

Colossians Part 1: Do you know the mystery?

Week 2: Grace and Peace

Sunday, August 21, 2022

- **TODAY we formally begin our journey through the small but incredibly significant book of COLOSSIANS. Few things as we begin:**
- **FIRST- get your Bible! Today's text is only two verses, but I encourage you to really follow along in your own Bible. TO GET STARTED, read entire letter! Several times, get the overall letter in your mind, so as we go through it, you can know the larger context and concepts Paul is leading us through.**
- **LAST SUNDAY was our introduction... go back and listen if you missed it.**
- **EACH WEEK- study guide- will include questions...**
- **So, as we begin, let me welcome you to Colossae!**
- † Welcome to Colossae!
- **Paul begins his letter with a greeting in keeping with the customs of his time**

Colossians 1:1-2 *Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to God's holy people in Colossae, the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ: Grace and peace to you from God our Father.*

- **If remember from ACTS, Timothy joined Paul & Silas early in second missionary journey, and by the time Paul spends his two years in Ephesus- where he may have written Colossians- Timothy had become one of Paul's closest friends and workers with him.**
- **FEW things about Colossae, help us get a sense of the community, culture, and people Paul is writing to. WHEN WE READ SCRIPTURE – sounds obvious- but we must remember this was written over 2000 years ago, in Greek, to a cultural setting and involving issues very different from our own lives... but in some ways NOT so different. Our goal is to get inside the Colossians minds, find our common ground, to help us see how we understand and apply this scripture in a way that is honest with Paul's original intent and emphasis.**
- **SO- Colossae was located in the Lycus Valley of ancient Asia Minor. Ephesus was located on the West coast of modern day Turkey, and Colossae was about 120 miles inland to the east. About 11 miles from Laodicea, which is mentioned in the text.**
- **The Lycus valley had a significant Jewish community but the population was predominately gentile, meaning indigenous peoples/pagans, greeks, and romans. Culturally Colossae was a religious mix of old Greek/Roman Gods, such as Artemis, and local pagan and 'mystery' religions- more on that later.**
- **Key thing about the cultural and religious life of the region is that it was highly spiritual, but ill defined, confusing (lots of overlap/intermixing between different ancient traditions) and largely amoral.**
- **Would have included issues such as immorality, the sexual exploitation of women and children, pedastry (sexual relationship between adult male and a preteen male- common in ancient greek world), slavery, co-mingling of religious authority, political authority, and business, and a generally a worldview that devalued much of human life.**
- **Basically, the culture favored the powerful and elite, to which the message of the Gospel stood in stark contrast.**
- **Last detail- Colossae had been prominent/ wealthy city for centuries, but by the first century the city was in the early stages of a long decline.**

- *Distill down just a bit: If you were part of community of disciples in Colossae, you lived in a culture that was very spiritual, but just as immoral. Life was exploitive, human life routinely devalued, especially that of women and children, your religious systems were confusing and empty, the powerful took advantage of the weak, and if you really look around you, you could see that your city and culture was in decline. As Paul observed in Ephesus, your culture was without hope and without God in the world.*
- *INTO THIS REALITY came the message there was A GOD, THE GOD, and God was not distant, not just for elite and powerful, was redemptive rather than punitive, self-sacrificial rather than exploitive, and brought hope of forgiveness, restoration, and eternal and ultimate value to ALL PEOPLE – RIGHT NOW- through faith in God’s son- God’s presence in the world, Jesus Christ.*
- *THIS MESSAGE, THIS GOOD NEWS about fullness of God’s Grace- it was powerful, and attractive. In his letter to church in Philippi, Paul describes how Spirit was growing these believers so when surrounding saw them, they saw “Children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation, shining like stars in the sky as they held firmly to the word of life.”*
- *AND THEN, as this church began to grow in their understanding and experience of the Grace and Peace of God, some false teachers came to them and said... HOLD ON... this Jesus you are proclaiming, this New Life you are living... IT’S NOT ENOUGH. In order to be right with God, you need to move beyond FAITH, and start to do all these other things we will tell you.*
- *We know you think Christ Alone provides you everything you need for your identity, hope, peace, and wisdom from God.... But what you really have to have is this giant helping of RELIGION based on the wisdom of man... “DON’T YOU KNOW life is about more than contentment, peace, joy, hope, and love! HERE... take this guilt, obligation, pride, rituals, and performance based acceptance so you can think you’re better than everybody else”*
- *When Paul heard about this, he gets exercised... NOT ON MY WATCH... and writes a letter- from prison- to this young, vibrant, and vulnerable family of believers.*
- *He begins with a greeting that encapsulates in one sentence the essence of everything else he will say.*
- *With his first words Paul makes it clear that the genuineness of his message, his authority to speak to them and teach them, is by....*

† By the will of God

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God...

