

Colossians 1-2:5

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[0 : 0 0] We're going to be contemplating God's Word for a bit now. We're going to be thinking about a passage in Colossians, that letter that we read. As we begin to contemplate this, I wonder if any of you are like me in some way.

How easy it is, despite my greatest desires, how easy it is to become very distracted from Christ and His glory.

Especially in times where I feel a bit overwhelmed by something. When I feel that something is just too big or too strong. It's overpowering. Those become particularly difficult times for me to really try to understand.

And I search for a framework or something that I can grasp onto that can make sense out of confusing, difficult, overwhelming things.

So I don't know if you're anything like me in that. Perhaps some of you are. I would bet somebody out there is. The Colossians were a bit like that also.

[1 : 1 2] Actually, a lot of people in the ancient world. In Ephesus, which is not too far from Colossae. In Ephesus, there was a man in about 54 AD.

He was controlled by a demon. An evil spirit. And this one man, controlled by this demon, jumped on seven Jewish exorcists.

Young men, seven of them. And the text tells us in Acts, sent them out of the house naked and bleeding. They were completely overwhelmed by this thing that was of much greater power than they were.

What was the response that people in Ephesus had when this happened? What I want us to contemplate is our response when things are confusing or overpowering.

The response in Ephesus was a bunch of people burned, destroyed their sorcery books. They were dabbling in this stuff and dark magic.

[2 : 2 1] And they burned them. They got rid of them. And they turned to Jesus. They had seen that at his name, demons flee. But not at his name. This one demon beats up seven people, naked and bleeding.

They burned their sorcery and they turned to Jesus. That's how they responded to this overpowering, scary situation. Something similar. In a tribe in the Congo, maybe in the 1950s, a missionary there stood up on a mound to present the gospel to a tribe that had not heard the gospel before.

And an invisible force grabbed him by the throat. Now I know this because this is one of my professors and he was telling us about what happened to him. This invisible force grabbed him by the throat and said, spoke to him, Leave, I own this mound that he was standing on.

Well, my professor, this missionary, responded something like this. Well, you can have the mound, but God owns these people's hearts. And he stepped off of the mound, walked about 20 paces over, and he presented the gospel to the people of that village.

And a lot of them accepted Christ. What would your response be to an overpowering, scary situation? Or maybe simply a confusing situation?

[3 : 45] In Colossae, the people were beginning to dabble with ways to protect themselves from evil spirits.

This was not their only difficulty, their only problem. There were other things mixed in with this. How to be acceptable to God seems to be mixed in with this. But let me describe to you, based on things that Paul writes about in Colossians, this letter to the church, let me describe to you what seems to have been the problem in Colossae, because of which Paul wrote this letter.

I think this will give us a greater understanding of the contents of this letter. Well, some of the things, and in your own time, I think it would be good to turn in Colossians and try to wrestle with, see if you can piece together some of these things as well.

But what seemed to be going on was a former pagan, or maybe a few, people who had been in paganism, perhaps a shaman, it's difficult to know, of course, but who had converted to Christ.

Somebody who had accepted Christ and was in the church, yet somebody who had not changed his ways of thinking about the world, was still understanding things in a pagan way.

[5 : 05] Now that in itself is quite easy to understand. We see an example of that in the book of Acts, not in Colossae, but in Samaria, there's a man named Simon, a sorcerer, who vows everybody with his sorcery.

He accepts Christ. Luke tells us that he believed and was baptized. But then not too long after this, when Peter comes up and lays his hands on the believers, and they receive the Holy Spirit, Simon, the ex-pagan, offered them money and said, here, give me this ability that I can lay my hands on people and they can receive the Spirit.

And Peter rebuked him harshly. He said, you can't buy this stuff. You need to repent. So this man in Samaria was from a pagan background, believed and was baptized, was in the church, but was still thinking in a very pagan way about things.

It seems like something like that has been happening at Colossae. And I say that because of some things that Paul says. I'm going to put myself in this person's shoes, or these people's shoes, that seem to be teaching the Christians at Colossians how to deal with life.

Basically, what they were arguing, it seems, is, I'll say it as if it's one person, because that's easier. This person is telling the Christians, I've seen things.

