

Introduction

Colossians

Putting Jesus in his place.

That was the issue the church at Colossae were wrestling with.

There was a plethora of other gods and spiritual beings to worship. The city was rife with syncretism, the belief that you can worship Jesus but need to supplement your faith by turning to other powers and authorities. If you got sick or wanted your business to flourish, surely it was expedient to pay allegiance to these other powers and not just Jesus? In Colossae, Jesus was eminent. He had status. The fundamental question was, 'Is he pre-eminent?' Jesus was important, just not all-important; he was adequate but not totally sufficient for every need. He was better, not the best.

Writing from a prison cell in Rome, Paul warned these new believers of the danger of turning to another Jesus who is less than the Jesus of the Bible, the Son of the living God. If they failed to heed his warning, their faith and everything associated with it would eventually unravel.

Their trade-in of the real Jesus would give them a domesticated Jesus, a Jesus who might be Lord of some things but not Lord of all.

Colossae was a church that had to find its way in the world of its day, without the advantage of all the background knowledge Christians have today, after centuries of Christian civilization. Yet, by God's grace, it was part of a first-century missionary church that outlived, out-thought and out-died its contemporary world, and passed on the baton of faith.

That is why Colossians is so important for the church today. We still live in a world full of pluralistic ideologies, philosophies and religions all competing for our attention and devotion. Every day, in many practical ways, we face the challenge of whether Jesus is pre-eminent in our lives. Putting Jesus in his place is still something we wrestle with. Be encouraged as you study this epistle to the Colossians. This letter, if we listen to it, will provide challenge, inspiration and a renewed focus to keep on living for Christ in our generation.

Day 1

Read Colossians 1:1–2

Key verse: Colossians 1:1

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*¹Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,
and Timothy our brother . . .*

How do you introduce yourself?

We often describe ourselves in terms of our significant relationships or what we do for a living – ‘I’m John’s wife’, ‘I’m David’s son’, ‘I’m a teacher’, ‘I’m a nurse’, ‘I’m a student’.

When he was writing to the believers in Colossae, Paul introduced himself simply as ‘an apostle’ (verse 1). The word apostle in Scripture actually means ‘sent one’. The Latin equivalent is missionary. At one level, every Christian is a sent one; we have been sent by the risen Christ into the world. But there is an exclusive sense to this word too. When Paul says he is an apostle, he means he is someone who has seen the risen Lord and has been

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personally commissioned by him as a bearer of the apostolic gospel (see 1 Corinthians 9:1–2; 15:1–8). So verse 5 mentions the ‘word of the truth’, and verse 6 knowing ‘the grace of God in truth’ (NKJV). Paul is not an apostle as a result of deciding to get a new job because he thought that Judaism had had its day. Rather, it was the will of God (verse 1). He had been converted on the Damascus Road; he had seen the risen Lord and had been commissioned by him.

If it was the will of God for Paul to be an apostle, it was also God’s will for him to write this letter. Colossians is one of Paul’s prison epistles, written around the same time as Ephesians, Philippians and Philemon. Paul found a writing ministry when he was in prison for the gospel. I don’t suppose he would have willingly signed up for that, but he realized it was the will of God that he should be in prison at that time. In prison by the will of God? That is a jarring note for many Christians today. To be a success, to be a winner, to be always on the up, surely that is the will of God? Isn’t it God’s will for me always to be healthy, wealthy and wise? But here we find Paul in prison by the will of God.

Perhaps we need to rethink what God’s will is?

: Are you in circumstances you would not choose for
: yourself? What is your prison? Is it illness, heartbreak,
: redundancy, bereavement, the onset of old age? What-
: ever your prison is, God can use it for his purposes, just
: as he did for Paul. From prison Paul was able to write
: this letter that has blessed countless generations of
: believers. God can use your prison for his glory too.

:
: And we know that in all things God works for the good
: of those who love him, who have been called according
: to his purpose.
: (Romans 8:28)