



Sermon – November 1, 2020
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Verses Covered This Week

Colossians 1:23

Colossians 2:5

Well let's open our Bibles together. We're going to be in Colossians chapter 1 in verse 23 this morning. Colossians 1:23. If you're with us for the first time, whether here or gathering with us online, welcome home. And if you happen to be in for the game weekend, we're glad you're here as well. But wouldn't it be better to just live right here in College Station? We'd love to welcome you to Aggieland. As we turn our attention to the text this morning, we know that no matter the highs and lows we face in life, God meets us in His word. And this morning as we also partake of the Lord's Supper, we know that He will meet us in this family meal.

Well, you probably saw last week that the World Series just wrapped up. It was the end to the most unusual season in baseball history. Shorter season, less pay. But when it came to the New York Mets, two things didn't change. The first is that they finished at the bottom of the NL East as usual. But in addition to that, they also cut a one million dollar check to a player who never saw the field. In fact, this particular player earned so much money that he was the 7th highest paid position player on the New York Mets. He received over five times the amount that Pete Alonso, their best star, made this year. And he never played once. He didn't just never play this year; he hasn't played for the Mets for the last twenty years. As a matter of fact, this player that received over a million dollars is 57 years old. You're probably wondering, "Well who is this?" It's a guy by the name of Bobby Bonilla. And maybe if you grew up as watching baseball, you remember him back in the 90's. He was a perennial all-star. One of the best sluggers in all of baseball. But the Mets had had enough of him before his contract was over. They owed him five million dollars still. But they didn't want to pay him all that money right away. So Bonilla and his lawyer got together and came up with a plan. They said, let's put some language in the fine print of this contract and we can hide some things. You know what the fine print is. It's those hidden details that often change the nature of the contract that are often overlooked by the person on the other side of it. And what they wrote into the contract was starting in 2010, for the next 25 years the Mets have to cut a check to Bobby Bonilla every year for over one million dollars. They could have paid him just over five million back at the turn of the century to be done with his contract. By the time it's all said and done, in 2035, he'll be 72 years old and will

have taken from them not five million, but nearly 30 million dollars. The fine print can make all the difference.

When we come to Colossians 1:23 this morning it seems like we're getting the fine print of the gospel. Just last week we saw about Paul speaking of the nature of God's reconciling work in our life. How He rescues us from sin. He sets us free to walk with Jesus. But as we turn our attention to Colossians 1:23 I want you to see what appears to be this fine print of the gospel. Look at how Paul says it there.

²³if 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.

So remember last week we saw the way that God reconciles us in a moment. But what we're going to find this morning is that God sustains our faith for a lifetime. In this verse, while it might seem insignificant at first glance, actually plays an important role in the book of Colossians. It's bringing together this first part of the book of God's reconciling. And it's going to be a bridge that helps us to see what Paul is about to show us in his earthly ministry and all that God is doing for us in Christ. But what we're going to notice this morning is that Paul unpacks how the gospel provides us with an unwavering faith in an unshifting gospel. So notice the way that this text begins there. You see this concern for the Colossians: if indeed you continue in the faith. And we know that in that time period they were facing external persecution from outside the church. They were facing internal pressure from within the church from these false teachers. And Paul is calling them to persevere in the midst of persecution. To find stability in the midst of hostility. And then the text starts there with this word if. We need to spend a little time on this small word. What is the nature of this if? What does Paul have in mind? Is he unsure that they're going to continue in their faith? Is it a warning about possible future failure? What does he have in mind in this moment? Is he suggesting that you can lose your salvation? Well some Christians throughout church history have said the answer to that question is yes. That, in fact, you can lose your salvation. That you can know Christ at one moment and walk away from the faith. Be saved and then in the future no longer be saved. Is that what Paul has in mind here? What is the picture that he is giving us? Some people will look at salvation and if they believe you can lose it, they might think of it like a Netflix account. Cancel at any time if you get tired of Jesus. Or maybe they think it's a bit more like a frequent flyer program for your favorite airline where you've got to complete these certain things in order to keep the status of salvation. When Paul says, if, there maybe it's an uncertain if. Maybe it's the equivalent of him saying, "If you do this, though I doubt you can." Maybe it's an if like if in March when we have March Madness, maybe you'll be able to fill out a perfect bracket. Is that the kind of if that he has in mind there? Is he doubting our faith? Is he questioning our future? And this isn't just something that the Colossians would have been encountering, I imagine, right here in the room, or perhaps even online. This is a constant struggle on the hearts of some of you today. Am I genuinely saved? Can I have an assurance of my salvation? Is there a threat in my future where I may lose it all? And what we need to recognize this morning is that when Paul tells us, if we continue in the faith, the certainty of that future is not in doubt. Because what he's going to show us is that in our spiritual journey, it is Christ who is sustaining us. And how do I know that? Well think about other Scripture passages. If you want to write them down for looking at later, think about Philippians 1:6 where what Paul tells us is that he who began a good

