

Colossians 1-2

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Date: 30 January 2011

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[0 : 00] Some of you have some handouts, don't know how many of you do, probably some of the smaller people in the congregation have them, although they're not off limits to anybody above three feet.

You can be filling this out as we go, and I'll draw your attention to a few of the blanks that you can fill in as we go. That's a picture of some of the things we're going to talk about tonight.

So I have a question for all of us. How gripped are we by the gospel? I don't know about you, but I sometimes pass over statements about the gospel as if they're mundane.

I've heard them so often. I've said them so often. I've read them so often about Jesus dying and rising from the dead, about being forgiven of my sins. And I know it's shocking that any of us would be able to treat such things as if they were simply discussion about a football match.

But I confess that I have that difficulty sometimes. I'm so used to the language. Perhaps we are no longer shocked by God's grace.

[1 : 24] It doesn't surprise us like it should. And maybe because of that, maybe that's the reason that we don't really talk about the gospel much to our friends or maybe even to other believers.

By friends, I mean unbelievers. I should have said that. We don't talk about the gospel much to unbelievers. Perhaps because we're not really shocked by God's grace anymore. So I want you to think about your first encounter with Christ.

And any subsequent encounters. As you read his word, as you pray. Think about your relationship with Christ. And think about what a first encounter would be like face to face with Jesus.

We read about Paul's first encounter as he actually stood face to face with the Lord. So for the next little bit, I hope that we can contemplate an experience of Jesus' grace.

Think about how Paul explains Jesus' grace to others. And we're going to do that by looking in Colossians.

[2 : 41] A few places where he talks about God's grace. And I'm putting it this way because it's very interesting how when Paul talks about when Jesus came to him, he uses very, very similar language to talk about the gospel to the Colossians.

He was so impacted by what Jesus said to him that he says the same thing years later when he writes to the Colossian church. He was so moved by God's grace that it made him share this.

And I hope that we can be encouraged to do something similar. So we just read what Paul said about his personal experience of Jesus, his first experience.

Let me summarize a little bit and I'm going to bring out a bit more. Because Paul shares that experience another time. A few chapters after what we read. And he tells that time a few extra details that he didn't tell in the one that I read earlier.

Picture Saul walking along this road. Or riding the horse along this road to Damascus. He's a devout Jew. He loves God.

[3 : 53] He's passionate about God's holiness. He doesn't want anything to come in the way of God's glory. And so he thinks that this new sect that follow this Jesus fellow who claims to be the king of Israel.

Who was crucified. But who the Christians say rose from the dead and is the king. He's trying to persecute them. He's putting them in jail. He's even giving his consent when they're killed.

He's really, really hunting them down. So imagine. As Paul is heading towards Damascus to do this. And this light flashes around him.

So bright that it knocks him off his horse. He can't see. But he hears the person in this glory talk to him. He says, and the voice says to him, Saul, why are you persecuting me?

Saul says, who are you? When he says, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you're persecuting, what do you think must have gone through Paul's mind?

[5 : 01] He's just been knocked off his horse by the one that he's been claiming stayed dead. He's been persecuting this man's followers.

He's now face to face with the one who actually is risen from the dead. The one who actually is surrounded by God's glory. I can't imagine the terror that must have been going through Paul's mind at this moment.

As Jesus now stands in front of him. And so when Jesus says to Paul, get up. Get on your feet. What do you think Paul would have been thinking?

I don't know exactly, but I would have been panicking. What is he going to do? I've been persecuting and killing his followers. What's he going to do to me now that he has me face to face?

And I think it's in light of that, when Paul is aware of how wrong he has been, that what Jesus says next really goes deep, cuts him to the heart.

[6 : 08] Because after Jesus says, get up, get on your feet, as if stand up, I'm going to fight you now. The next thing Jesus says is this.

I'm appointing you to be my servant. To be my witness. That must have taken Paul off guard. That's not what I would have expected, certainly.

I don't think that's what Paul would have expected. I'm going to appoint, I am appointing you to be my servant. A witness of what you have seen of me. And what I will show you. And then listen to what Jesus says next to him.

This is all in Acts 26, by the way. Next Jesus says, I will rescue you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. Is that really what Jesus said?

To the man who's just been destroying his followers? Rescue, protect. And if you think about it, throughout Acts, you see this time and time again.

[7 : 10] From both Jews and from Gentiles. Paul presents the gospel and some accept it joyfully. But others attack him. Jews stone him.

