once were in Adam, Paul wants you and I to see who we now are in Christ.

If you were taking notes, you've underlined or circled the word once. You now need to underline or circle the word now. Who are we now? Because of Christ.

[16:10] Now this, there's one more word you really need to underline and circle. See that word reconciled? I think it's one of my favorite words in all the Bible. It's so warm.

It's so rich. In fact, here's the fascinating thing about reconciled. It's the exact opposite of alienation. It's very similar. Both terms are relational.

Reconciliation is not a legal term. It's a relational term. It's not a cold or clinical term. No, no, no, no. It's a warm and rich term.

You see, if alienation is distance, reconciliation is embrace. If alienation is exile, reconciliation is homecoming.

Paul's not saying that our court record has been merely adjusted. Paul's saying our relationship to the judge has been restored.

[17:07] Now, I really need to get right there is a world of a difference between a legal verdict and a relational verdict. Think of war.

Not hard right now, is it? Lots of wars. And when you think of war right now, what are the world leaders calling for, for the most part? Constantly calling for ceasefires, negotiations that will lead to peace treaties.

Legally, those things matter. We need to stop the killing. We need to stop the shooting. We need conflict to end.

Here's the thing. If there is a legal verdict of a peace treaty, the guns may fall silent. But do you know what will continue? Suspicion.

Fear. Bitterness. A ceasefire can halt the hostility, but it cannot restore trust. It cannot heal broken hearts.

[18:16] It cannot rebuild shattered relationships. A peace treaty is a legal reality. Reconciliation, however, is something different.

In reconciliation, not only does the war end, but love is restored. Trust is rebuilt.

Communion comes to exist. There's not just words, but there's action. And here's the amazing thing. In Christ, that's what we've received.

We were once alienated, but he's reconciled us. When Christ came and died on the cross, he tore down the walls of sin that we built.

When Christ came and died on the cross, get this right, he took the judgment we deserve. He was alienated. He was forsaken.

[19:22] He was abandoned so that you and I could be restored to right relationship with God our Father. And I don't want you to miss this.

He has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death. The subject of the sentence is not you. It's Christ. He has done it. How has he done it? He's reconciled us.

This is a staggering thing. In the body of flesh. Why is that stunning? Because Christ is the eternal God.

He is the creator of all things. The one who upholds all things. Sustains all things. The one for whom all things exist. He became man to do for us.

[20:27] What we could never do for ourselves. He took on flesh. The infinite became, entered the finite world and became one of us.

And he moved towards us with skin and bone. So that our creator would become our savior. So that the wages of death that we deserve would fall on him.

I want you to see and I want you to feel the cost of your reconciliation. In his body of flesh. By his death.

Your reconciliation cost Jesus his life. Now here's the purpose.

And this is truly, mind-blowingly magnificent. Listen. Why? Why did he do it?

[21:36] In order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him.

Now, I'm going to struggle to try and articulate what Christ's sacrificial substitutionary death has done for us.

But let me say it like this. If we were to turn the pages in the spiritual photograph album and go to the end and look at the picture of yourself standing before the father, you know what you would

see?

Perfection. Perfection. Perfection. Perfection. Perfection. I mean, absolute, pristine perfection. Perfection. He died in order to present you holy.

Holy. He died to make you just like himself. Not airbrushed. Not artificially edited.

[22:36] Not cosmetically improved. No, no, no, no, no. He died so that you would become just like him. Holy. But not just holy. Blameless.

There's no stain of sin that can stick to you. Without blame. And yet here's the reality.

We know if we turn back, we are blameworthy. But it's not only blameless. Above reproach.

No accusation can be brought against us because Christ has made us like him.

If you could look at the end of the photo album of us standing before the father because of the great work of reconciliation, we're clothed in Christ's righteousness.

[23:37] We're washed clean. Every blemish gone. Every wrinkle smoothed. Every distortion of sin undone. The contrast here is stunning.

We were once alienated. We were once hostile in mind. We were once doing evil deeds. But now? But then on that last day?

We will stand before him. Just like him. The reason we read from Isaiah 53 is because all the language there of holy, blameless, and above reproach, it's all sacrificial language.

Jesus was the holy, blameless, without defect, Lamb of God who died in our place in order that we would become just like him.

Notice the verbs. He reconciles and he presents. He's the active agent. The work of the cross has changed who we are right now.

[24:47] And the work of the cross has absolute good news for who we will be at the last day. But this raises one question that we need to answer before we end.

If Christ has done all this, if reconciliation is entirely his work, here's my question. How do we live right now? How do we live tomorrow morning?

Well, Paul does not leave that unanswered. He answers the question in verse 23. There's one word you could circle here.

It's not because it's a good word. It's this hard word. If. It kind of catches us off guard. Like after everything Paul's just said about reconciliation, grace, Christ's finished work, it feels as if the burden suddenly shifts to us.

But notice carefully, it doesn't. Paul's not moving from grace to effort. He's not saying, okay, here's what you need to do. Try harder and you'll make it to the end.

[26:11] No, no, no, no, no. Paul is saying, you and I will make it if we stick to Christ. If we stay rooted and abiding in Christ.

Look at the verbs that he uses. Continue. Stable. Steadfast. Not shifting. This is not about doing more.

This is about staying put. So, I flew here. London to Glasgow. Glasgow to Stornoway. I didn't fly here, actually.

The Logan Air pilot flew me here. Now, I got here because of faith. I trusted that plane and that pilot could bring me here.

And so, I stayed put on that plane. I didn't get up and say to the pilot, I think I'd do a better job at flying this plane than you. I didn't say, I'm going to open the door and jump out. I stayed put.

[27:22] And you know, we who are in Christ and Christ is in us. Here's a simple invitation. Abide in Christ.

Stay put. Continue in Him. Stable and steadfast. Don't shift. Now, the reason Paul has to say this is because, remember, the Colossian Christians were being tempted by false teachers who were saying, you need Jesus plus.

And Paul is saying, no, no, no, no. You've got everything you need in Jesus. You know, one of the subtle lies that Satan can whisper into our ears is this.

Jesus handled your past. It's now up to you to get you through. Or, that's a gospel of works.

Or there's then the gospel of despair. Jesus got you started, but I'm not sure you'll finish it. One expresses pride, I've got this.

[28:24] The other expresses despair, I can't do this. But you know what both of those lies have in common? They both remove Christ from the

center. Here's the good news. Christ saved us.

Christ will present us. So, tomorrow morning, who will keep us? Tomorrow morning, what do we need to do?

Depend on Christ. Trust in Christ. Now, let me draw this to a conclusion. I began by saying, that feeling, that sheer wonder of receiving a Valentine's card with my name written on it made me feel noticed, chosen, seen.

Even if it was from my mom, I felt a little loved. There was something electric about it. Something absolutely incredible to have my name written down and to be chosen to be loved.

What if the God of heaven wrote your name on his hands and heart and died outstretched for you at the cross to tell you he loves you, to forgive you of your sin, to take you out of Adam and to bring you in himself so that he will spend the rest of eternity loving you his bride and having you love him the groom.

[30:05] When we see him we'll be made just like him and we will see beauty glorified like never before and when he sees us he'll see himself in us and so the message the good news of the gospel continue in the faith stable and steadfast not shifting from the hope of the gospel at the cross Jesus declares I have chosen you I love you you're mine and can I just say this if you're here tonight and you're not yet a Christian this story is not for someone else this message is not for the person sitting next to you this message is for you the good news is being offered to you he comes with a greater gift for you the question is will you receive it will you receive him will you turn from your sins and will you trust in him let's pray