

Our text today is part of the prayer that the Apostle Paul prayed for the believers in Colossi.

“11 May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. 13 He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. 15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 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. 17 And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 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. 19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.”

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Somebody recently made the comment, “*There is something seriously wrong with the world when people are offended by everything except sin.*” Isn’t that the truth! In fact what they are offended about most is the suggestion that there is such a thing as sin.

The troubling thing is, many Christians have been going the way of the world rather than continuing with God. It is just like God said it would be in the last times. God says in 2 Thess. 2:3 that the day of Christ’s return “will not come unless the falling away comes first.” We are certainly seeing that falling away happening.

Our Old Testament reading brings up an age old question that is still leading many to turn away from God and the Christian faith. Is there really any benefit in being a Christian? The people of Malachi’s day were saying, “It is vain to serve God. What is the profit of our keeping his charge or of walking as in mourning before the Lord of hosts? And now we call the arrogant blessed. Evildoers not only prosper but they put God to the test and they escape.” Malachi 3:14-15.

That’s the trouble isn’t it? When it comes to life in this world there is no obvious, noticeable difference between a Christian and any one else in the world. There is no obvious, visible advantage that Christians have over any other religion. All people, Christian and non Christian, live for a certain number of years and then we die. We all have some good times and some troublesome times. Christians are no more prosperous by worldly standards than non Christians. In fact more often than not it is the other way around. As a result, just like in Malachi’s day, many Christians have concluded that it really doesn’t pay. We might as well enjoy life and so they forsake God.

Did you notice what the real issue is? The people said “What is the profit of our keeping his charge or of walking as in mourning before the Lord of hosts? Why should we always be struggling to keep His commands and be made to feel bad about ourselves when we always fall short. That is the problem, people don’t like to admit their sin and guilt. The unbelievers of the world don’t have that turmoil. They live the way they want and feel good about it. They blaspheme God and get away with it. They are not struck dead on the spot, or struck with some disease. So, many believers look enviously at their carefree lifestyle.

That is why Paul prays for the believers in Colossi, “May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy.” We need this prayer as much today as ever. God does strengthen us and give us endurance and patience with Joy by opening our eyes to see what the rest of the world can not see. The world is only looking at this life and what is visible to the eye. God promised Malachi, “Once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him.” Mal. 3:18

God Strengthens us by showing the Distinction Between the Righteous and the Wicked!

1. We see it now by faith and rejoice. 2. In time everyone will see it clearly.

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The people of the world only see our physical life and think we are all the same. But God has shown us that there are actually **Two Invisible Kingdoms**. Look again at verses 12 & 13. Give “thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. 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.” There are the two kingdoms, invisible to the eye but very real and it makes a huge difference which kingdom you belong to.

There is the **Domain of Darkness**. Its king is Satan who rules over his domain. We all were once a part of that kingdom. God describes it in Ephesians 2:1-3. He says we were dead men walking, “following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.” Everyone in that kingdom is under the power of Satan and is happily following the sinful desires of their heart and feeling good about it, but they don’t see that they are children of wrath, that is under God’s wrath. Satan’s whole objective is to keep people in the dark so that they don’t see what is coming. He wants as many as possible to suffer God’s eternal punishment along with him.

God the Father 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.” God goes on to remind us how great that kingdom is by describing our King.

“He is the image of the invisible God.” God is invisible. That’s why it’s so easy for people to put him out of their mind even though they know He exists. But Jesus is the image of the invisible God. Jesus said, “The one who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Don’t you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?” John 14:9-10 We can look at Jesus and see God. We can see His overwhelming love and patience with us sinners. We can see His tender care for us. We can see His ability to handle every situation. When we really see Jesus, we would never want to live life without Him.

