

July 28, 2019 – Colossians 2:6-19

When you think of Disney World, you probably think of the characters. Mickey Mouse. Donald Duck. And all the rest. Or maybe you think of the rides. Space Mountain. It's a Small World. That sort of thing. Or maybe you just see the price tag. Because it is not an inexpensive trip.

But for me and my wife, the particular appeal of Disney World is the comfort. Because they just do everything for you. They transport you. They transport your luggage. They feed you amazing food. They shuttle you around from park to park, resort to resort. They even take photos for you. They make going on vacation so easy. So simple. So comfortable. That you never want to leave.

Now, that's all well and good for a vacation once every couple years. But eventually you do need to leave. Because life can't just be about comfort. Comfort can't be your only priority in life. Especially for Christians.

Jesus certainly didn't make comfort his priority. He wouldn't have gone to the cross if he did. The apostles and prophets didn't make comfort their priority. Most of them died for their faith. And the Church throughout the world, throughout history, has generally done its very best work when it was uncomfortable.

We see that right now all the time. The church in America has every luxury. Buildings and technology and tax exemptions and legal rights. And it is struggling to stay alive.

Whereas the church in Africa and Asia has no luxuries. They meet in secret in people's homes. They are persecuted by their governments and their neighbors to the point of death. And the Christian church there is... growing. By leaps and bounds. It is thriving like never before. Paul had it absolutely right when he said that faith is something that must be refined by fire until it is pure gold.

We don't suffer through those types of persecution in Boonville, Missouri. In fact, I would say we suffer through less persecution than many Christians even in the United States. We have a town that is largely made up of people who respect the Church. Respect us as Christians. And even if they don't worship on a regular basis themselves, they're generally glad that we're here.

But that doesn't mean that we aren't refined by fire in our own way. Which is really what Paul is getting at in our Epistle lesson. Paul is writing to the Colossians. The church in the city of Colossae. And the church there had a problem.

You see, the Colossians were surrounded by false teachers. People who claimed to be Christian teachers. Claimed to know God's Word. Claimed to have the Gospel. But really only sold them lies.

They were surrounded by heretics, to use the formal term. We don't know exactly what type of heresy they preached. But we can piece together some of their characteristics by what Paul tells us.

They were philosophers. Men who were educated and respected. They taught human traditions. Things that made a lot of sense at first glance. They criticized the Christians for the way that they worshipped and lived. Because the Christians didn't celebrate the same festivals or obey the same strict rules about their lifestyle. And they were mystics. They claimed to have visions and have special knowledge about the things of God.

None of which has anything to do with Jesus Christ. Which is Paul's point. The Colossians are surrounded by these false teachers and are getting thoroughly sucked in by them. Deceived and manipulated. Because what they're hearing sounds good.

It's taught by respected philosophers who make sense and appear to have a lot of power. And they're teaching something that's very tangible. That you can become a better person just by how you eat and drink and live and worship. Things that are easy to attain.

Day by day, the Colossians are becoming more and more captive to a false Gospel. And, in the process, they are losing the true Gospel. They are like a tree whose roots are dying. Like a piece of fabric that is unraveling before his eyes. And they don't even realize the danger that they're in.

You don't have to be violently persecuted to be refined by fire. You don't have to live in a hostile country surrounded by people trying to cut your head off or bomb your home to be in danger. Because although Africa and Asia might be some of the most physically dangerous places in the world to live right now, perhaps the most spiritually dangerous place in the world to live right now is right here. In the good ol' U.S. of A.

The Epistle to the Colossians might be the most relevant book of the Bible to Christians in America right now. Because the Colossians were living what we're living. Communities filled with heretics and false teaching designed to slowly eat away at our faith.

Not by bombarding us with persecution that makes us fear for our lives. But by wrapping us in the comfort and happiness of luxury. Luxury that deceives us until we don't even realize how far we've strayed.

Do you see why it's important to be uncomfortable? As Christians, we need to look at every single thing in this world with suspicion... even Disney World. Because if it comes from sinful human hands and sinful human minds and sinful human hearts, then it will deceive us.

And that's true in our government and our schools and our sports and our television and our music and our movies. And even our families and our friends and our neighbors. They all have a sinful human agenda.

There is only one thing we can trust in this world. And that is a God who has proven himself trustworthy. Because he has no agenda except our salvation.

And he proved that in Jesus Christ. The fullness of deity dwelling in bodily human flesh. Humbled in every way by a human birth and a human life. God gained nothing by the incarnation. He gained nothing by suffering on the cross. He gained nothing by dying in our place. He gained nothing by making us alive.

And yet he did. And because he did, we have faith in him. Above all other teachers and authorities and systems of belief. Because he gains nothing by our faith. He does it freely for us out of pure, undeserved love.

This is the free gift of grace that is yours in Christ Jesus. This is where we are rooted. This is how we are knit together. This is our only priority in this whole world of false teachers and false gospels.

Everything else will lead us astray. Everything else will deceive us by worldly luxuries. Everything else leads only to death. But Jesus Christ makes us alive. He buries us by baptism. And raises us to new life in the resurrection. He nails our sin to the cross. And triumphs over all.

And this makes us uncomfortable. Because it makes the world uncomfortable. It makes the world uncomfortable to hear a Christian say, "I don't trust you. I trust Jesus Christ." When you say that, you take their power away. You disarm them, as Paul says. You put them to open shame.

They don't like that. And they will make your life uncomfortable. And that's a good thing. It's a good thing to be uncomfortable. Because that discomfort? That's the feeling of being refined by fire. Into pure gold.

That is the feeling of your faith in Christ growing. The feeling of your love for Him and His Word being knit into the very fabric of your soul. To be uncomfortable in the world is to be comforted by the arms of Jesus Christ. To be comforted by Him who died for me and rose for me and baptized me into his death and gives me his life. As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him this day. Amen.