[6 : 33] I've had visions. And in these visions, in what I've seen, I've received wisdom. I've received knowledge and complete understanding of the mysteries of God.

And I'm going to now tell you about these mysteries. This is the philosophy that will put you in line with the basic principles of this world.

And therefore, things will begin going better for you. These will also protect you from these demonic rulers and authorities. This philosophy that I have seen in my visions.

For your protection, there are certain things that you need to not handle, or taste, or touch. As a matter of fact, God's law speaks about these things that was handed down to the Jews.

If you don't keep these things in God's law, if you don't avoid these things, you're not going to be pleasing to God. You're going to owe a debt to God. You're not going to be protected from the rulers and authorities.

[7 : 35] Also, for your protection, there are certain celebrations and ceremonies that you need to keep. Again, God's law speaks about these. You need to be circumcised. You need to keep the diet, the food and drink regulations.

You need to celebrate at the festivals, the new moon celebrations, the Sabbath celebrations. All for your protection. This is what I've learned in my visions.

You also need to worship the angels. You need to ask them to protect you against these demonic rulers and authorities. Also, you do need to keep your bodily urges under control.

And to do this, you need to subject your body to very harsh treatment. This is the depth of wisdom and knowledge that I have received from God in my visions.

The things that I've seen. This is how you should live. This is God's mystery. Now, in light of that, and you'll have to wrestle with whether I've put the pieces together appropriately, but in light of that, let me read to you another passage from Colossians.

[8 : 41] And I want you to listen to some of these buzzwords. See if you can hear the issue that's going on that Paul is addressing. And not only those buzzwords, but also listen for the emphasis that I'll place on what Paul says as the remedy for this.

People who are scared and who are trying to find some way of protecting themselves. So listen, if you would, at Colossians, starting in Colossians 1, 27.

I'm going to read for a little while, but listen to the emphasis. What's the remedy? Paul says, to them, that is, all the saints, to them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

We proclaim Him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all His energy which so powerfully works within me.

I want you to know how much I am struggling for you and for those at Laodicea, which was a city just about ten miles away, and for all those who have not met me personally.

[10 : 04] My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ.

In Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments. For though I am absent with you in body, I am present with you in spirit, and I delight to see how orderly you are and how firm your faith is in Christ.

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in Him, rooted and built up in Him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught and overflowing with thankfulness.

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.

for in Christ all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form. And you have been given fullness in Christ who is the head over every power and authority.

[11 : 19] In Him, you were circumcised in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men, but with a circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with Him in baptism and raised with Him through your faith and the power of God who raised Him from the dead.

When you were dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code with its regulations that was against us, that stood opposed to us.

He took it away, nailing it to the cross. And, having disarmed the powers and authorities, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by His cross.

Therefore, do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, or a new moon celebration, or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come.

However, the reality is found in Christ. Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize.

- [12 : 37] Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. He has lost connection with the head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.

Since you died with Christ, are lost to the basic principles of this world. Why? As though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules? Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch.

These are all destined to perish with use, because they're based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations, indeed, have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility, their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

Since then, you have been raised with Christ. Set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things, for you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. Did you catch the emphasis that Paul is trying to drive home to them?

- [14 : 02] It's all about Christ. It's all about this King Jesus. Despite your fears, despite your desire to be protected, despite your confusion with people who are teaching you this, that, and the other, it's got to be in line with Jesus.

All of Colossians could be summarized. It's all about Christ Jesus. So, a question comes to each of us. Are we satisfied with Christ, knowing Him?

Does that satisfy us? We're going to explore that a little bit more now by turning to a passage that's all about Jesus, that explains who Jesus is.

That's Colossians 1, starting in verse 15. Because the question does come, who is this Jesus?

If everything's about Him, I need to know more about Him. I need to know Him better. Who is this Christ? Now, starting in verse 15 is what a lot of people have termed the Christ hymn of Colossians.

- [15 : 17] Just before Paul begins in verse 15, however, talking about who Jesus is, we need to look at verses 12 to 14 because Paul has Jesus in mind already.

You notice how in verse 15 it says, He is the image of the invisible God. Well, who is the He? Who's in Paul's mind? How does Paul think about Jesus when he begins here describing Him in greater detail?