He is called, “The firstborn of all creation.” That doesn’t mean that the Son of God came into existence at some point in time before all others, as the Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses claim. The Son of God is eternal like the Father and the Spirit. But he is the firstborn in the sense that He is above all the rest of creation, preeminent over all. The rest of the text makes it clear that is the way in which He is “first.” “16 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.” Jesus, the Son of God, is the creator of all things visible and invisible. When Paul mentions, “whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities, he is talking about the invisible angel powers and rulers, which includes Satan and all his evil angels who rule in the domain of darkness. Don’t miss the point. Jesus is the creator and ruler over all the invisible angels and demons. And He has already conquered Satan and all who are under his power. To be with Jesus is to be on the winning side.

Then Paul shows the significance of this: “17 And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” That’s why you can’t really see a visible distinction between Christians and all others in the world, because Jesus upholds everything! As Jesus said, The Father “makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” Matt. 5:45. When it comes to the necessities of life God doesn’t make a distinction between believers and unbelievers. He is good to all and provides for everyone.

But He does make a distinction in verse 18, “And he is the head of the body, the church.” Christ

provides physical sustenance for all people, but He is the head only of the Church which is His body. As our head He gives us guidance and direction throughout our life. He shows us what is good and right. That phrase includes all the blessings of having Jesus Christ as our King rather than Satan. All the Peace of living with God's forgiveness, all the joy of belonging to the gracious God of heaven and earth. All the contentment of knowing that we are in His care. It truly is a wonderful life to have Jesus as our head.

These differences are not really visible to the world now, but that difference will be seen clearly one day. Paul goes on to describe the biggest difference that will be clearly seen forever, "He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent." There is that "firstborn" again. Here we see that it is not suggesting that He comes before everyone else in time, but in importance. Jesus was not the first person ever to rise from the dead. But He is the firstborn from the dead. He is the one whose resurrection guarantees resurrection for everyone else. That is what makes Him truly preeminent.

Even in death, you can't really see any visible difference between Christians and non Christians. They all die the same. Some suffer much and some not so much. Death is called the great equalizer. It doesn't matter if you are rich or poor, black or white, Christian or non Christian, all die. But then the difference is huge. Our Gospel Reading from Luke 23:27-43 demonstrates that difference in a powerful way. There were two men crucified together with Jesus. They appeared the same in every respect. They both were criminals. They both were being put to death for their crimes. They both suffered great pain in a slow cruel execution on the cross. And they both died. The only difference between them is one turned to Jesus in faith in the last hours of his life. He confessed his own guilt and asked Jesus to remember him when He entered his kingdom. The other one continued to blaspheme Jesus. Did that make any difference? Many would say, "No, they both died the same." But Oh are they wrong. Jesus told the man on His right who turned to Him in faith, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." Luke 23:43 And so it was. When he died he found himself with Jesus in paradise. No more suffering or sorrow of any kind. Just the fulness of joy. Imagine, a man who was a lawbreaker, now in heaven with God. That's the difference faith in Jesus makes. The other lawbreaker died too, but he did not end up in paradise. He found himself in the domain of darkness, suffering together with Satan, the archenemy of God. Can you imagine the horror and the fury of that man when he found himself in the torment of hell knowing that he was crucified beside the Son of God, the one who was dying to save him from this torment, and all he did was blaspheme Him with his dying breath? Realizing that the other man who was in his same shoes received eternal life in heaven just by asking for it? That's real torment.

There we see the real distinction between the one who serves God and the one who does not serve Him. That difference is eternal. There is no way to change it. Seeing this truly does strengthen us "with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy." By showing us the two kingdoms which are invisible now, God does strengthen us to endure and to hold on to Christ our glorious, preeminent Savior. And to give all thanks and praise to our Father in heaven who has "qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light."

May we never be envious of the people of the world or even think about turning away from God back into the domain of darkness. Rather let us rejoice in God's grace which made us a part of his Kingdom by faith. And let us be eager to show our friends and neighbors that the huge difference between us. Show forth the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. Let us close with the last two verses. "19 For in him [that is Christ] all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross."

Thank God we are a part of that Kingdom.

Amen.