Drag him outside of a city. Leave him for dead. But he didn't die. Jesus protected him. Gentiles, pagans. Grab him and drag him through a mob.

And shout awful things at him. And beat him without trial. And yet, Jesus spares him through this. Time and time again, Jesus was good on his word.

He rescued Paul. Protected him from the Jews, from the Gentiles. And then Jesus says, I am sending you to the Gentiles with this mission.

To open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light. And from the authority of Satan to God. So that they may receive forgiveness of sins.

[8 : 10] And a share among those who are sanctified by faith in me. That's Paul's first encounter with Jesus.

I would assume he was terrified. And then to his shock, heard grace. Heard, you're my witness.

I'm going to protect you even. And here's what I'll have you to do. And it's all good. Open their eyes. Turn them from darkness to light. Turn them from the authority of Satan to God.

So that they can be forgiven of their sins. Just like Paul just was by Jesus himself. These three parts of what Jesus says to Paul.

Right here in his first encounter, in his call. These three things we see again in how Paul words the gospel to the Colossians. So let me highlight a few things from what Jesus says here.

[9 : 11] Because we're going to see him again. Turn them from darkness. That is the authority of Satan. Turn them to light. To God. The authority of God.

Now, it would have been obvious that the Gentiles were in darkness. And the authority of Satan. They're polytheists. Worshipping other gods. There are a lot of philosophers that are clever.

Very clever. But they're absolutely ignorant of God. There are atheists. There are pagans who use sorcery and witchcraft. Pagans who worship and sacrifice to demons.

These are the Gentiles into whom Paul is going. With the good news that they can be forgiven of these sins. But it's interesting.

Although here Jesus says, I'm going to send you to the Gentiles to open their eyes. Turn them from darkness to light. And it's obvious that Gentiles are in darkness. Paul, he would not have thought this before this encounter.

[10 : 15] But after the encounter, he thinks the Jews are in darkness as well. Paul, he's going to send you to the Gentiles. Paul, he says, Paul, he says, Paul, he says, Now, that's quite shocking, perhaps. But listen to what Paul says to the Corinthians.

Paul writes in 2 Corinthians, chapter 3 and 4. He writes, Even to this day when Moses is read, That is, in the synagogues, when they would pull out the scrolls, the book of Moses, and read, Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts.

But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing.

The God of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot see the light, the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, Let light shine out of darkness, has made his light to shine in our hearts.

[11 : 30] To give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Both Gentiles and Jews who don't follow Jesus are in the darkness, under the authority of the God of this world, Paul says.

The authority of Satan. That was him before this encounter with Christ. He was the one wearing the veil when reading Moses.

He was blinded. The God of this age had veiled and blinded him so he could not see the glory of Christ. The light. But then as he was on the road to Damascus, this light shone so bright that it blinded him, ironically.

And suddenly he sees the glory of Christ. So, Jesus tells them, turn them from darkness to light. From the authority of Satan to that of God.

But also, the second thing, so that they can receive forgiveness of sins. Forgiveness of sins. The word forgiveness here simply means to let go.

[12 : 39] So that God, who is holding their sins, lets them go. And that's it. We're going to look at that in just a few moments, a little bit more detail. And the third thing, so that they can receive a share, a portion, a part, an inheritance among the saints.

This is simply blessing upon blessing. The Gentiles now are able to receive an inheritance. That's you and me, by the way. We're Gentiles.

We're heirs of this. But the point to draw now is that Paul was so gripped by Jesus confronting him face to face as he stood there in his sin and guilt, knowing it.

And yet Jesus forgave him and promised protection and gave him a mission to take this light to others. He's so gripped by this that as we're going to see now, he shares this with other people.

He can't help it. When he was in Ephesus, as we read, he presented this gospel to the people who were in the heart of darkness, surrounded by spiritual darkness.

[13 : 55] And yet he stayed for three years talking about Jesus. Had such a ministry there that as I said, Epaphras, somebody from Colossae, who had come over to Ephesus, heard about Christ, received Christ, learned from Paul, and himself was so motivated by hearing about the gospel that he took it back to his own people in Colossae.

We read earlier in Colossians that it was from Epaphras that the Colossians heard first the gospel. So, let's look now.

We've had a glimpse of Paul's experience of God's grace in Jesus. Now let's look at his explanation of this grace and see if we can be motivated by this.

So turn in Colossians. We're going to look at a few passages in a lot less detail than we did this morning. and we'll get some general impressions. His letter to the Christians in Colossae.

