



## Sermon: Colossians 1:1-14

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The Epistle reading starts us off in Colossians. It is a lovely letter. There are great riches here, so I plan to focus on it over the next weeks as good fare for us all.

Paul wrote this letter to a young church in Colossa, a city in West Turkey about 80 miles inland from Paul's preaching base, Ephesus.

The local people were called the Phrygians, there were settlers from Greece, Rome and there was a Jewish community. Antiochus the Great moved 2000 Jews from exile in Babylon to Colossae. By Paul's time there were about 50,000 Jews living in Colossae. The synagogues in that area were noted for lax morals and speculative doctrine. Phrygians were animists – fearful of the spirits of the mountains and the water – which were referred to as the elemental spirits. Romans and Greeks worshipped immoral gods who were far away.

One of Paul's disciples Epaphras had gone there and preached the gospel which said you don't need to fear the elemental spirits of nature, Christ has conquered all demons, Christ has dealt with sin and allowed you to have close access to God the Father. He has now visited Paul who is in prison in Rome about 62AD. Paul wrote to this church - it seems because some problems had developed among them. It was a huge effort to send a courier across half the Mediterranean so why was it so important? From the direction of Paul teaching it seems the people held onto their old beliefs as they came into Christianity. If you add anything to faith in Christ you weaken that saving faith.

For the Colossians it was: "What are you doing worshiping angels or elemental spirits? What are you doing seeking your revelation in horoscopes?" For us, are we incorporating new age?, how are we putting other beliefs ahead of Christ?, are we putting other philosophies ahead of Christ's revelation? Are we reducing the moral standard to be more comfortable or easier? There are many ways of compromise.

The big theme of Colossians is Christ. Christ is the creator of the Universe and he has all authority, he is everything. The fullness of God dwells in him.

Don't get your religions mixed - get Christ and you get God.

### **Colossians 1:1-14**

**Verses 1-2** This is the formal greeting of the letter. It is from Paul, writing as an Apostle – an ambassador of Jesus Christ – we heard last week Jesus saying to the 72 that whoever accepted them accepted him and whoever rejected them rejected him and therefore God the Father. Paul says he was appointed by the will of God. He has authority to teach and instruct them and us. If we reject his teaching, we therefore reject the teaching of Jesus and logically, we reject God the Father.

He is writing to the believers in Christ in Colossae. He calls them holy ones or saints and faithful brothers and sisters. If you believe in Christ, you are a saint. That does not mean you are perfect it means you are dedicated to him, you are on the way - being perfected. You may be a believer but are you a faithful one? It is the faithful ones who are the strength of a church.

**Verse 3-5** Whenever, he prays for them – and he tells them in verse 9 that he has not stopped praying for them – when he prays for them he thanks God for what they have. It is God who is the source of the blessings we have. It is God who enables us to serve and be faithful. So we thank God for the good in other people.

What do they have? Faith, hope and love. Their faith is in Christ Jesus. We all put faith in people and organisations everyday. You trust the bank with your money, the bus driver with your safety – that is faith! What is important is that you rely on Jesus.

As we grow in faith in Jesus, we grow in love for other Christians. It is a love for all the saints. A wonder of the Church is that there is love and relationship across the divides of humanity: age, race, class, language. When you go to another country as a Christian you can go to a church and be accepted.

Yet, Paul tells that this faith and love grow out of hope. It is not the other way around. Be aware that the hope he is talking about is for what is stored up for us in heaven. It is not wishful thinking. It is expectation of a future event. Biblical hope is certainty because of the trustworthiness of the one who has promised.

How do we know about what is stored up for us in heaven? Verse 5: it is what we are told in the word of truth which is the gospel. For the Colossians this came by the preaching of Epaphras. For us it comes from what is written in the New Testament and preaching true to what it says. How can we have any knowledge of life in heavenly glory apart from God's revelation of it? Christian hope can only be based on the Bible – anything else is speculation, wishful thinking or possibly deception.

Our faith and love are based on our hope in heaven. If there is no expectancy of an afterlife, why be concerned about salvation? Faith in Jesus Christ does not make sense if there is no good future. When you start to realise that there is a consequence for sin but there is an answer in Jesus, then you start to be interested in believing.

Even love – that is agape love for all Christians – is based on that hope. We are going to live together in heaven. Loving each other now is part of a foretaste of that future life.

Paul prays for them in a certain way (v10). That God would fill them with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. Why? So that they may lead lives worthy of the Lord and please him.

Now this is not salvation by works. He has already said that the gospel is about God's grace – his free, undeserved, generous gift. And when we receive it, when we come into that new life, then we start to live in a way that gives pleasure to God and is worthy of him.

Paul tells us more about what that looks like:

1. **We will bear fruit in every good work.**
2. **We will grow in the knowledge of God:** As we get to know God following him, we come to know how his heart, we start to think with the mind of Christ.
3. **We will be strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so we may have great endurance and patience.** Endurance is living above the circumstances. Endurance uses the difficulties and does what needs to be done anyway. Endurance is not being resigned to the circumstances but resolution in the face of them. Paul says we can draw on God's power to endure.

On the other hand, patience is dealing with people. All of us have rough edges and others need to be patient with us. When people are difficult, we need God's strength to give us patience. I acknowledge I am sometimes impatient – please forgive me where I have been impatient. But I am not alone in that. From this verse, we can all learn that we need to ask God for his power to endure and be patient.

4. **We will joyfully give thanks to Father who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.**  
Do you get it? - salvation gives us inheritance in God's kingdom. We share in the riches of Christ as co-heirs.

And then we come to the lovely verses 13-14 "For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."

I said before that Paul was not talking about earning salvation by good works. Here it is: God has rescued us, he has given us redemption. We have forgiveness of sins. These are gifts of God from his grace. We don't deserve it; we can't earn it; we can only ask for it and receive it.

Redemption is a word from the slave market when someone paid to set a slave free. We could think of the ransom paid to set a kidnap victim free. It is a picture of what Christ has done for us on the cross.

There is also a picture of emigration or transfer. The word brought (or translated in the King James) was used elsewhere of colonists being taken from their country to be settled in another.

There is a reality of two rulers and two kingdoms. There is a kingdom of light and one of darkness. Christ is the ruler of the kingdom of light. When we put our trust in Jesus to save us, God takes us as refugees. We are taken out of a dangerous realm to a safe place – a refuge. But this is not a refugee camp, it is a far more glorious place than the miserable existence left behind.

We were in a place of darkness – now we have light – revelation, purity. What is the border between darkness and light, between death and life, between slavery and freedom? The border is labelled “forgiveness.” You cross the border when your sins are forgiven.

When we are forgiven we are translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God’s son and we stand as inheritors of God’s riches with Christ – and it is all by grace. Have you asked him for forgiveness and trusted that he has saved you? Do you know you have emigrated from the kingdom of darkness and become a citizen of the Kingdom of Light? In Christ that is your inheritance.