

Colossians 1

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[0 : 00] I just want to say thanks to the praise band. Can I say you're wonderful? And of course I can say that because my own daughter is part of the group.

Sorry for embarrassing you, Gillian. If you were asked for a favorite passage in the Bible, which one would you choose?

Or do you have many passages that you go back to again and again? Maybe you find it hard to have a top one or a top half a dozen.

There's so much you love. Personally, I could list many favorites from across the whole of scriptures, from the Psalms and the Gospels and the Old Testament and Paul's writings here. And one of those passages tonight we read about the supremacy of Christ is one of my own favorites.

[1 : 07] He is above all things. You maybe know that more modern worship song, above all things. How majestic are these words!

For God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ. And through him God reconciled everything to himself. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ's blood on the cross.

Maybe you could put the slide on. Yeah, if it's big enough, you might see where we're going. Just a little bit about the city of Colossae.

So this letter obviously was written to the city of Colossae. And you can see where it was there. Maybe to the center of, more to the center of Turkey today.

And when you think of the apostles' efforts in that part of the world, in their day, and the lack of Christians there today, how we need to contend for the faith in our own land.

[2 : 18] How we need to stand up for the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. So Colossae was situated inland about 120 miles east of Ephesus. It's on the Lycus River Valley in ancient Phrygia.

And Phrygia was one of the peoples that were represented in Jerusalem when the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost. Now Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis form a little triangle there near the foot of Mount Cadmus.

The nearby city of Laodicea is mentioned by Paul in chapter 2. When this letter was read in Colossae, it was to be passed on to Laodicea.

Now, we know that there were no church buildings. It's certainly not anything like this in that day. People met in homes.

That was the home church. And Christians like Philemon opened his home in Colossae. Also a lady called Nympha had opened her home in Laodicea.

[3 : 30] So they were probably little fellowships. A few friendships, a few friends who had gathered, and others who would join them, making it a church. We know exactly where the city was situated.

But unlike the biblical sites in Israel, which are well excavated, or many of them are, the excavations there are few. There are the remains of an acropolis and a necropolis, a cemetery there.

And scholars indicate that Paul had not yet visited Colossae. And verse 7 implies that Epaphras had founded the city.

I wonder, I've often wondered, was Epaphras one of those people who had been in the city of Jerusalem at the day of Pentecost? Maybe my thoughts are all wrong, but I have often wondered that.

So he founded the church there, along with the churches at Laodicea and Hierapolis. The letter was written at the time that Paul was ministering in Ephesus during his third missionary journey.

[4 : 43] And we read in Acts 19, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks. In John's message to the church at Laodicea, he speaks of the lukewarm state of the church there, that they were neither hot nor cold, and that the Lord would spew them out of his mouth.

And this local allusion would have been clear to the citizens of Laodicea, who knew of the pure, cold waters of the city of Colossae. So that's a little introduction to the city of Colossae and Colossae in the times of Paul.

As was customary for Paul, he begins his greeting, his letter with a greeting, Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy, our brother, to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ, who are in Colossae, grace to you, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

And he continues in the first chapter wanting to encourage the Colossians in their faith. There was an issue leading to the writing of this letter.

Of course, all of Paul's letters were written to issues that were happening across the church and still happening across the church of today.

[6 : 17] It's possible that Epaphras, now with Paul in Rome, had brought bad news to Paul of this erroneous teaching that was going on in Colossae. And so Paul responds, encouraging a growth, a deepening toward Christian maturity in Colossae, through what they had learned of the faith in the first instance.

And he says, we always thank God because of what we have heard, the faith and love that sprang from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven, and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel that has come to you.

Jesus, to so many people, both in Paul's day and in ours, is at best little more than a good man who points us to living good moral lives.

And Paul speaks of Christ's relationship with creation itself in verse 15. These verses are among the most majestic in Scripture. Here's the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created, things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities, all things were created by him and for him.