And now we're getting close to these handouts, by the way. Nothing, you haven't really been able to fill anything out yet, but listen up because you're about to. Paul's presentation of the gospel in Colossians is very, very similar to what he just heard about from Christ.

[15 : 24] So read chapter 1, verses 12 to 14. You'll remember them from this morning, of course. 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 dominion of darkness and has brought us into the kingdom of the Son whom he loves in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

So for you kids who are looking at this, do you see, you probably can't see from here, but these are two pictures. There's a kingdom of darkness. Well, I might have just given you one of the words. A dominion of darkness and the kingdom of God's beloved Son.

If you have a blank, you can fill these in. And what God has done is transferred us from the kingdom of darkness through the cross to this kingdom, the kingdom of his Son.

Now you see a series of lines below in each of these, little boxes that are blank. As we work through some of these passages, you'll recognize some things, some descriptions of the dominion of darkness.

[16 : 33] And some descriptions of the kingdom of God's beloved Son. So if you have this, listen to those descriptions and fill them in. God the Father qualified you, Paul says, to share the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.

Qualified you. He made you fitted. He made you capable of receiving this inheritance. All I want to note here is simply that there's absolutely nothing that we can do to make ourselves capable of receiving such a glorious inheritance.

It's not us who does it. God has made us fit to receive this. He has made us qualified. And that's why Paul says, joyfully thank the Father for this.

He rescued us from the authority of darkness. So there's the authority, sorry, got ahead of myself, I don't have that bit on.

You can feel free to write that in there if you wish. The authority of darkness, the authority of Satan. Jesus said to Paul, the authority of darkness, Paul says, and he transferred us to the kingdom of God's Son, the kingdom of light.

[17 : 56] And it's in this Son, in his kingdom, that we have redemption, that we are spared, that we have the forgiveness of sins.

Now let's elaborate on that a little bit. And that's where we're going to fill in some blanks. The forgiveness of sins. Look at verse 21 to 23. This is another way that Paul describes the gospel that he was so gripped by.

In verse 21, he says, once you were alienated from God. That looks like it could probably be a blank in your handout. Once you were alienated from God.

Enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. Do you think about yourself and your past in that way? Once you were alienated from God.

Hostile in your minds. Enemies in your minds. Because of your evil behavior. Paul knows that experience. He thought he was doing God good.

[19 : 03] He thought he was zealous for God's holiness. When actually, he was an enemy of the very God he claimed to know. Because he was persecuting his son and his people. His evil behavior.

But now, in the kingdom of light, but now, God has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you in a certain way.

He has reconciled you. That word reconcile, it literally means to change somebody. That's not what the English word reconcile means.

But the word that Paul uses in Greek means to change. Or to make somebody other than what they are. That's what he says here. He says, God has made you other.

You were alienated. You were enemies of God. But God has made you other than that. He's changed you. By Christ's physical body through death.

[20 : 07] in order to present you in a certain way. To present you holy in his sight. Again, notice, who's doing the action here?

Paul was in the midst of his evil behavior when Jesus knocked him off the horse and Jesus changed him and set him on the proper path. And he says here, God has changed you.

He has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight. Without blemish. And notice this next phrase in verse 23.

And free from accusation. So some of these things you might be able to fill in the blanks. In the proper kingdom of darkness or of light. Free from accusation.

What does that mean? Why is it that we cannot be accused any longer? Paul elaborates a few verses later. So look at chapter 2 verses 13 to 15.

[21 : 17] And this is the last passage that we're going to contemplate this evening. Colossians 2, 13 to 15. Remember, Paul's so motivated by Christ's grace to him that this is what he says.

In chapter 2 verse 13. When you were dead in your sins. Again, you can put that in a description of the way we were in the kingdom of darkness.

When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature. God made you alive with Christ. He forgave all our sins.

He took it away. Having canceled the written code with its regulations which was against us and 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. Triumphant over them by the cross.

[22 : 22] There's a lot there that he says. So let's pick it apart. Let's look at a few of these phrases. God forgave us our sins.

Like I said at the beginning for me that often I pass right over that statement and don't contemplate it. I don't remember what that's like to experience the forgiveness of my sins.

I say it because I know it's true. Having forgiven us all of our sins and this is how he forgave us our sins. It says having canceled the written code.

What does that mean? Having canceled the written code. Well written code is not the best way to translate it.

I love the NIV. It's very good. But that's probably a bit more confusing than what Paul says. And some of the other translation English translations have other ways to put it better.

[23 : 21] so you don't need to know Greek. You just compare some of the ways that people have translated this and you'll get a fuller picture of what Paul said. Canceling the written code.

