

GLENKIRK CHURCH



WEEKLY DEVOTIONS

The DEVO

AUGUST 24 - 28, 2020



MONDAY

Colossians 1:1-8; Daniel 7:13-14; Revelation 21:5-7

The Apostle Paul's letter to the Colossians—along with Ephesians, Philippians and Philemon—comprise his “prison epistles.” Most date these concurrent with Paul's first Roman imprisonment, 60-62 AD. As we will be spending much of the next 13 weeks in Colossians, let's consider the context of this book whose central theme is the supremacy of Christ.

Colossae was located in Asia Minor, modern-day Turkey. “Historically, Colossae was a prosperous city, and famous for its fabric dyes. But by Paul's time, its glory as a city was on the decline.” (David Guzik) “[Colossae was a] significant city in 5th century BC, but no longer ... in Paul's day. ... [It was] planted during the Ephesian mission—A.D. 52-55 ... [and was] evangelized by Epaphras (Colossians 1:7) a Colossian (4:12), now a fellow prisoner with Paul (Philemon 23).” (Steve Gregg)

“[The Colossians] were on the verge of losing their understanding of the power by which Christian life is lived. ... This letter is the great proclamation and explanation of the power of the Christian's life through Christ as the resource of the individual.” (Ray Stedman) “Colossians emphasizes Christ as the Head to the church, and of all creation. ... The ‘Colossian heresy’... [combined] Jewish legalism, Greek philosophy, and mystery religions (asceticism, worship of angels).” (Gregg)

“The Colossian Heresy ... [was] a mixture of early Gnosticism and Judaism ... based on the relatively common idea at the time that because men were evil, flesh itself must be evil and could not therefore directly approach

God or Christ. Thus there was a need for a man's spirit to come to God through some semi-divine intermediaries. ... It further included the practice of asceticism, of following certain ordinances in respect of abstinence from food and drink and observing of holy days as a means of battling with the flesh." (Peter Pett)

The Colossian church was then less than 10 years old, yet was losing its way already—it was increasingly snared by legalism, external influences and associated, corrupt doctrine. This serves as a warning to us, both individually and corporately. "[Our] hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. ... Christ alone, Cornerstone." (Myrin, Morgan and Liljero)

QUESTIONS

Which books of the Bible are the Apostle Paul's "prison epistles"?
With what issues are the church at Colossae struggling?

PRAYERS FOR AFRICAN ENTERPRISE

Pray for African Enterprise, which has worked to bring peace, reconciliation and hope to African nations for 50 years. AE's evangelistic approach involves mobilizing thousands of local volunteers and churches in African nations to bring the Good News of Jesus to people in North Africa.

TUESDAY

Colossians 1:7-8; Matthew 6:1-2, 19-20; Matthew 23:5-8

The Apostle Paul, penman of at least 13 of the 27 New Testament books and a key figure in Acts, is one of the Bible's most prominent players. Paul's coworkers include other "big names"—Luke, Mark, Barnabas, Silas, Apollos, Timothy, Titus and Philemon, the latter three namesakes for Pauline epistles.

However, Paul's writings name other colleagues, including Priscilla (who some believe penned Hebrews) and her husband Aquila, along with other women—Apphia, Euodia, Junia, Mary, Persis, Phoebe, Tryphena, and Tryphosa. Recognizing otherwise obscure women for their meaningful roles in the early church challenges Paul's reputation as a "male chauvinist."

But what about Epaphras, named only in Colossians 1:7 and 4:12, and Philemon 1:23? "Little is known about him, though we can infer that he was a native of Colossae and that he was perhaps converted by Paul himself during the apostle's ministry in Ephesus." (Douglass Moo) "Epaphras was the missionary by whose instrumentality the Colossians had been converted to Christianity, and probably the other churches of the Lycus had been founded by him." (S.F. Hunter) "Epaphras, sent out by Paul ... established the church at Colossae. ... He also established the churches at Laodicea and Hierapolis." (Peter Pett)

Epaphras founded at least three churches, seemingly a big deal. Yet he doesn't get a lot of biblical ink. If we interviewed Epaphras today, however, he would likely have no complaints. Apparently, as a faithful

servant he chose heavenly rewards over earthly recognition (Matthew 6:20).