work in us will carry it to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. It's God that will carry it to completion; not us. Or maybe you remember in Romans 8 in verse 39 where he tells us how nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus. Even our doubts. Even those seasons of sin cannot separate us from the love of Christ. And how do we know that this is not an uncertain if? Well, look ahead with me in Colossians, to the chapter 2 and in verse 5, and look at the way that he commends them later on. Notice what he says. He says,

⁵For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ.

This is not an uncertain if; it's an unwavering if. It's like Paul is saying, "I know this will be true. There is no doubt in my mind that you will continue on in the faith." And you see that language there; to continue. That means to remain or to stay, to persevere, to persist. It has the idea in the original language of someone who stays in a certain location regardless of the circumstances. Maybe it's like a beach house home owner, who when that hurricane is coming towards the shore, doesn't abandon where they live. Or maybe it's the captain who refuses to go down with the ship, that refuses to leave and is willing to go down with the ship. Maybe it's the soldier who when the enemy comes, instead of fleeing with the rest, he stands his ground. There's this picture of remaining despite the circumstances. And so what is Paul doing here when he gives this language to us? If you continue in the faith, it comes as a warning. He is giving us a warning calling us to persevere. And the idea underneath this in theological terms is known as the perseverance of the saints. That those God calls, He keeps. Those that He saves, He sustains. It is God who is at work both to will and to work His good pleasure. Now He is carrying it on to completion. And those warning passages like here in Colossians or what we see also in Hebrews are functioning as a means to call us to persevere in the spiritual journey that the Lord has brought us on.

So I imagine if your house is anything like mine, it's full of Halloween candy right now. And when the kids come home with the candy, there are different types of people when they get home. Some are hoarders. They protect theirs and they don't let anybody else see it. Some are going to dump it out on there and count how many they have. The type A people in the room might not only count, you might sort it into different like kinds. You know who you are. And then there are also the hiders. Those that are going to go stash a few where nobody else can find it. Maybe there are some traders in here who may not like one thing, but they want to exchange it for something else. But inevitably, in almost every American home where candy was gathered last night, there was more than likely a parent with a warning. And what are they telling their kids? If you eat too much of that candy, what's going to happen? You're going to be sick. You're going to get that stomach ache. The warning is functioning as a means to keep them on a path that is best for them. And when God gives us these warnings through his words, they're functioning in a similar way. He is giving these warnings to us to continue in the faith so that we will see the calling that has been given in our lives to press on, to endure, to persevere. As a matter of fact, when we gather on Wednesday night at our next Gospel for Life series, we're going to be talking more in depth about this idea of perseverance. And enduring in the mission that God calls us to. And I want to invite you to that this Wednesday night at 6:00. But in the meantime, have you noticed since I've been here these past six months? One of the things we started doing in our services is by finishing our time together with a benediction. And each Sunday, as I'll do later today, I will read a word from Scripture. And then what I'll say at the

end is some version of, Central family keep pressing on. And then I will modify it with something that comes out of that text. But what you hear from me every Sunday for the last six months is that encouragement. That challenge to keep pressing on. And when Paul is speaking here of continuing in the faith, that is the image that he is giving us. To fight for our faith. To press on no matter the circumstances. That we might be those that continue in the faith.