Well written code actually is just talking about something handwritten. That's the word he uses. He has canceled a handwritten thing. That doesn't make a whole lot of sense except when you realize that that word is used all throughout the ancient world of a debt.

A record of debt that somebody owes. Somebody would handwrite this record of debt. And that's what he's talking about. God has canceled this record of debt.

Canceled means to wipe away. It's what Jesus will do in the end when he wipes away every tear from our eyes. That's what he does here. It's as if there's a crowd standing around and right in the middle of it there's this handwritten document by God.

And everything that we've done all that evil behavior that Paul talks about when we were alienated from God God has recorded it. He sees what we do. He sees what we think and what we say and he has recorded it.

[24 : 33] It's there. This handwritten code of debt with its regulations or you could say with its stipulations with the things that you have to do because of this debt.

He has you're in debt to me God says because you've done this and this is what's required of you. That right there that is what God wiped away like he erased it.

He cancels that with its regulations that stood against us opposed to us. Then he says look at look at the verses verses 13 to 15 having cancelled the written code with its regulations that was against us that stood opposed to us he took it away nailing it to the cross.

What does he mean by that? Well taking it away that's that's fairly obvious. Picture again we're standing we're sitting in this crowd and everything that we've done is written by God and he not only wipes it away but he just takes it out of our midst.

It's not even in front of us anymore. It's the next phrase that that really should catch us he nailed it to the cross. The only thing that was nailed to the cross besides the criminal in the ancient world was his crime.

[26 : 07] You remember when Jesus was nailed to the cross and a plaque was nailed above his head that says his crime what it said on his was king of the Jews but on the other criminals that would have something would have been nailed above them their list of crimes for which they're being punished so anybody walking past and seeing this cross seeing a person hanging there could say well that person did something very bad well let's see what they did and they look at what was nailed to the cross with them well there's the list of the crime that they're being punished for so what is Paul saying here God forgave us all our sins having cancelled the handwritten debt with all of its regulations stipulations that were against us he took that away nailing it to the cross picture if you will standing at the foot of Jesus' cross you look up and you see this man Jesus hanging there bleeding dying and you say well I wonder what he did to deserve that he obviously did something to deserve it and you look above what's nailed to the cross with him and it's a crime but what's that crime that you see you scroll through it and you say wait a second that's that's my crime that's me up there

I did that he didn't do that I did and you see all these other ones too all the other people that could walk by and say hey that's my crime what's what's he doing hanging on the cross for my crime that's the shock that Paul was affected by and that he's trying to put a cross to these Christians God has forgiven our sins he has let go of our sins because on the cross Christ was punished for that sin those sins all that we have done that's stark that's striking he has nailed it to the cross it's not in our presence anymore and therefore what Paul said earlier which I mentioned is the case that he presents us before himself free from accusation we can't be accused because of what Jesus has done for us we cannot be accused because it's gone so if you're united to

Jesus in faith if you are in this kingdom of light rather than the kingdom domain of darkness the authority of Satan if you're in the authority and kingdom of God's beloved son then you should know that the king died so that you could be forgiven of all the things that you have done that are opposed to him the king died for his subjects he did one other thing that this passage says that I'm going to mention briefly after talking about nailing that to the cross it says that having disarmed the powers and authorities having stripped them of their armor he made a public spectacle of them triumphing over them by the cross that language making a public spectacle is the language of a king who has just come back from battle he and all of his soldiers who have survived the battle they're all coming in and they're trailing behind them those whom they have conquered who are stripped of their armor stripped of their clothes in some cases absolutely powerless to do anything humiliated the king parades the conquered ones through the streets of his subjects with everybody shouting looking at the enemies who are now publicly humiliated because they've been defeated

Christ did that for the powers and authorities that the Colossians were so scared of these demonic beings that do exercise power over those that are in the domain of darkness the authority of Satan but for those who have been transferred to the other kingdom the kingdom of Jesus he parades them as humiliated fools that's a very different picture of evil spirits than the Colossians were afraid of so to summarize when Paul came face to face with Jesus and was shocked by his grace he was so motivated that he couldn't help but talking about it to others in the same way that he had heard it from Christ himself and that spread he talked about it to Epaphras who believed was seized by grace

Epaphras went to his own home Colossae and talked about it with them they were seized by grace let this happen to us remember the shock of grace that we see in Jesus Christ and let's start talking about it and now let's praise our father for this grace let's praise him by singing in Psalm 40 God Lord the