Our culture is much like the ancient Pharisees': acquire all that you can, control others, make a name for yourself, and leave an honored legacy. Yet the Lord's way is that of a servant, one lovingly putting others first. Paul strove for this, including penning four prison epistles to edify others. Epaphras, Priscilla and others labored for God's kingdom amidst personal denial and persecution. Jesus laid aside His privileges as God (Philippians 2:6-9) and came as One so poor He had "*nowhere to lay His head*" (Matthew 8:20), eventually executed in the most painful, humiliating way possible so that we might live. You and I have much to learn from all of these!

QUESTIONS

What was Epaphras known for? Why would Epaphras likely be unconcerned regarding his relative anonymity today?

PRAYERS FOR AFRICAN ENTERPRISE

Pray for our missions' director Emmanuel Kwizera as we prepare for our missions in November and December.

WEDNESDAY

Colossians 1:3; Hebrews 1:1-3; Luke 6:46-49

Paul identifies the Messiah with a familiar title in Colossians 1:3: “*our Lord Jesus Christ*.” This expression is so familiar that many gloss over what it truly means. Let’s unpack this a bit.

Years ago I was speaking with a colleague, a self-described “spiritual person.” Knowing me as a Christian, she commented, “I’m OK with God; my problem is with Jesus.” Since we were at work, I didn’t pursue this conversation then. But her statement’s oddness struck me. More commonly I’ve heard people say they admire Jesus, but object to Christianity and “organized religion.” She struggled with Jesus Himself, but why?

“The title ‘the Lord Jesus Christ’ contains three elements. Firstly, He is Lord (*kurios*), the One Whose Name is above every name, Yahweh Himself (Philippians 2:9). ... Secondly, He is ‘Jesus’ (‘God is salvation’). He became flesh and dwelt among us. He was truly Man. ... Thirdly, He is ‘the Christ’... the expected King Messiah, the One appointed to eternal Rule ... the One before Whom every knee shall bow (Philippians 2:10).” (Pett)

In calling Jesus Lord, you declare Him as your Ruler and King. Fallen, rebellious people might bristle at such subordination. Joan Osborn had a 1995 popular song, “One of Us,” which lamented “What if God was one of us?”—as if this were far-fetched. But the Bible teaches that He is, in Jesus of Nazareth, God the Son. My colleague’s problem, however, was with Jesus as the Christ, the anointed Savior.

Jesus said, “*I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me*” (John 14:6). Her real issue, the stumbling block for many: Christianity’s “exclusivity.” But is it truly exclusive?

There are no credentials for coming to Christ—no qualifying pedigree or ancestry, IQ, financial means, etc. Only your heartfelt need for a Savior, asking Him to save you while repentantly turning from sin. That’s it. Is it reasonable to criticize a Gift because it is unique, to slam the Giver accordingly while calling its recipients arrogant? The gift of salvation in Christ is free—one need only receive it. Go, tell others this good news!

QUESTIONS

What does the expression “our Lord Jesus Christ” truly mean? What are some of the typical problems that unbelievers have with Jesus?

PRAYERS FOR AFRICAN ENTERPRISE

Please pray for the people suffering in COVID-19 lockdowns that they might have food for their families and stay safe.

THURSDAY

Colossians 1:2-5; Isaiah 9:6; Hebrews 4:1-3

Today's Colossians verses include terms familiar in Christendom: grace and peace (Colossians 1:2), faith and love (1:4), and hope (1:5). In Isaiah 9:6, God's Son is named, among other titles, the "*Prince of Peace*." Hebrews 4:3, conversely, borrows a stark warning from Psalm 95:11 "*They shall not enter my rest.*" How do all of these interrelate?

Given our inherited fallenness and associated sin nature, each of us is born a rebel against God, "at war" with Him (Romans 8:7), whether we recognize it or not. Jesus, the *Prince of Peace*, came to end this conflict and reconcile us with the Almighty. This reconciliation comes via God's mercy—"not getting what you deserve" (condemnation)—activated when we accept Christ and are thereby justified (judged guiltless). With that mercy comes God's grace—"getting what you don't deserve"—the gift of adoption into God's eternal family. In Paul's Colossians 1:2 salutation grace precedes peace, as peace is impossible without grace coming first.