And notice how he goes on to describe it. Do you see it back in verse 23? That we continue in the faith, stable and steadfast. These two words go hand in hand together. This idea of stable is that of a firm foundation. One that is established and well grounded. And then steadfast talks about an immovable structure as if when you're seated and unshaken. Both of these terms are architectural images. And it's fitting that Paul gives us these words. Because we have seen in the past couple weeks that he is speaking here of Jesus as the temple of God. The one in whom His presence is resting. The one whom establishes the church. And as he speaks about our life, when he calls us to perseverance, he uses this language of stable and steadfast to characterize how we should have in Christ a firm foundation and an unshakable structure to press on in the gospel. I remember being on staff here back when this building was originally built; I came on staff not long after that. And we began to have some challenges with our physical space. I'm not sure if you're aware of this but right over here where our student ministry meets, that portion of the building started to shift. It started to settle in the ground. The construction wasn't exactly right. There began to be cracks in the wall, separation, things happened where it wasn't designed properly and the ground wasn't managed properly where it required significant work in order to fix it. But imagine if we had taken a different path. Imagine instead of addressing the underlying issue in order to restore stability and steadfastness to its foundation; maybe instead we could have done is every year, maybe every six months, when we saw a new crack forming we could just come behind that. Add a little bit more plaster to the wall. Touch it up with a little paint. Probably would have looked the same, wouldn't it? It would have created the appearance of stability. It would have created the appearance of soundness. But the underlying structure would have still been a mess. We face that same danger in the Christian life. That we want to project that sense of stability. That appearance of steadfastness as if we've got it all together. We plaster things, we cover it with paint, we put on that mask to create the appearance that doesn't match the reality. But what Paul is calling us to in this moment is that idea of being stable and steadfast; not moving away from the hope of the gospel. We need to have unwavering faith in these uncertain times. But I want you to notice the way that this text goes on. Because we're also going to see the way that Paul calls us to an unshifting hope in an unchanging gospel.

So look at the second half of this verse. He says, 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, have become a minister. So what Paul is showing us here is that while the world around us may change, the gospel of Jesus Christ never will. It's an unchanging gospel. And as a result of that, we should have an unshifting hope in that unchanging gospel. He says there that we should not shift away. This is an idea of drifting, departing, moving away from something, it's the only time in the New Testament that this term is used. And of course, Paul would have been concerned about this in the life of the Colossians. When you have a pagan culture around you that is resistant to your spiritual beliefs and when you have false teachers within you that are leading you astray from the gospel of Jesus Christ, there could be this danger that they might shift away from this hope of the gospel. That hope of the gospel. Just think about it for just a second. Paul is speaking there of our, how our future trust transforms our present reality. What

we know is coming for us in the future reshapes how we live today. And what's coming for you and me if we're in Christ? What we know is that the gospel gives us hope because it teaches us that Jesus came and died in our place. He made a way for you and me to be made right with God. To be reconciled back to his family. We'd been brought into that family. We have been welcomed into His kingdom. And there is coming a day when this world will pass away. When our Savior shall return, when we will meet Him face to face, when we will spend eternity in the new creation that He has promised us. And that future reality gives us hope in the present. Paul warns us, he calls us to be those that do not shift away from the hope of the gospel. And we know a little bit about what that means in an election season like this, don't we? So you've probably seen far more political ads than you ever want to over the next four years just in the last four weeks. And the whole purpose of those ads, whether they're on television or online or wherever you might find them as they're seeking to shift you away from your support of one candidate to another. To your allegiance to one issue to another. They're micro-targeting you. Looking at your desires and interests in a way that might prompt you to change these fundamental things about what you believe in the political process. Paul is warning us that satan often works the same way in our life. He's watching us. He's micro-targeting his temptations. He's seeking to lead us astray. He's trying to get us to shift away from our hope in the gospel. And Paul is calling us in that moment to remain stable and steadfast.