Look at verses 12 to 14 and listen to who Jesus is, how Paul is picturing Christ Jesus. give thanks to the Father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.

For He has rescued us from the domain of darkness and has brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Now, tonight we're going to dwell on that passage and a few others like it in Colossians. But picture Jesus as Paul is thinking about Him, as Paul is describing Him already.

- [16 : 29] The King of God's kingdom, that's who Paul is thinking about. The Son of God, the beloved Son of God who is King over God's kingdom.

This is Jesus who taught about God's kingdom when He was walking on this earth. The Jesus who died for our sins, seemingly defeated.

You know, this can't be the King. There's no way. He's dead. Seemingly defeated, but rather dying for the purpose of forgiving His followers of their sins.

Jesus who rose from the grave, triumphant, conquering, glorious, with a human body that was changed to be imperishable, immortal, impossible to be destroyed again.

That human, glorious Jesus ascended to heaven and sat down on the throne, the throne of God at the right hand of His Father. That Jesus who now is sitting on that throne, reigning over all things, that's who Paul is picturing.

[17 : 35] But he thinks it's good for us to learn more about this Jesus, the beloved Son who is reigning over God's kingdom.

And so in verse 15 he begins to describe Him in more detail. Who is this Jesus? Now what you'll notice is that Paul says two basic things about who Jesus presently is, right now enthroned in heaven.

Jesus is this and then He casts our minds back to the past to explain why Jesus is that now. And then He does it again. Jesus is this presently and then He casts us back to the past.

This is why He is this way. So the first one in verse 15 this is who Jesus is and then in verse 16 and 17 He casts our minds all the way back to the creation to explain why Jesus is what He is in verse 15.

Then Paul does it again in verse 18 He says this is who Jesus is now and then in verse 19 and 20 He casts our minds back into the past but not as far back as creation actually just a little bit before in the past at Jesus' incarnation His birth and His death.

[18 : 53] So that's the basic structure what Paul does. So let's now wrestle with a few of these phrases a few of these descriptions about Jesus. This is a very important passage for understanding who this Christ is that is the center of everything.

So presently right now as He sits on the throne in heaven He is the image of the invisible God the firstborn over all creation. You can think about the Queen with her image on the bill.

That's the idea. God is invisible. You can't see Him. But He has presented His image to us to be seen. Jesus in His glorious humanity seated on the throne is the image of the otherwise completely invisible God.

Jesus Himself said something like this when He was with His disciples before His death. He says to His disciples I am the way the truth and the life.

No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you really knew Me you would know My Father as well. From now on you do know Him and have seen Him.

[20 : 12] Philip said Lord show us the Father and that will be enough for us. Jesus answered don't you know Me Philip? After I've been with you for such a long time anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father.

That's a similar idea. Jesus is not claiming to be the Father but to look at Him physically to see Him and to know Him is to know God the Father who is invisible.

Another way to think about it which I think is in the back of Paul's mind think about who else has been described as the image of God. Well the very first one to ever be described that way was Adam.

In the beginning God created humans. He created Adam to be His image. He created him in His image in His likeness to rule over the earth.

That's who Adam was. He was the presentation of God. God could not be seen in His earth but He placed His image there to rule over God's kingdom.

[21 : 21] That's who Adam was. So perhaps you can see how as Paul contemplates the King, Jesus who is sitting above the kingdom of God right now reigning it's not a far stretch to think about the first image of God who was reigning over the earth.

However, as we'll see there's something very different about this image of God. Jesus is a much truer image of the invisible God. But nonetheless that's exactly what He is.

If you want to know God you need to know Jesus who is His image and therefore reigns over His kingdom. But not only that He's the image of the invisible God but He's also the firstborn over creation over all creation.

Now I don't know if any of you have had conversations with Jehovah's Witnesses but this verse sometimes gets brought up. They've said to me on a number of occasions look, this says that Jesus was created.

That's what they think. They think that in the beginning God created Jesus. And then through this created Jesus this non-eternal Jesus through Him created everything else.

[22 : 36] So Jesus is part of creation and they say look right here He's the first one born in all creation. How do you argue with that?

