

“Christ Jesus Himself”
 Sermon II for 15 October 2017
 Text: Ephesians 2:19-21

Now my purpose today is to preach on how wonderful Christ is.

Psalm 107:17-22 English Standard Version (ESV)

**17 Some were fools through their sinful ways,
 and because of their iniquities suffered affliction;
 18 they loathed any kind of food,
 and they drew near to the gates of death.
 19 Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble,
 and he delivered them from their distress.
 20 He sent out his word and healed them,
 and delivered them from their destruction.
 21 Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love,
 for his wondrous works to the children of man!
 22 And let them offer sacrifices of thanksgiving,
 and tell of his deeds in songs of joy!**

Was I such a fool, did I through personal sin (and iniquity) bring **affliction upon myself**? The answer is yes. Indeed, I did. Much of my personal pain, much of the alienation I experienced, I actually brought upon myself. The KJV is bravely forthright in its translation. The KJV reads **Fools because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted**. The ESV shields us from the truth that our transgressive choices bring brutal consequences: afflictions.

However, we, when we arrive in our desperate place of brokenness—when we repent of all manner of self-salvation, cease looking to others to help us through, either to lift us up, or to approve of us, then we are able, with sincere prayers—scorched soul petitioning—to cry out to God. From the perimeters of impending death, even spiritual doom, **He hears our voice, He saves our souls, He sends His word and heals and delivers them from their destructions**. (v. 20) He sends His word—how beautifully compact that is with significance! The eternal word, the redeeming word of God Himself! And so, He delivers us from our “destruction!!” Yes, from suicide, addictions, early death and accidental harms. That is wonderful, current and timely of Him. *For if you are healed by the word of the Lord, you are healed entirely, completely, wholly!* Wonderful . . . indeed. **Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!** That is Who and what I have come to praise aloud this morning.

He is both the end of the Law and the soul of the gospel. (Explain) because this is the development of things as written on the pages of Scripture. God decrees are outside of time)—however we experience His decrees as our lives are lived in time and history. This grates, no doubt, on the ears of those who prefer self-determination, personal autonomy, rugged individualism. The fact that we choose, and we rule in this life *but that God can overrule* offends our pride of flesh! We like to think we are in charge so we rush ahead and live *as if* we actually were in charge. But we are not. Scripture teaches that

it is **God's** intentions and His purposes that are sovereign at the end of a life or even the end of a year, month, or day!

For example, in Genesis, Joseph's brothers sought to murder him but they could not! God had a plan for all of them! No matter what shame, injustice, harm or deprivation came his way, God was with Joseph—taking evil and turning it to good. Yes, when in their free will, they sold that dreamer into slavery, even then they were not quit of him! Joseph grew in wisdom, in strength and in virtue. God gave him the capacity to interpret dreams and prospered him. *The evil that they planned and executed against Joseph was reversed in the purposes of God!* **What you meant for evil, God meant for good** (Genesis 50:20). The outcomes are always in God's hands—all of them. And so, too, it was with the Sanhedrin and the Roman leadership; they arrested, tried, convicted and executed Jesus **according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God** (Act 2:23). All mankind exercises free will yet this free will operates under the moral judgments of God. God uses even evil human choices to complete His gracious plan: forgiveness of sins, redemption and everlasting life for all who believe on Jesus, trust in His finished work of atonement!

Moving on to the soul of the gospel: Jesus, revealer and redeemer, is the incarnate truth of God. Full of wonder, the apostles and disciples beheld His face, felt, heard and smelled Him who in His face reflected the majesty and glory of the Eternal and Infinite God. They gave their all for Him because they both knew and loved Him. It is this love of Jesus that makes souls brave, good, heroic, enthusiastic and glad! Yes, all praise to Jesus, the end of the Law and the soul of the gospel. Even now, He lives above as our Great High Priest, interceding in heaven for His church—and, simultaneously, for you and for me right where we are.

With Him, nothing is impossible, for He is Lord of All. This is our second major heading. Everything aligned with the purposes of God are possible, entirely doable. Individually and globally. His Kingdom is coming on earth and nothing on earth can hamper, hinder or impede it! Think of Jesus as a power utility that has no interruption of services, for any reason ever! And there is not need for state departments, energy czars, or acts of Congress! Imagine. The power of Jesus supplies what's needed to run our homes. I am not referring to appliances and lighting; those things actually don't require much energy. However, a godly marriage, raising Christian youngsters, the godly home, those things require constant supply from Him.

