

Colossians 1:21-23

Dear Friends in Christ,

Simply defined, *sentiment* is “an attitude, thought, or judgment prompted by feeling.” Sentimentality is the “quality or state of being sentimental esp. to excess or in affection.” (Webster’s 10th Edition)

Have you ever given much thought about how much time you spend roaming in sentimentality; excessive feelings about something or someone? You know? Maybe it’s about the way things were, or missing someone from the past. Maybe it’s deep feelings about what’s going on in your life right now. There’s a good chance that what I’m saying is evoking a lot of sentimentality, good or bad, for some.

It’s easy to get a bit lost in it. But Scriptures give us a direction.

REMEMBER THESE THINGS

I. Where We Were.

We begin with these opening words of our text: “And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds...” (v. 21) This is where we were before Christ entered our lives: “alienated... hostile in mind...doing evil deeds”. These are hard truths to hear. Most walk away.

I would guess most here are familiar with the theology of the day. It goes like this: “We’re all headed to the same place, just different ways of getting there.” Well, no we are not all headed to the same place. The atheist would definitely argue against that. And, no there are not different ways to get there! Sad, isn’t it, that people can be so astute about their earthly affairs, but the last breath and what’s waiting on the other side are the big “whatever!”

The Scriptures are a spiritual map. They are a map for our journey through this world into the next. The map begins with we “were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds.” Combine that with this truth: “The Lord looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.” (Ps. 14:2,3)

I’m thinking it would be very good to remember this Scripture which we considered last Sunday, which states in part the words I quoted from Psalm 14:

For we have already charged that all...are under sin. As it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.” (Rom. 3:9b-11)

At first glance, we might not like those words which describe where we were with the Lord - *alienated, hostile, evil* but, as had been said so many, many times, if we look at our thoughts about others, the things we say about others behind their backs, and if we’re honest about things we’ve done in secret, well, the words fit: *alienated, hostile, evil*. And the words of the Psalmist are correct: *turned aside...have become corrupt...none who does good, not even one*. Indeed, we need to remember where we were. And we need to remember that the struggle with sin is still there.

If we read the map of Scripture then we will know where we start in our journey with the Lord. There is no delusion. And that is very comforting in light of what our text goes on to say; what we must remember . . .

II. What Jesus Did.

And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him. (vv. 21,22)

This is what we want to remember in the high moments of all our joys and the extreme lows of our sorrows - remember, though we still battle with sin, we were "reconciled in his body (Christ's body) by his death (His suffering and dying in payment for our sin), in order that we would be presented (stand in the Presence of God) holy and blameless and above reproach before him." We will never hear God say to us, "Guilty! Away from me! I never knew you!"

Matthew Henry has been described as a nonconformist minister. He was born in Wales but spent much of his life in England. He died in 1714. He wrote a six-volume Biblical commentary of which we have copies in our church and seminary libraries. There are two pieces from volume 4 I would like for you to hear. I have, for years, thoroughly appreciated them. The first is this:

Old men (and I will add old women) who have their hearts upon the world have never filled their days, never have enough of this world, but would still continue longer in it.... Unbelievers shall be unsatisfied and unhappy in life, though it be ever so long. The sinner, though he live to a *hundred years old*, shall be accursed. His living so long shall be no token to him of the divine favour and blessing, nor shall it be any shelter to him from the divine wrath and curse. The sentence he lies under will certainly be executed, and his long life is but a long reprieve; nay, it is itself a curse to him, for the longer he lives the more wrath he treasures up against the day of wrath and the more sins he will have to answer for. So that the matter is not great whether our lives on earth be long or short, but whether we live the lives (as children of God through faith in Christ, or as unbelievers). (*Matthew Henry's Commentary On The Whole Bible*, Volume 4, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, Mass., 1991, p. 305)

The second piece is based on these words from Isaiah 53: "But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities." Henry wrote:

...(Jesus) *made peace by the blood of his cross*. Whereas by sin we had become odious (a horrible smell!) to God's holiness and obnoxious to his justice, through Christ God is reconciled to us, and not only forgives us our sin and saves us from ruin, but takes us into friendship and fellowship with himself.... Christ was in pain that we might be at ease; he gave satisfaction to the justice of God that we might have satisfaction in our own minds, might be of good cheer, knowing that through him our sins are forgiven. (*Ibid.*, p. 240)

I love the way he said it: "...we had become odious (a horrible smell) to God's holiness and obnoxious (how about *disgusting?*) to his justice." Look at that! God never loved us because we were lovable. On the contrary, Scriptures teach, "...but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us...while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son." (Rom. 5:8 & 10) And this: "even when we were dead in our trespasses, (God) made us alive together with Christ - by grace you have been saved...". (Eph 2:3-5)

III. Where We're Headed.

And so, our text closes with this:

if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.” (v. 23)

Regardless of what anyone here is going through at this brief moment in time, we must continue in the faith and we must not shift - never shift! - from the hope of the gospel. We must not forfeit the map or drown in a sea of sentimentality. We must have these words in front of us day after day after day - from the Apostle Paul:

Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. (You belong to Him! I belong to Him!) Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind (did you hear that? “Forgetting what lies behind?”) and straining forward (straining - a strain - a willingness to persevere) to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 3:12-14)

I’ll put it this way: Being a Christian is not some nifty formula made for spiritual pansies! It involves a strain and a press. It’s driven by the love of God in Christ and the reality: “I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” (Ps. 23:6b)

When I think of the past I remember that God chose this worthless nothing to be His through faith in Christ. I could cry for joy. When I think of the present I think about how he guides this sinful, goofy human through this fiercely dark and sinful world. I could cry for joy. When I think of the future I think about Heaven. I could cry for joy. Those are the things I want to remember and think about. How about you?

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott

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Colossians 1:21-23:

“Remember These Things”

- I. Where We Were.*
- II. What Jesus Did.*
- III. Where We're Headed.*

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