- *Paul wants them to know that this isn’t about HIM. His unique and specific role as an apostle- a person who had received revelation from God, about God, to bring to them- this was a work GOD was doing, not his own agenda.*
- *I point this out because when WE think of the idea of God’s will, it’s easy to think in terms similar to what Paul says here. IF GOD had this specific and unique WILL for Paul, then what is God’s specific and unique will for ME- and we tend to think of this in terms of like jobs, relationships, life decisions.*
- *MAKE NO MISTAKE- the presence of Christ in us, the teaching of scripture, will influence and bring direction into our life decisions... AND, at times, the Holy Spirit may work to direct us in very specific and unique ways.*
- *But the concept of God’s will is not limited to specific callings, decisions or actions. If we look broadly through the NT, we see God’s will as the underlying, foundational expression*

of HOW WE LIVE in relationship to others, BECAUSE of WHO WE ARE in relationship to God! In Romans 12...

Romans 12:1-2 *Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. ² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

- **In each step of life, each decision, each encounter, as we walk in the Spirit, experiencing the transformation of our mind, will, and emotions... we will see God leading us into His will for us be a living presence of his nature and character.**
- **Paul was an apostle of Christ by the will of God- we are disciples of Christ by the will of God.**
- **Going on... Paul refers to the Colossian believers with two terms... The first is that they were...**

† God's holy people

- **"HOLY" important NT concept, but often confused or diluted in our Christian culture.**
- **Stereotype of 'Holy' person can be person who is somewhat legalistic, outwardly pious, very restricting in their lifestyle, and maybe looks down on others... the idea of a person being "holier than thou..."**
- **But being holy, or holiness, isn't fundamentally about outward behavior, although that is part of it. The word literally means "SET APART". As people of Faith in Christ, because by His Grace God has COME TO US, brought us into his life, our lives are SET APART to him, and for him. Our faith is not just a passive/partial attribute of who we are, it is our very life and identity.**
- **In Colossians we will see this in two ways- First, here, the objective reality that In Christ, we ARE HOLY. The word is also translated SAINTS- because of what God has done in making us New Creations through faith in Christ, we are FULLY, COMPLETELY, OF GOD and SET APART to and for him. Just like a child adopted into a new family, our name has changed, and we now are of the family of God.**
- **It's been said that IN CHRIST we haven't just received a new future, we have also received a new PAST- God has completely taken us out of the family line of Adam- the reality of fallen humanity, and brought us into the family line of Jesus. (Romans 5).**
- **Illustration- dirt road to paved road... road ahead changes, but so does the road behind.**
- **IMPORTANT, because being the holy people of God is about MORE than behavior. It is about BELONGING.**

- **BUT BECAUSE we are holy, set apart to God, his SAINTS- this also inevitably will change HOW WE LIVE. Our lives WILL take on the nature and character of our new source of life- CHRIST. Because we ARE HOLY, this will lead to HOLINESS in how we live. Consider from Romans 6...**

Romans 6:19-23 *I am using an example from everyday life because of your human limitations. Just as you used to offer yourselves as slaves to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer yourselves as slaves to righteousness leading to holiness. ²⁰ When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. ²¹ What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! ²² But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

- **WOW.. SO much there, but moving on. Paul identifies these believers as “God’s holy people in Colossae”, and then, as “the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ”**

✠ Faithful brothers and sisters

- **SO MUCH HERE!**
- **First... FAITHFUL. This means, at least partially, that Paul recognizes their faith in Christ. They are people OF FAITH. (I’ll say- not religious, but deep faith).**
- **But much more, the idea of faithfulness indicates they are STEADFAST in their faith. In the face of the difficulties of life, and the profoundly exploitive and dehumanizing nature of their surrounding culture, they were known to be unwavering in their faithfulness to God.**
- **Key here is that the ideas of being ‘holy’ and ‘faithful’ are inseparably connected. To belong to God, to be yield to Him and dependent upon him, is itself the source of faithfulness. Paul makes this point in Galatians, in the famous ‘Fruit of the Spirit’ statement....**

Galatians 5:22-23 *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.*

- **The courage and moral strength to remain faithful in difficulty is NOT OF US in our flesh- it is a result of the Spirits presence, the Spirits work, in our mind, will, and emotions.**
- **You could say that FAITH- an abiding trust and yieldedness to the Spirit of Christ in us- leads to FAITHFULNESS that is the fruit, the result- of ths Spirit of Christ in us.**
- **Even more, Paul emphasizes that our faithfulness to God also leads to our faithfulness to EACH OTHER.**
- **When he says these believers are the faithful BROTHERS AND SISTERS (brethren), he doesn’t just mean ‘men and women.’ He means FAMILY. Here we see one of the many emphases Paul will place on the church being a BODY, a COMMUNITY, a relational family whose bonds and caring are even greater than the bonds of our physical families in this life.**
- **IT IS TRUE this often is not how the church operates- but this is how God’s church is DESIGNED and INTENDED to operate. As we will see again, this is a powerful corrective to the highly individualistic notion of faith common in evangelical culture.**
- **NEXT WE SEE something easy to miss, especially in the ENGLISH, but incredibly important and purposeful in what Paul says. Our faith is not just a matter of FAMILY, it is a matter of LOCATION.**

✠ Location, location...