He is the One who removes tyrants, and excises corrupt parties from government. The course of history is His to shape, scientific discoveries, intellectual fads, social movements do not trouble, displace or faze Him at all. He converts, redeems, transforms the hearts of men and He succeeds with some for whom all bets are off! He overrules the scourges of flood, wind, fire and disease. Wildfires are under His control, and violence and wars and conflict. Volcanoes are activated at his command and the earth quakes when He tells it to!!

The recent mass murder in Las Vegas, the suicide of a heartbroken, local lad, recent school shootings, the losses of life and property in hurricanes Harvey, Maria, Irma in Houston, Florida, on the islands, St. Martin, Puerto Rico, the wildfires, deaths by falling rock at Mt. Rushmore, loss of the lives of military personnel in Niger have all been put before Him. They are each precious to Him, their deaths are lamentable. But disasters open the

doors to ministries of compassion, to displays of unity and compassion that some want to explain everything! Service, consolation, incredible acts of generosity—all complementing each other and all pointing to the goodness of God who cares enough to have us care! One of the church's finest hours. *How are we to demonstrate obedience if there is no work to be done?* If our efforts cost us nothing, what is their ultimate value? Of course we sorrow over such catastrophes, and at the same time, we have a shared sense of gratitude that it was not worse, more extensive, more costly and evil. What some take as an indication that He doesn't care is more truthfully taken as a sign that He indeed does care, that He expects us to be mobilized to overcome evil with good. The horrible things the Evil One instigates in this world shall not go unanswered.

The universe belong to the Lord.

Therefore it behooves us to learn to frame things better in His terms, and to align our wills with His will wherever possible and soon! We must adopt His purposes Why? Because His decrees are eternal and His means of the Lord are infinite, He lacks nothing in resources, He operates out of plenty and abundance.— even when we picture scarcity, depletion and limitations, our thinking doesn't always line up divine capacity. The universe, from His point of view, is open . . . the closed universe is, for Him, a figment of poor human imagination! His will is irresistible and his assets are inexhaustible. This means that we are freest when we do what He wants.

Third heading: the transition to finding our unity in Christ's centrality is really smooth if we recall what we just affirmed about our Lord and God. Here's what matters: the Christ Event (the incarnation, the atonement, the sacrifice, death and resurrection of Jesus) is the central event of the cosmos—the most meaningful, significant and consequential occurrence that ever was, or ever will be. As believers we understand that human history actually revolves around who Jesus is and what Jesus accomplished: armadas, world wars, holocausts, plagues, wars and rumors of war are paltry themes compared to this. Jesus unifies.

However, diverse approaches are taken to our Christian theology (we each tend to favor one!): for example, 1. the doctrinal, 2. the experimental and 3. the laws and ordinances approaches. Each approach frames our religious understanding, in terms of its own perspective. And being passionate about our perspective can result in disunity. *This is so lamentable.* It is lamentable because although each approach is valuable in its own right, they have broken with Jesus Christ as their common ground, or center when they accentuate their differences. *They have built elsewhere than on the chief cornerstone!* Alongside doctrine, we must affirm our unity in Christ alone. Or, taking on the second approach, the experimental, focusing on my inner life, experiences and feelings, doubts and fears. . . or exultation, gratitude and hope, focusing on these can result in looking at my spiritual progress rather than *looking to Jesus.*

Look to Jesus and be saved. And while it is critical to know the commandments of the Lord, and even more important to obey them (**If a man loves Me, he will keep My sayings.**), *there must be personal love to begin with or all is vanity.* All the benefits of all three approaches will be ours truly if we live, lean and depend upon **Jesus Christ Alone.**

- Christ is precept, the way, doctrine, and the truth.

- He is experienced, indeed He is “life abundant.” He is our salvation and all our desire always and ever.
- It is Jesus who demands our entire devotion. We are to obey Him.

We dare not ignore doctrine, underrate experience, or forget His commandments but none should have exclusive dominance over the others—and certainly not over Christ Himself! The personal, living, loving Jesus. **Christ in us, the hope of glory . . . our *full redemption*.**

As we discussed in Sunday School sometimes all that others truly need is for someone who cares about them to clear out the underbrush, remove the hindrances (sin, error, confusion and miseducation) so that they can see Jesus and Him crucified. Jesus will do the heavy lifting when it comes to drawing them to Himself. *Then the place, purpose and reason for church will occur to them because everyone who belongs to Jesus want to belong to His body, the church.*

Review the wonder of Jesus, of your salvation! Remember, nothing is impossible with Christ Jesus, for He is Lord of All. Celebrate the centrality of Christ in everything!

Amen