If we're being honest this morning with the election day coming on Tuesday, isn't this one of those times in our lives where we might be most tempted to shift away from the hope of the gospel? You've probably heard it said, I can't count how many times during this election cycle, this is the most important election of our lifetime. And there's a sense in which that's true isn't it? Standing up for life. Protecting marriage and religious freedom. All of these convictions that we hold with confidence as Christians are in a sense on the ballot. And there can feel as if, yes, in this moment everything is at stake. And when that's true, it creates the risk that we might shift away from the hope of the gospel. Now look, you and me don't know what this election day's going to hold. Chances are it will be a tight race. More than likely we won't even know who the winner is that day or the next several days; perhaps the next several weeks. There might be civil unrest that comes in our country. There may be further division and dissension. We cannot know what is going to happen in the future. But here's what we do know. The Bible calls us to engage the world around us. It sets the expectations as citizens of the United States will vote, will participate, will be engaged. But the way we do that is not out of fear in our future, but faith in our Father. We remember the reality that in these moments of uncertainty; every one of us is facing the question, where will we put our hope? Now some of you are going to put that hope in political parties, political figures. They think if we can just get the right person in the right position for the right amount of time, that will fix our country. You think that's going to work? Is that all we need? No. It's never going to be enough. So where should we put our hope? If in this election season, political parties are not the ones who can get us where we know the gospel desires to take us. Paul is asking us, where shall we put our hope? And he gives us the answer right here in Colossians 1:23. That we need to be unshifting in our hope in the gospel of Jesus Christ. So what does that mean for this moment? We participate in this election season, not just as citizens of the United States, but citizens of a heavenly kingdom. And here's what that means for us on Tuesday and beyond. Regardless of what happens at the ballot box, God will still be sovereign. And regardless of who becomes our president, Jesus will still be king. And regardless of what political movement takes power in this country, the Holy

Spirit movement will still be active. Our hope on Tuesday is not in a donkey or in an elephant. It's in the lion of the tribe of Judah.

But I don't want you to miss what Paul is doing here. How is this unchanging gospel at work in the world? We see it as this text comes to an end. He tells us that it was proclaimed in all creation under heaven and of which I, Paul, was made a minister. He speaks of two sides of the gospel; both its universal nature and its personal nature. Do you see the universal dimension of it there? He speaks about how it was proclaimed in all creation under heaven. That's it's been preached, it's been heralded, it's gone forth in all creation. Now it seems as if Paul there is speaking in hyperbole. He's trying to signal the significance of how quickly the gospel is spread into the world around us. But he's picking up on language he's already been using in Colossians 1. About how in verse 6 that the gospel has gone into all the world. And he is showing us there of God's intention to reach all people with the gospel of Jesus Christ. So think about what he's doing. He is zoomed in in verses 21 and 22 on the way that the gospel is applied to each one of us in reconciliation. And now he zooms back out in order for us to see God's universal work in the gospel amongst all nations. Don't miss this, Central. Take, for example, a country like Iran. Back just 20 years ago, you could probably number the amount of Christians in that country by the amount of people that would fill this church in both our services this week. But if you were to go back there now, just 20 years later, what you would see is that the gospel has been on the move in Iran. And you would find hundreds of thousands, perhaps by some estimates, even millions of people in this hardened, closed, country who have come to a saving faith in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. How is that? It's because there is a universal gospel. One that is being proclaimed in all creation under heaven in which shapes every aspect of our life. When Paul speaks here of the personal nature of the gospel, isn't that what he has in mind here when he says, I, Paul, became a minister. He's speaking, not just of how the gospel reaches every corner of creation, he's highlighting how it reaches every corner of our hearts. That when he met Jesus on that Damascus road, it changed him. Everything was surrendered. When he came to a realization of who Christ was and of his deep need of Him, he surrendered it all. He laid it at His feet. That is the personal call of the gospel to each one of us. That we trust in Jesus as our Savior, Lord, and treasure. And in the case of Paul, He doesn't just rescue him from sin, He sets him on a path to ministry. He tells us that he is a minister of the gospel. More literally, a servant of the gospel. And Paul showed us what it looks like to persevere in the way he's calling the Colossians to do. Remember this man. He used to be a persecutor of the church. Then once he comes to faith, he is so devoted in ministry that he's mocked, he's beaten, he's stoned, he's shipwrecked, he's left for dead. And yet in the midst of that hardship, he presses on. He perseveres. Christ sustains him in the same way that Paul is calling us to recognize that Jesus will sustain both you and me.

