

# Welcome to the End

## Colossians 1:13-20

### Introduction

Today marks the last Sunday of the Christian calendar year. So, welcome to the end! When you and I gather in this space one week from today, we will be in the season of Advent – the start of a new year for the Christian Church.

- So if next Sunday is like our New Year's Day, then ...
- This Sunday is our New Year's Eve.

As you no doubt have heard me say, the whole intent of the Christian calendar is to tell – over the course of a single year -- the entire story of Jesus.

- Starting next week we begin to anticipate His coming as a baby. A virgin will be with child – and miracle of miracles – that baby will be born just 24 days later!
- Then all year long – from December until the following November the story of faith continues to be built and proclaimed year after year, week after week. Until we come to this Sunday. Our New Year's Eve.

Today we celebrate the truth that Jesus Christ accomplished everything He came to earth to accomplish. His final words on the cross said it all:

When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. (John 19:30)

Through His birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension, He once and for all time conquered every element of evil and today

- And in that final moment, He became the King of kings and Lord of lords.
- And one day soon He will come again and put his final stamp on the victory.

As one writer put it:

*On the Feast of Christ the King, we celebrate the day when Christ's great love will be fully realized on earth, the day when our King will return. On that day He will right all wrongs. He will judge the living and the dead. He will bind up the brokenhearted. He will give sight to the blind. He will heal the lame. He will set the prisoners free. He will establish justice once and for all, a justice tempered with mercy so that all life might flourish under His reign. It is this victorious coming that we celebrate on the final Sunday of the church year.*

Doesn't that get you excited? The game is over! The final seconds have ticked off the clock! The horn has sounded. Jesus won!

On the 15<sup>th</sup> of October the University of Tennessee football team beat the Alabama Crimson Tide on a last second field goal. Alabama was ranked #3 at the time. This was the first time in 16 years Tennessee has beaten Alabama.

How did the more than 100,000 fans at Neyland Stadium celebrate the program's biggest win in years? As expected — loudly, with a storming of the field and with a tearing down of the goalpost. Actually, make that two goalposts.

Those goalposts eventually were carried out of the stadium and tossed into the Tennessee River.

Hey, church! Christ is King! He won! It's time to storm the field. Tear down the goal posts. Next Sunday Jesus will be a baby, but this Sunday He is the King!

That is the perspective the Apostle Paul clearly had in his mind when he wrote the letter to the church in Colosse. Notice the verb tense as he describes Jesus in the epistle lesson ...

- Jesus IS the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. (3:15)

- He IS before all things, and in him all things hold together (3:17)
- he IS the head of the body, the church (3:18)
- He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead (3:18)

Not ... He hopes to be ... He once was ... He is. Right then. Right now. When those words were written the earthly Jesus had already been dead for 30 years, but even so the proper verb tense for these verses is "IS" not "WAS."

- Jesus IS the King of Kings and Lord of lords.
- Jesus IS the victor over sin and death.
- Jesus IS alive and well and waiting in heaven for the Heavenly Father to sound the final horn.
- Jesus IS all He claimed to be.

If that were the whole story, it would be enough reason to set this day aside for celebration. But it is not the whole story ...

I want you to see a different verb tense. This time it involves you and me.

## **TRUTH #1: JESUS HAS RESCUED US**

*For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness...  
(Colossians 1:13)*

Another translation reads:

*He set us free from lives filled with dead-end alleys and dark dungeons.*

If Satan had won the contest, that would be the story of every life, because wherever Satan reigns, you will find an endless supply of dead-end alleys and dark dungeons. You will find lives filled with hopelessness and despair. The Greek word for darkness literally means "spiritual blindness, hatred and misery."

And prior to finding life in Jesus Christ, that is where every person lives. You cannot escape that dominion; you can only be rescued.