- **Listen again to the greeting...**

“to God’s holy people in Colossae, the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ”

- **The NASB puts it this way...**

To the saints and faithful brothers and sisters in Christ who are at Colossae: ^{NASB}

- **In the Greek the two clauses “In Colossae” and “In Christ” are perfectly balanced on either side of “the holy and faithful brothers and sisters”.... Paul intends these to be viewed as a pair, both reflecting the location of our lives.**

- **JUST AS** these believers physically lived in Colossae, their spiritual location- their true home and identity- was **IN CHRIST**.
- The **SAME IS TRUE** of us. Just as our physical home is **IN EAGLE COUNTY**, our **SPIRITUAL HOME**, the true location of our **NEW SELF**- is **IN CHRIST**.
- This isn't just spiritual semantics. Great illustration from classic book "THE REST OF THE GOSPEL"... Illustration of 'The Swing'
- Imagine we are child on a swing... the seat, and us on it, are in great motion- side to side, up and down... **GOOD AND BAD**, positive and negative, hope and despair, courage and fear. **THIS IS LIFE**.
- We tell ourselves- the Christian life isn't supposed to be like this- I'm supposed to stay on the 'good side'... and so we employ all sorts of things to try and nail our lives up on the 'good' side of the arc. Sometimes we can do this for a while- but there will be times when life takes us to the other side of the arc- when our best efforts fail, when **WE** fail, and our attempts at control are to no avail- result can be burnout, being disillusioned, or the temptation to give up on ourselves, or give up on God.
- But there's another way to look at the swing. There's a part of the swing that hardly moves at all. It is the **HINGE**. No matter how wild the swing moves, the hinge is almost still- it is at peace. **THE HINGE** represents the **HOLY SPIRIT**- represents God's Truth- God's presence that says "cast your cares upon **ME**- make your focus **ME**- and I will give you rest for your souls- right in the middle of life as it really is.
- **CHURCH**- our physical life, the cares of this life that are very real and very important- they are the seat of the swing. This is where we live in this physical life. **BUT OUR TRUE HOME, OUR TRUE CENTER, OUR SOURCE**- is the **HINGE**- the truth and presence of God, where things are still. At peace.
- **SO**, while it is true that I am **IN EAGLE COUNTY**- in my life of questions, confusion, maybe hurt, fear, anger.... My **HOME, MY HEART, MY SOURCE**- **IS IN CHRIST**. He is the center, and he calls us to look to him, to rest in him, as our center, as our frame of reference for the reality of life here in the swing.
- **AND THEN**, as he concludes his greeting Paul invites the believers into a kind of life he will spend the rest of the book explaining.

...to God's holy people in Colossae, the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ: Grace and peace to you from God our Father.

† Grace and Peace

- We see this greeting- this calling and this promise- throughout the New Testament....

2 Peter 1:1-2 Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ,

To those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours: **Grace and peace be yours in abundance** through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

- **In his greeting at the beginning of Revelation, John:**

Revelation 1:4-6 John, To the seven churches in the province of Asia: **Grace and peace to you (what is the source?)** from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, ⁵and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, ⁶and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

- **CHURCH!! This is the ETERNAL GOD who IN CHRIST has come to us, redeemed us, called us his VERY OWN, and calls us INTO HIMSELF, saying... COME TO ME.. IN THIS LIFE RIGHT NOW, TODAY, whatever that may be.... Come into the experience of my GRACE AND MY PEACE.**
- **Think of our true needs in life. What we REALLY, MOST TRULY need and seek after- these are all above the line things... PEACE. HOPE. CONTENTMENT. SECURITY. PATIENCE. LOVE. ACCEPTANCE. MEANING. COURAGE...**
- **Some 30 years ago my father served under a Pastor in an innercity church in Dallas- in OakCliff- David Kuykendall. OF THESE GREATEST NEEDS, David's definition of GOD'S GRACE was...**
- **The presence and power of God to meet my greatest needs, in every circumstance, all the time.**
- **Back to 2 Peter... the passage continues...**

Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord... His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.

- **HEAR! In this short greeting, Paul reveals that IT IS THE WILL of God, as God's Holy People, his Saints, as BY faith in CHRIST we are faithful IN LIFE, with our true home IN CHRIST even as we live in this physical world... for us to KNOW, to EXPERIENCE in the midst of LIFE AS IT REALLY IS... God's grace and peace to us.**
- **I've provided questions... hope to do this throughout study...**

Questions for reflection and discussion

- Although separated by 2000 years, what do we have in common with the people of Colossae?
- God's will for Paul- as an apostle- was specific and unique. What do you **know** is God's will for you, and for all believers? What does this look like in your life?
- In your own words, what does it mean that you are one of God's Holy people? What are the greatest attributes of holiness?
- What does it look like to be *faithful in Christ*?
- How do you experience God's Grace and Peace? How do you extend God's grace and peace to others?

Lord, we thank you that you have blessed us, and that you DO keep us... that IN CHRIST you have made your face to shine upon us, you have come to us, and IN CHRIST you have shown us the fullness of your Grace, and IN YOU we may know your peace