Absent peace with God, knowable only in Jesus Christ, we are unable to experience true, sustainable rest—from toiling to "earn salvation," striving to "appear righteous," etc. "With the establishment of the Old Testament Law, the Jews were constantly 'laboring' to make themselves acceptable to God ... [by] trying to obey a myriad of do's and don'ts of the ceremonial law, the Temple law, the civil law, etc." (GotQuestions.org) The ancient Jews worked to earn favor with God; as with contemporary religious people, there is no rest here. Even worse, works-based religion itself is one obstacle to knowing Jesus Christ personally. Paul understood this as a former Pharisee.

“In [Jesus Christ] we find complete rest from the labors of our self-effort. ... He alone satisfies the requirements of the Law, and ... provides the sacrifice that atones for sin. [Jesus] is God’s [way] for us to cease from the labor of our own works.” (GotQuestions.org)

Such grace-enabled, peaceful rest is a fountainhead for the other virtues Paul mentions: faith, love and hope. Whom do you know who, apparently, has not entered yet into God’s rest in Jesus Christ? How will you lovingly introduce them to the *Prince of Peace*?

QUESTIONS

Why is Jesus called the “*Prince of Peace*”? What does “*They shall not enter my rest*” mean? How are religious people, including most ancient Jews, often unable to know the “rest” that Jesus Christ offers?

PRAYERS FOR AFRICAN ENTERPRISE

Pray for Christians in Zimbabwe to have concern for the lost and actively seek opportunities to share the gospel with those around them.

FRIDAY

Colossians 1:4-6; Ezekiel 3:17-19; Romans 10:13-17

Penning Colossians circa 60-62 AD, Paul proclaims, “*the gospel ... [is impacting] the whole world ... bearing fruit and increasing*” (1:5-6). He was considering the then-known “civilized” world. But is this still true? “Almost 2.2 billion people living today (28% of earth’s population) are still considered unevangelized (having never heard the Gospel).” (Facts&Trends)

There are two common responses here. One is shutting down concluding, “There’s little I can do; I can’t travel overseas on a mission and I’m not an evangelist.” The other: “Fund global missions more; I’ll go myself and increase my financial support.” While the second response is excellent, faithful to Jesus’ Great Commission command to “*Go ... and make disciples of all nations*” (Matthew 28:19), there are other practical things we should be doing locally today.

“One out of five non-Christians in North America doesn’t know a Christian.” (Christianity Today) Jesus said, “*the fields are [ripe] for harvest*” (John 4:35)—however, those “fields” are right here in the US, in our community and your neighborhood. I don’t know all my neighbors; there are a few of them I have never met even though we’ve lived nearby for years. How am I doing with the Great Commission?

With the pandemic caveat and our need to act responsibly, here are some practical “baby steps” for all believers: practice spiritual conversation starters, giving others clues regarding your faith, seeing if this prompts related dialog. When asked, “How’s it going?” instead of “OK,” say “I’m blessed.” Ask others regularly, “How can I pray for you?” Jim Henderson’s suggestions include: Ask someone, “How are you?” When they answer, actually listen—

when Christians show genuine interest, people may begin believing that God might actually *like* them. Do things for others, putting their needs first. Pray behind people's backs. Practice "nonmanipulative intentionality"—actions that engage others without trying to control them.

But don't settle only for the "Preach the Gospel at all times; use words when necessary" slogan. Living the Gospel is foundational, but we must voice it as well. "Jesus advocated two basic evangelism practices. ... *Speak* the Gospel (Mark 16:15) ... and *serve* the Gospel (Matthew 25:40)." (Henderson) "*The fields are ripe*" indeed, even in your own neighborhood!

QUESTIONS

What are some simple, practical things that you and every believer can be doing today to help "*make disciples*"? What "spiritual conversation starter" appeals to you, one you can incorporate now into your daily life? What's one problem with the slogan, "Preach the Gospel at all times; use words when necessary"?

PRAYERS FOR AFRICAN ENTERPRISE

There are food shortages in Malawi, high prices, and a risk of widespread suffering as a result. Pray for good governance and planning to overcome these issues.

Sources:

- David Guzik's quote is from https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik_david/StudyGuide2017-Col/Col-1.cfm
- Steve Gregg's quotes can be found at http://matthew713.com/notes/files/Colossians_Intro.pdf
- Ray Stedman's quote is from <https://www.raystedman.org/new-testament/colossians>
- Peter Pett's quotes can be found at <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/pet/colossians.html>
- Jonas Myrin's, Reuben Morgan's and Eric Liljero's quoted lyrics are from their song, "Cornerstone," published © 2011 Hillsong Music Publishing (APRA).
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