[7 : 48] He is before all things, and in him all things hold together, even us. We hold together in him.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. We read that God made man in his own image in Genesis 1, but here we read that he is, that Jesus is, the image of God.

Paul says something quite similar in his second letter to Corinth. The God of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers so they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

So, we see that Paul was really exalting the person of Christ as to who he was. Christ is the image of God, or as it says in Hebrews, the sun is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.

Christ is the embodiment of the invisible God. He is what you see of God. And he, and it is he, the Christ, the Messiah, who reveals God, the Father, to the world.

[9 : 17] These people who are, who have come into Colossae and who are pushing heresies, whatever they were, is maybe Gnosticism or something similar.

They cannot compare to the greatness of the incomparable Christ. The only one who can help is he who said in John 12, if I be lifted up, I will draw all men or all people unto me.

only Christ can be that because he is supreme over all creation. That is both in time and in eternity.

He is the supreme ruler of all. The idea here is a custom that we had in, well, I suppose it was across the world, but it was certainly here in Scotland, that the firstborn son was the heir of all things, which was left to him by his father.

That's how it was. Things are changing now. Here we see a handing over of all creation to the Christ, to the Messiah, all in the wisdom of God.

[10 : 41] Proverbs 8 and 23 says, I was appointed from eternity, from the beginning, before the world began. When there were no oceans, I was given birth. When there was no springs abounding with water.

Before the mountains were settled in place. Before the hills, I was given birth. Before he made the earth or its fields or any of the dust of the world. No wonder Paul can point to Jesus and say, Jesus

is Lord.

Firstborn over all of creation. And to add more force to what he has written, Paul says, for by him all things were created in heaven and earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities, all things were created by him and for him.

He is before all things and in him all things hold together. He is a firstborn of creation. How can that be?

Because he was before it. He was there before the creation of the world and by him everything was made.

[11 : 56] We have a song, one of the modern songs that says that he threw the stars into space. But it didn't, it was not a random throwing.

each one is in a particular place. Is it any wonder then that when we read the gospel narrative in the gospels that even the wind and the waves, life and death give heed to his voice?

Is it any wonder that he could do away with the pain and disease like no other could?

Everything which is seen and unseen, up above and down below, are within his control.

Can this ever be said of gods of wood or stone? the gods to which so many peoples across the world still bow, burn incense to and worship in a variety of ways?

Of course it cannot. We were in a far eastern city a few years ago on a visit on a holiday and there at every door there was a little shrine to their god, which was very, very sad to see.

[13 : 19] Everything in creation, whether seen or unseen, exists in him, exists for him, and exists through him.

And people come in and try to give Colossae another gospel. And so Paul is trying to remind these people where they had come from, what they had embraced of Christ, and what they were in danger of leaving behind.

And he says in verse 20, since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to his rules? Why are you sinking back into sin?

That's basically what Paul is saying. Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch. These are all destined to perish with use. This is our God, the servant king, who died to make us good.

It's only to him we should bow. It's only to him we should worship. Isn't it? We didn't bow the knee to any other God, because God said at the very beginning, thou shalt have no other gods before me.

[14 : 43] As we mentioned this morning, there are many gods in this world. Not only is Christ the firstborn of all creation, he's the firstborn from among the dead, and the head of the church, as Paul says, and he is the head of the body of the church.

He's the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through the blood shed in the cross.

He and he alone is head of the church. And the claim that they are the true body of Christ cannot be made by any single denomination in the world.

If we are in Christ, we are part of the church. There is no better church than another church. The church are those who are in Christ, whether we have buildings or no buildings.

To be part of the church is to be in Christ, to be a follower of the Lord Jesus. the body of Christ is that of all true believers who accept that Jesus Christ died for their sins and who seek to live a godly and a circumspect life.

[16 : 18] For when we know that when a person comes to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit comes into that person's life. making them one with Christ, making him a sister or brother of the Lord.

In the Greek language, the head also means source or origin. From that we come to understand that the source of our faith is the Lord Jesus Christ.