An Australian mining town will always remember the year of the dramatic rescue. An earthquake killed one miner and trapped two others 3,000 feet under the ground. Days turned into weeks as miners dug through tons of rock; rescuers could only work one at a time on their backs in a cramped rescue tunnel, using hand-held tools to avoid caving. They dug through rock five times harder than cement. Five days after the accident the two trapped miners heard the sounds of the rescuers. Six days later a small crack was made and food and hope was passed to the trapped men. Fourteen days after the accident, over 300 hours of waiting for rescue, the two miners were freed. Bill Shorten, national secretary of the Australian Workers Union, said, "This is the biggest escape from the biggest prison."

Close but not quite. The biggest prison is the dominion of darkness, and we have been rescued from it by Christ the King.

## **TRUTH #2: HE HAS REDEEMED YOU**

*... in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.  
(Colossians 1:14)*

The price for your sins has already been paid. Your sins – past, present and future – have already been forgiven. You have to receive it, but it is already yours.

A.J. Gordon was the great Baptist pastor of the Clarendon Church in Boston. One day he met a young boy in front of the sanctuary carrying a rusty cage in which several birds fluttered nervously. Gordon inquired, "Son, where did you get those birds?" The boy replied, "I trapped them out in the field." "What are you going to do with them?" "I'm going to play with them, and then I guess I'll just feed them to an old cat we have at home." When

Gordon offered to buy them, the lad exclaimed, "Mister, you don't want them, they're just little old wild birds and can't sing very well." Gordon replied, "I'll give you \$2 for the cage and the birds." "Okay, it's a deal, but you're making a bad bargain."

The exchange was made and the boy went away whistling, happy with his shiny coins. Gordon walked around to the back of the church property, opened the door of the small wire coop, and let the struggling creatures soar into the blue. The next Sunday he took the empty cage into the pulpit and used it to illustrate his sermon on this text, paying for them with His own precious blood. By his death we are freed from our captivity to sin.

"That boy told me the birds were not songsters," said Gordon, "but when I released them and they winged their way heavenward, it seemed to me they were singing, 'Redeemed, redeemed, redeemed!'"

### **TRUTH #3: HE HAS RECONCILED US**

*For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things ... (Colossians 1:19-20)*

Reconciled. That's an accounting term.

Each month, I dutifully reconcile my bank statement. I make sure that my check register and that statement agree about how much money I have. For the church finances, Darla Kalifoot and Kristi Leeth do the same.

Because Jesus Christ was victorious, we are able to stand before the Heavenly Father without fear. He will look at us who walk by faith and "You don't owe me a thing. Your account has been reconciled."

You don't need to live in fear about whether you have done enough, whether you still owe God something. In the words of an old hymn "your accounts were settled long ago."

## **APPLICATION**

He has rescued us. He has redeemed us. He has reconciled us. Every verb is in the past tense. Christ IS King and He HAS done all these things on our behalf.

There are times – and this will be true until God proclaims the game to be over – when it looks like the devil has won, but don't buy it.

Take the gospel passage for today as an example. Jesus is on the cross. He is moments from dying. His tormentors are gambling for His clothing. The religious leaders are standing there, reveling in their victory. I can imagine all the demons in hell popping their champagne corks in celebration while Satan Himself watches the scene smugly. "Gotcha!" he says!

But there on the cross, in what looks to be the ultimate moment of defeat, a sinner turns to the man hanging on the cross closest to him and confesses the wrong he has done.

*"Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."  
(Luke 23:42)*

The party in hell suddenly grows silent. Every demonic ear strains to hear what will happen next. They hear Jesus respond:

*"Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise." (Luke 23:43)*

To that thief on the cross, Jesus proclaimed His victory: "The world sees a thief. But I have rescued you. I have redeemed you. I have reconciled you. And today you will be with me in paradise." And

from the pits of hell we hear Satan cry out in defeat once again:  
“No!”

Every time a life is transformed by the power of the gospel message,  
every time a sinner meets Jesus at the cross and begs for mercy,  
every time a faithful Christian stands up in the face of adversity to  
give voice to her faith, the proclamation echoes throughout all  
creation: Christ is King!

Celebrate it church. This day and every day. Jesus Christ is King!

Amen.