How do we understand this? Is that right? Is that what Paul is saying? It's absolutely not what Paul is saying. Jesus is the firstborn of all creation in a very different way than what they say.

See the firstborn think about what that meant in the Old Testament. The firstborn was the rightful heir.

The person who would carry on the family. Who would be in charge of the family after the father is gone. That's the firstborn. They are the one who receives the great inheritance. That's the firstborn.

Now it is true that typically it was the person who was born first that had that right. That had that privilege of being firstborn. But not always.

[23 : 41] In fact there are some very significant places in scripture where it's not the person who was born first who is the firstborn. Let me mention one and then we'll dwell for a few moments on the second one that I think is very important for this passage.

Think about Jacob. Jacob and Esau were twins but Esau was born first. In Genesis we read about them. Esau was born first the first one born.

He therefore had the right of inheritance. He was the firstborn. But you remember what happens. Jacob I would say weasels it away from Esau and that might be about right.

But he gets the birthright from his older twin brother Esau. Esau gives it to him in all fairness to Jacob. But then Jacob is the firstborn.

He's not the first one born but he is the firstborn. He has the rights of inheritance. He is the one who is primary in his family. So firstborn doesn't necessarily mean the first one to be born.

[24 : 49] There's an even more important example in the Old Testament however that I want us to turn to because because of it's important for this passage. It's in Psalm 89 that we're singing.

We already sang it the verse right before this. Psalm 89 listen to what God says about David.

Now remember God promised David that he would always have a descendant on the throne of God's kingdom. And I've already mentioned how for a very long time that looked like it was not the case.

That God was not keeping his promise. Because there was no descendant of David on the throne of God's kingdom for 600 years. But listen to what God says about David and his descendants.

By the point of this Psalm David is long dead. So whenever we read about David in this Psalm it's talking about David's descendants. That's who it's talking about. Look at verse 26.

[26 : 00] God says about David he will call out to me you are my father my God the rock my savior. I will also appoint him my firstborn the most exalted of the kings on the earth.

Well that's interesting isn't it? David is the last born in his own family. He's the youngest brother. But God's not even talking here about just his family.

He's talking about all the kings of the entire earth. And he says I will appoint David my firstborn among all the kings of the earth. David or his descendants whoever was reigning on the throne of David over God's kingdom he would be God's firstborn.

The preeminent one. The one king over all kings who has the rights of inheritance. That's what God is talking about with the king of his kingdom.

His firstborn. Well now we turn back to Colossians. We've already seen that Paul's thinking about Christ as the beloved son who is reigning over the kingdom of God.

[27 : 13] That's Jesus. It's no wonder he talks about him Jesus as the firstborn over all creation. Jesus is the rightful king. He is the one who has the rights of inheritance.

He is the great heir of all that God owns. So if you're talking with a Jehovah's Witness or someone who talks about this verse it has nothing to do with Jesus being born in any way.

It's his position of honor over all of creation that it's talking about. The human glorified Jesus on the throne is the firstborn over all creation.

Now Paul explains that who Jesus is now the image of the invisible God the firstborn over all creation that king and he explains that based on something in the past.

Look at verse 16. And this is probably one of the most shocking things for someone. Jesus clearly a human walked around on this earth ate sweated he didn't smell good sometimes his disciples talked to him face to face they shared things with him they knew he was human and this is what Paul says about this Jesus who is the king says he is this firstborn over all the earth because for by him all things were created.

[28 : 50] That's quite a statement things in heaven and on earth visible and invisible that's phenomenal Jesus who is the creator of everything that boggles my mind when I try to think about being one of his disciples talking with Jesus face to face looking into his eyes and realizing that this man created me not just me but created the ground that we're standing on the light that shines by which I see this man he's the one who created this it blows my mind but this is who Jesus is he has the right of the firstborn the right over all creation because he created it.

Now in other passages like Philippians chapter 2 Paul talks about Jesus having this right because he was obedient even to the point of death he earned the right to have the name above every name but this is also true it was his anyway because he's the creator this is who Jesus is as we struggle with things that confuse us things that scare us and overwhelm us Jesus is the king the only way to know God the rightful heir of everything and in fact your creator.