He is the head of the church. And when Paul says that he is the beginning and the firstborn from the dead, he is not saying he is the first person to be raised from the dead, but that Jesus was the most important person ever to be raised from the dead.

He was raised, why? So that we too could be raised from our deadness and sin. For if Jesus had not been raised, our faith, our belief would have been futile, would have been in vain.

And the purpose in all of this was so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

[17 : 32] This was God the Son. This was God the Creator. This was God the Savior. This was God the head of the church. As the King James version has it, in all things, he might have the preeminence.

Can you see, can you understand how exalted a position the Apostle Paul is seeking to give to the Lord Jesus Christ?

We see here that there is nothing that is not under his power. His position in the world is absolutely unique. Who is there like Christ on this earth?

No, not one. No, not one. I've often related to a story I heard many, many years ago of D.L. Moody. It's worth retelling.

It was towards the end of the 19th century, and there was a large exhibition, I think there were Christians involved as well, in Chicago.

[18 : 36] Many of the world's religions had a presence there. And D.L. Moody and others saw that there was an opportunity to share Christ with all those who were there.

And he invited evangelist friends to higher halls across the city for them to preach the good news of Jesus. One Sunday it's reported that the campaign conducted 65 meetings at 46 venues and reached over 62,000 people from across the different faiths of the world.

And friends had said to D.L. Moody, now's your opportunity to denounce all these other faiths. But Moody refused to do so.

What he said was this, I'm going to make Christ so attractive that men will turn to him. I'm going to make Christ so attractive that men will turn to him.

It's pointless pushing other faiths down. What we should be doing is raising Christ up.

[19 : 52] Moody was under no illusion for him Christ was like no other. He was supreme in everything that he might have the supremacy. And many were reached to the gospel at this time in the city of Chicago.

In Paul's letter to Titus, Paul tells them to teach slaves to show that they can be fully trusted so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive.

I wonder am I making faith in Christ attractive to others? Show that they can be fully trusted so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive.

Are we doing that as individuals and as a church? Are we creating the kind of atmosphere where people want to be young and not so young?

Is that the kind of atmosphere we're creating? Churches say when I remember being asked to invited to join other churches many years ago or move churches and number one question we don't have many young people in the church so so we want to reach out to the young people but the thing is we're not going to reach young people with gimmicks we're going to reach young people and middle aged people and old people with the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ primarily not saying that we cannot have other things but gimmicks it's not going to win anybody we need to show the genuine love of the Lord Jesus Christ the love that we have in

[22 : 08] Christ the love that we have for them in Christ we need to show people that they are precious before the Lord and everyone in here tonight is precious before the Lord Jesus Christ I was speaking to a young woman recently who changed congregations a few years back for a church that was more relevant to her teenage children their children have now grown up and away from the church and the parents have returned to the church that they knew why did they come back because they missed the biblical teaching if they had stayed there where they were originally in a church where the Bible was being expounded if they had stayed there with their teenagers how different things could have turned out these teenagers could have been following

Christ today where are they now they're just out in the world the moral of the story is stay where there is a Bible believing teaching so that you and your offspring can grow in the faith now congregations want to want to see growth of course and congregations need to be warm and welcoming and I found that here generally found that here when you are out shopping during the days of the weekend whatever shop you go to if it's not welcoming if you go to a restaurant that's not welcoming if you stay in a hotel that's not welcoming you're not going to go back there are you or certainly not in a hurry how many times have you gone into a shop and just because you have been welcomed warmly welcomed by the assistants you've just bought something just to buy something just to help them out there's a very real sense in that we have to make a church warm and welcoming not only in how it's furnished and decorated but the personal welcome that we are

