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Worship This Week July 17, 2022

WELCOME:

PRAISE SONGS: 570 I have decided to follow Jesus, Trust and obey

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

PRAYER: Horn of Africa

SCRIPTURE – Colossians 1:24-27

I am glad when I suffer for you in my body, for I am participating in the sufferings of Christ that continue for his body, the church. 25 God has given me the responsibility of serving his church by proclaiming his entire message to you. 26 This message was kept secret for centuries and generations past, but now it has been revealed to God's people. 27 For God wanted them to know that the riches and glory of Christ are for you Gentiles, too. And this is the secret: Christ lives in you. This gives you assurance of sharing his glory.

MESSAGE:

It's OK to suffer. You're not being punished. In fact, we should expect it. It's part of being the Body of Christ. Our Lord suffered while inhabiting His earthly body. We are the continuation of his ministry. The message continues to be proclaimed through us.

In Paul's day, suffering was at the hand of unbelievers and the leaders of the Jewish Temple. **Two different** groups, but united in opposition to the Lord. The unbelievers are represented by Rome, the advanced civilization controlled by Caesar. The Emperor was a godlike figure, similar to a dictator. It was totalitarian rule – the empire wanted total control not only of their territories and the people therein, but in fact the entire world. It's not unlike modern superpowers. The end game for Britain prior to its decline, the United States, Russia (as Soviet Union and today) and now China is to eventually dominate the world. This is a basic premise of history and geopolitics.

The leaders of the Temple sought control in a different way. They placed impossible demands on the people through Old Testament Levitical law. They

collected their own taxes and threatened expulsion from the Temple (and therefore the community) if people misbehaved.

The emerging church of Jesus Christ – which was being spread by Paul and others – was under attack from Rome **AND** the Temple because the church refused to worship Caesar and **ALSO** refused to follow most of the old laws. True worship is not about following a long list of impossible laws – or even doing all kinds of good things. True worship is about believing and submitting to God.

Neither Rome nor the Temple understood this. They didn't understand the truth. They didn't understand what they were doing. They were actually in cahoots with each other. "We have no king but Caesar" was the infamous reply from the priests to the governor. Rome allowed the Temple because it helped keep order. They were in it together.

They were chained, imprisoned. They were either slaves to Rome or slaves to the Temple. We are also slaves, but of a different nature. When we choose to be enslaved to Christ, he responds by freeing us from impossible demands. His demands are simple and his burden is light. (Matthew 11:30). He won't lay anything heavy on us.

We understand this new life as being born again, spiritually. Those who dive deep into a new life with Christ can be freed from the desire to sin. That's probably the biggest challenge for every person, whether they are believers or not. Slavery to sin is what prevents us from becoming fully alive in Christ. We will all wrestle with this. Even the Apostle Paul was unable to be freed from the desire to sin.

This is one of the main messages Paul and the early church had for Rome and the Temple.

25 God has given me the responsibility of serving his church by proclaiming his entire message to you.

Of course, it's only part of the message. Paul was commanded to proclaim the "entire message."

Let's bring this into the current day.

Today's Rome is our culture, which is controlled by Hollywood, big business and backed by government. We are invited to be slaves to a system which removes God completely. The system is fueled by human physical and social desire. We want to feel good. We are taught to fulfill our desires. We buy things. We experience things. We indulge. Of course, we are encouraged and are rewarded for giving to the poor because it makes us feel good. We look good. And we get a generous tax receipt.

Today's Temple are elements of the church which are often misrepresenting Christ and misinterpreting scripture. They no longer believe that Christ is the way, the truth and the life and that no one can approach God except through Him. Some of them believe that many of Jesus' miracles were not supernatural. For example, the feeding of the 5,000 men with a few loaves and fish was because those in the crowd who had food were convinced to share. They believe that when Jesus said that He came to bring life and bring it to the full had nothing to do with spiritual power; rather, it had to do with obeying whatever desire we might have and indulging in what is natural – and any feeling of peace we get is the spiritual high. This is nothing new. The mainline church has been steadily moving towards liberalism for quite some time, certainly since the Enlightenment in the 18th century and at a faster pace since the rise of progressive thinking in the early decades of the 20th century, more than 100 years ago. In recent decades, it's gone to a new level, which rejects the exclusivity of Christ and his call for us to seek complete submission to God and acknowledge that the world has been given over to Satan. Social media is where a lot of this comes out. A few weeks ago, someone posted this **observation**. It was aimed at those in the church who believe that God doesn't care what we do with our bodies.