Did you notice that Paul slipped in what God what Jesus created not just invisible and visible things in heaven and things on earth but specifically thrones or powers or rulers or authorities Paul is speaking very particularly to their hearts one of the things they're wrestling with is fear of these powers and authorities and he says Jesus created them why would we ever think about turning to other things for protection when he is the creator of these very things and listen to the very next statement in verse 17 I'm sorry at the end of verse 16 Paul summarizes all things were created by him and for him so think about yourself why were you created think about Richard Dawkins or any atheist why was he created think about the demonic rulers and authorities think about anything in this entire creation it was created by Jesus and for Jesus to bring glory to Jesus we can only touch on the surface of the depth of this

I would encourage you to contemplate more deeply what this means what this means for you let's carry on verse 17 Paul summarizes this first bit he says what Jesus is now Jesus is before all things and in him all things hold together Jesus is before all things that certainly could mean that Jesus existed before things he was the creator obviously that's the case but this also could very easily mean he is before things in preeminence he has the first place because he's the creator as well as this sovereign king he's before everything and then the next thing he says and in him all things hold together have you contemplated that before as you think about your life every day the things that happen contemplate the things happening on the other side of the world everything is holding together because of

Jesus Jesus is sitting on the throne reigning over all things and it's because he is reigning over all things that things are not falling apart now some things are falling apart and we know that in the end Jesus will make all things perfectly hold together but everything is secure in Jesus' kingly hands Jesus has perfect government he really can hold everything together now that's the first bit of what Paul says and the second bit I'm going to go through more quickly Paul says again something that is true about Jesus right now and then explains it by looking to something in the past in verses 18 to 20 this Jesus the creator of all things and sovereign king he is presently the head of the church think about it because you're the church part of it anyway this Jesus that he has just described is governing you

[33 : 57] I hope that we think about this as we wrestle with problems that our church faces our brothers down the streets brothers and sisters facing challenges in the church of Scotland battling for the truth of God's word Jesus is the head of them he is their sovereign and what what better sovereign could you possibly have than the Jesus just explained here also ours as we wrestle through difficulties as we disagree with brothers and sisters over exactly what words to sing and how to sing them in church who's the head over this church I hope that we contemplate that and we prioritize things properly he is in verse 18 second half he is the beginning the firstborn from among the dead he is not only the creator of the original creation but here

Paul draws attention to the new creation that which started when Jesus rose from the dead Jesus is the beginning of that too there is not a single thing old creation or new that Jesus is not the beginning of the head of the firstborn over and he is that did you catch what verse 18 the end says he presently is the head of his body the church he is the beginning he is the firstborn from among the dead so that in everything he might have the supremacy for verse 19 this is where Paul casts our minds to the past to explain why Jesus is this way for God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in Christ and God was pleased to through him

Jesus to reconcile to himself all things whether things on earth or things in heaven all things by making peace through the blood of Jesus cross cross now that's that's a striking thing the Jesus that he's just explained the one who is sovereignly enthroned the one who holds together everything the one who is the creator in fact the one who is the first to rise from the dead and the inheritor of all things living from the dead that Jesus who is preeminent supreme in everything he shed his blood he died so that his subjects could be forgiven of their sins that's a king that is unlike any other king we could possibly know that's a

God unlike any other God anybody could possibly claim to know this Jesus this beloved king is the one who sheds his own blood for his subjects to close our thoughts on this before we sing a bit more in the psalm that we're singing let me read to you two small passages from Colossians and think about the Jesus that has just been described to you think about him as you hear these words starting in verse 21 once you were alienated from God you were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior but now he has reconciled you changed you he's made you other than you were by Christ's physical body through death in order to present you holy in his sight without blemish and free from accusation if you continue in your faith established and firm not moved from the hope held out in the gospel and let me read to you

Colossians 2 8 to 10 see to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ for in Christ all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form and you have been given fullness in Christ who is head over every power and authority so Bonacord when you are scared about something when you feel overwhelmed by something frustrated up against a wall anything are you able to trust Jesus this Jesus are you satisfied with this Jesus if you're not there is not anything in this entire creation that could ever possibly satisfy you let me pray for us now go if you ooh you why you wanted to he ok