able to give

I've been to churches you may have been to different churches and I've come and gone unnoticed not that I want any glory for coming in but nobody even said hello it's not easy to go back to a church like that researchers who look into these things say we have only a few seconds to make an impression if you're selling your home and you invite people to come in and see your home prospective buyers they make up their minds and within seconds of coming into the house whether this is the house they want or not perhaps it's the same in a congregation so what impression are we making as the people of God are we as a church showing the love of Christ that's a question we are part of the church need to be asking ourselves are we full of the Lord are we full of Christ for God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him and through him to reconcile to himself all things whether things on earth or things in heaven by making peace through his blood shed in the cross it is only the preeminent Christ that can reconcile man to God the false teachers of Colossae whoever they were promised a kind of relationship with God or with their God maybe through refraining from certain foods and from worshipping angels there may have been other things when all that was needed was Christ Jesus the one who has supremacy and all the fullness of God you may become across people who will say they're

Christians will say they're born again will say they're saved whatever the term might be but there's a lack of evidence of that conversion in their lives the fruit of the spirit in a life in your life and in my life is very noticeable it has to be and it's noticeable in their life of worship as well for where there is little desire to worship God to join with brothers and sisters in Christ on a Sunday morning Sunday evening we have done today one wonders of Jesus is really preeminent in their lives we are not to be stay at home Christians and Paul reminded the people of Colossae once you are alienated from God you are enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior that's a past life but now things are different he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in the sight without blemish and free from accusation how wonderful to appear before Christ without a blemish and we can only do that through his shed blood another of my favorite scriptures is Ephesians 2 as for you you were dead in your transgressions and sins in which you used to live and you followed in the ways of this world yes we were alienated but now the joy of being in

[29 : 11] Christ is in all those who follow Jesus we were alienated from God through the sin of Adam through the fall we were once strangers to grace and to salvation as such had been the people of Colossae they had tasted something of the Lord they had they had begun to follow him and now something else had come in to take them away Paul reminds him of the reconciliation to God through the redeeming love of Jesus Christ he had bought him by dying on the cross he died to make us good he died to make us holy while we were yet sinners long before we were born Jesus died for us it is just wonderful to be accepted by God as pure and clean as we can be when we accept the finished work of Jesus

Christ and Paul goes on to say that this will be the case if you continue in your faith established and firm not moved from the hope held out in the gospel this is the gospel that you heard and has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven of which I Paul have become a servant does this verse suggest that a Christian can lose their salvation and the blessed hope of eternity if you continue in your faith established and firm not at all for the genuine Christian the person who has been truly born again will persevere through the good times and through the bad times with the faith through trial through tribulation through illness through wellness if you are truly saved your feet are on the rock Christ Jesus and nothing can separate you from Christ oh I know that tiredness fatigue sometimes comes into our lives as

Christians but we need to remember that we are not saved because we continue in the faith we continue in the faith as a sign that we are saved continue Philippians 2 and 12 says continue the work of continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose the enabling grace of God takes us right through from the start to the finish and that's what will help each one of us when times are rough remember the faith in which Christ into which Christ has accepted you you people of Colossae you people of Scotland Christ is speaking to the world through these words the good news is that Jesus is supreme that everything in heaven and on earth is under his control and that he has taken away our guilty stains he has gone before us he has gone to prepare a place for us if it were not so I would have told you I go and prepare a place for you and he promised to come back when is he going to return we cannot tell but we need to be ready this is the gospel that you have heard and

that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven tell the world of saving grace the hymn says make it known in every place help the needy ones to know him from whom all blessings flow have you received the blessing of being in Christ your opportunity is to reach out to Jesus tonight and ask for forgiveness for your sin and accept him as your Lord and Savior if you have never done so one beggar tells another where food is to be found so let's do it for there is a food bank that will never run out amen and may the Lord bless to us these thoughts from his holy word father we thank you again tonight for the wonders of your grace we thank you that you're still calling people unto yourself and we thank you

Lord that you are gracious and merciful and that you will accept any who will bow the knee to you King Jesus so Lord here we come before you in faith take us Lord as we are but Lord change us to be more like you in Jesus name we pray amen and are we in you me you