

“The Sufficiency of Christ”

Sermon by: Rev. Dr. Joseph A. Conner, Sr.

“Beware lest any man cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.” – Colossians 2:8-10

One of the highest ranking blacks in the administration of President Dwight D. Eisenhower made a comment that was made following a cabinet meeting with the president. The discussion had ranged around government deficit, that painful word that defines a condition in which more money is going out than coming in. A member of the president’s cabinet said, “the government would do well if it could learn deficit spending as well as the African-American race has learned it.”

This was doubtless a flippant and graceless remark. What that cabinet member should have known was that black people, at least so many, have had an insufficiency of income. So, the only way of survival was to try to stretch what one had, borrow a little here, buy on the installment plan there, put this in layaway, pay this bill two months behind rather than that bill one month behind. “Rob Peter to pay Paul,” was our way of explaining black economics.

With people so economically strained, life is all about insufficiency – not enough. I was told of women in my childhood who worked in kitchens for \$3 a week. Some will say that this is exaggerated, but those who say such things show how young they are or how ignorant they are of what has gone on in this country. Insufficiency! Insufficiency, that’s what it has been all about.

Insufficiency – not enough – is something we came to know all about in this country.

In almost all of our relationships with those around us, we come upon this matter of insufficiency. “If only somebody understood me” is a cry often heard. Children complain that parents are insufficient in understanding them. Parents complain that children are insufficient in appreciating what parents are trying to say to their children and to do for them. Our friendships do not last because we expect from people more than they have in them. On the other hand, they expect more from us than we have in us.

Insufficiency! Insufficiency! Surely this is what is wrong in our believing and in our faith in God. If we can ever say, “Lord, I believe,” then surely our next words, uttered promptly must be “Help thou mine unbelief.” We need to find somewhere, somehow, someone who is sufficient, equal and more than equal to whatever may be our case.

Enter the writer of Colossians, possibly Paul! He announces that in Christ “dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.” This statement was not an assertion of speculative philosophy; it was not a finely spun theory formed and fashioned in a mind devoted to setting forth new and intriguing notions. The writer is addressing a problem, a dangerous idea abroad in the church of Colossae.

The problem was one of false belief, the most dangerous thing that can happen in a church. We may claim that it is not so, but our lives are acted out on the basis of what we believe. We may never have been burnt by fire, but if we believe that fire will burn, always burn, we will stay away from it.

Wrong beliefs can destroy churches; wrong beliefs can destroy Christians. We are not told exactly what was the heresy, the error of belief that had afflicted the church in Colossae, but the Colossian Christians knew what the false belief was, and the writer knew. We may, however, put together some bits and pieces and end with a rather clear understanding of what harmful ideas were being spread like poison in the Colossian church. Paul, or whoever wrote the letter, speaks of what was being wrongly believed as a “philosophy.” It is the only time this is used in the New Testament and the writer hitches it to “vain deceit.” Did

he not mean that a speculative, human groping at divine truth had produced some unsound, untrue, unfounded, beliefs?

Colossians 2:18 suggests that the “vain deceit,” the “philosophy” has to do with “worshipping of angels.” Now it begins to become clear. People at Colossae had come to believe that different angels did different things. In other words, there were divine creatures, less than God to be sure, but divine, who performed different functions. There was an angel for family life, another divine creature for farming, and so on. These were all “go-betweens” between God and man, mediators. Therefore, one had to look first in this direction and then in that, so to speak, at one office for one need, and then go on to another office to have another requirement met. It is not far from this to worshipping at first one altar and then another, depending on what the need might be at any given moment.

We must not laugh too hastily at this notion of dividing life off into portions and segments and looking to different “gods” for different things. Do I stretch this meaning too much to say that many of us have one god for worship and another god for work? We surely have one set of principles, theologies, systems of faith for one thing and another for something else, “religion is religion and business is business” says that we have a god for Sunday and a god for Monday.

Horoscopes for prediction, dreams for gambling – and we believe in each one in its own sphere and area where we operate. Race can be a god, and clothes, and jewelry and cars and country and houses and jobs and political parties and strong drinks, and drugs and a thousand other things.

The heresy, the false belief, in Colossae did not eliminate Jesus Christ. He had his place, but then others had their places, too. He may even have been the first among equals or even superior to all of them. But these other “angels,” “divine figures,” “thrones,” “dominations,” “principalities,” “powers,” call them what you will, were there, also. Paul called all of this “philosophy,” the small, pitiful reasoning of men, not the revelation of God. “Vain deceit.” Lies might be a stronger word. Paul called it rudiments, the ABC of religion, chicken scratches, childish, immature.

The people who trust in Jesus do not need any boosters or helpers on to God. Christ is inexhaustible. He is that true and living bread that came down from heaven and that is ever enough, never diminished or reduced. A world of hungry men may feast on Christ, but he is as inexhaustible at the end as he was at the beginning.

Christian people need no substitutes, no supplements, no boosters. Christ is all we need. We need no blessed handkerchiefs; Christ can wipe away all our tears. We need no consecrated rings, Christ is a ring all around us like the walls are 'round about Jerusalem. We need no holy water, Christ is the "living water, thirsty one, stoop down and drink and live." We need no one to bless a gold or silver cross. The cross of Calvary cleanses us from all unrighteousness, gives us full rights in the family of God.

Christ is all we need. Christian adoration has strained the language, piled meanings into many figures and metaphors to speak of the "allness" of Christ, his sufficiency, our completeness in him. And so we call him Prophet, Priest, and King, Revealer, Representative, and Ruler. Christ is all we need, the Captain of our salvation, the Head of the church, the Bridegroom at the final marriage, the Judge of all the world, the first born of the dead, the new and final Adam, the Captain of the Lord's host, the Living Bread, a fountain opened in the house of Israel, Mary's baby, Calvary's Hero, Death's Conqueror, the Grave's Spoiler.

Christ is all we need. He begins with childhood, and says, "Suffer the little children to come unto me." He continues in adulthood and says, "Come unto me, all ye that labour," He follows the wanderer out through the darkness and says, "For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." Christ is all we need. He finds us in our sins and kneels and writes with that wondrous finger and says to us, "Go and sin no more." When we are sick, he comes and says, "Wilt thou be made whole?" and assures us that all "sickness is not unto death." When we must go down to the slippery shores of death, Christ says, "I will come again and get you. In my Father's house is a place for you.'

Christ is all and more than all the world to his people. Christ is all. All our hope, all our strength, all our light, all our life, all our help. "Christ is all, and in all."

I don't possess houses or lands, fine clothes or jewelry, Sorrows and cares in this old world my lot seems to be, But I have a Christ who paid the price way back on Calvary And Christ is all, all and all this world to me.

Christ is all, He's everything to me, Christ is all, He rules the land and sea, Christ is all without Him nothing could be, Christ is all, all and all this world to me.

There are some folk who look and long for this world's riches, There are some folk who look for power, position too. But I have a Christ all in my life, this makes me happy And Christ is all, all and all this world to me.