Jesus hung around with sinners. For a reason. In Matthew 9, we're told that Matthew, the former corrupt tax collector, "invited Jesus and his disciples to his home as dinner guests, along with many tax collectors and other disreputable sinners. 11 But when the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with such scum?" 12 When Jesus heard this, he said, "Healthy people

Jesus didn't eat with sinners and tax collectors because He wanted to appear inclusive, tolerant, and accepting. He ate with them to call them to a changed and fruitful life, to die to self and live for Him. His call is transformation of life not affirmation of identity.

don't need a doctor—sick people do.” 13 Then he added, “Now go and learn the meaning of this Scripture: ‘I want you to show mercy, not offer sacrifices. For I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners.’” (Matt 9:9-13)

One Presbyterian minister responded this way:

“But to be fair, he ate with them because he WAS inclusive, tolerant and accepting. And many of them listened and changed for the better. Unlike many of the religious authorities of his day who were exclusive, intolerant and condemning.”

It was as if this pastor was reading a different Bible. Normally, I don't get into an argument with people who don't share the same theology, but I had to respond.

He ate with them not in order to join or condone them but because they needed healing. "Healthy people don't need a doctor." The point is quite clear. Allow me also to suggest that every single one of us is sin stained. Jesus lumps all of us together. We are all tax collectors and sinners. Hence, Jesus' loves includes everyone.

One of the big beliefs of the progressive, liberal church is that we are to be united in Christ. This means we can all believe in different things and still get along. To each his own. Again, that's a misunderstanding. Jesus certainly prayed for unity among his children, in John 17, but it was to be in synch with The Father. We are to be one with each the same way Jesus is at one with His Father.

Too many people are reading what they want out of the Bible rather than what it actually says. God's way is not in tune with the ways of this world. Jesus knew that. He knew that His Way, God's Way, would not be well received.

“Don't imagine that I came to bring peace to the earth! I came not to bring peace, but a sword. 35 'I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. (Matthew 10:34-35)

Jesus received opposition from his family, his community and the church from Day 1. It was a miracle that his ministry lasted three years. He knew that the

church that Paul and others were planning would receive the same reception. And if we are truly endeavouring to follow Him today, we can expect nothing less.

Jesus went on to say this:

38 If you refuse to take up your cross and follow me, you are not worthy of being mine. 39 If you cling to your life, you will lose it; but if you give up your life for me, you will find it.” (Matthew 10:38-39)

The Temple gave into Rome. Many elements of today’s church have given into to secular culture, Hollywood, big business and government. The church is tolerated in this world if it acts as a chaplain, presiding over funerals and weddings. Church is tolerated if it feeds the poor and rallies for justice. Church is not tolerated if it preaches the Gospel truth to worship no one but God alone. It’s dismissed as negative when it reminds people that we are sinners and there’s nothing we can do on our own to clean up our acts and get right with God. Only Christ can do that – if we allow him. Are we willing to do that?

“I submit to no one” is the rallying cry of the culture in which we live. It’s a declaration that we are our own gods. We control our lives and our destiny. If we don’t like our gender, we are invited to change it. We identify as whatever we want to be, rather than what God has created us to be.

Paul had this in mind when he told the church in Colossae: “I am glad when I suffer for you in my body, for I am participating in the sufferings of Christ that continue for his body, the church.” (Col 1:24)

God in Christ invites us to submit to the One who created us. Created in his image. There is nothing greater. We were created in God’s image but God allows the stain of sin to exist. He invites us to recognize it, to repent, seek forgiveness, and then choose a better way. Not woke culture in which truth is defined by whatever we think and feel in the moment, which can change two minutes from now. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and always. And he is of one substance with God the Father.

“Christ lives in you. This gives you assurance of sharing his glory.”

We are invited to allow Christ in, all over again. This is not being judgmental. I am saying this to everyone. It includes my Presbyterian pastor friends who aren't reading the same Bible. It includes my friends who are on the same page. It's not us versus them. The real battle is us versus Satan. The enemy is scoring great victories not by causing churches to close. The victory for the enemy is that no new churches are being planted for every congregation that ceases to exist. The victor is that existing churches are slowly dying and no one does anything about it.

We are invited to see outside these walls, that the harvest is ripe. We are invited to submit completely to the Spirit of Christ. If we are prepared to give up everything – and I mean that literally – then He will show us a new way.

Never forget the Lord's promise that He will be with us always, to the end of the age. And the age has not ended. Christ lives in you. Call on Him. He will answer.

HYMN – Step by Step