There's a man, Jesse Katayama, from Japan who saved up a lot of his money and back in March he flew to Peru for the trip of a lifetime. There is a, one of the most amazing places in the entire world is in Peru, up in the mountains, it's called Machu Picchu. It's the type of place that people will flock from around the world to visit and to see. It's one of the most beautiful landscapes that you will ever find where it combines the natural beauty with ancient ruins. And Jesse was there for that experience. And then COVID showed up. And the day before he was able to enter into the park to see Machu Picchu, they closed the park. He missed it by one day. The ticket's in hand. He had been promised entrance and yet it was not denied to him. What do you think he did? You know what I'd do. I'd probably be racing the clock to get home before they closed

down all the airlines and I couldn't get to travel. Well not Jesse Katayama. Instead, he decided to stay. He wanted to wait. He wanted to see this place as soon as he was able to. So for the last seven months this Japanese man rented a room in Peru and lived in the village right outside of this historical landmark. He got to know the people. He helped some of the young kids learn how to box because that was his background. He got involved in things. And his commitment was, "I'm staying until I get to see it or I run out of money waiting for it." And the problem was, his money was starting to dwindle. He was knowing that there wasn't much time he had left that he could wait. That time was running short. And as he was waiting, just a few weeks ago, the minister of culture for the entire nation of Peru heard his story. And this man recognized not just his desire to see this place, but his commitment to it; his perseverance to the opportunity. And you know what he did? He opened up the park for him. And Jesse Katayama was the only tourist that got to enter that day. The first person to return when they made that park open once again. And what would possess a man to persevere like that? What would cause him to be stable and steadfast in those headwinds? What would motivate him to continue to pursue the goal that he had set out even if it was potentially a great harm to himself? It's because he had determined that the destination was worth the journey. That the end point was worth the challenge he might face in getting there. And isn't that what we see this morning in Colossians 1:23? We don't know what's going to happen in our future. We don't know what's before us. But if you're in Christ, you know where we're headed. And that gives us a hope. It gives us a promise. It gives us a certainty that helps us to press on in the faith no matter what we face. And isn't it fitting that as we prepare ourselves to come to the Lord's Supper we come to a text just like this? Because part of what God uses to sustain us, to help us continue on in the faith, stable and steadfast, is the rhythms of the local church. That as we gather together to hear the word preached, as we gather together today to taste of this Lord's Supper, it is a reminder to us, a reorientation to the true north of the gospel, so that we can press on. As we gather here, we celebrate the Lord's Supper once a month. Not just to hear the word of Christ proclaimed, but to taste it, to experience it in that way. And we want to invite you this morning in just a moment to come to the table, to this family meal. This one that we're gathering together, those that have been reconciled to Christ and partaking of this family meal for those of you that have experienced Jesus in salvation. Have been baptized and are walking with the Lord. This is a family meal for you. And you'll notice around the room there are tables here in the front, in the middle, and the back. And during our response song, if you haven't already grabbed your elements, I want to invite you to come to one of these tables and to get the bread and the cup. Not just for you, but for those that you're sitting with and return to your seat so that we can prepare our hearts to take of this meal. And as we do that, I want us to be reminded of what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11, verses 27 and 28 about readying our hearts for this. Here's what he says.

²⁷Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

Let's pray together.

Father, in this moment as we prepare our hearts as one body coming together to take of this bread which signifies your broken body, I pray, God, that You would ready our hearts. Father, that each person in this room would examine themselves. And that as we do this we would flee from evil and commit to walk in holiness, to continue in the faith that You've called us to. And I

pray, Lord, that as we take of this meal together, that we may stand united in Christ as a church by the power of Your Spirit. May our hearts remain fixed on Him in whose name we pray.
Amen.