

Place: Lurgan Baptist 8:3:2016

A JOURNEY THROUGH THE BIBLE

Reading: Colossians 1:14-22

52. THE BOOK OF COLOSSIANS

When Andrew Morton released his book, “*My Story*,” detailing the life of Diana, the Princess of Wales, he burst a bubble that left many people disappointed and disillusioned with life behind the closed doors of the royal residences at Kensington Palace and High grove. On the heels of Mr. Morton’s sensational publication came the equally sensational revelations about Sarah, the Duchess of York, and the consequent breakdown of her royal marriage. Faith in royalty and esteem for the Royal family had been dealt a heavy blow. Margaret Thatcher’s book “*The Downing Street Years*,” was soon on the book shelves. In this book Baroness Thatcher in her own forthright way spilled the beans by frankly telling of the double dealing that went on within her Cabinet, and at times behind her back, prior to her forced resignation after eleven years at the top of British politics.

Once again the Cabinet revelations left many disillusioned and disappointed with some of our political leaders. Nor has the Church escaped the public’s disenchantment with organized religion. The notorious Bishop of Durham has relegated the Christmas message to a matter of myth and fable and other clerics readily agree. Thanks to this confusion brought on by those who profess to belong to

Christendom, the same disappointments have also effected some people’s perception of Jesus Christ. Today, many voices tell us that we need something *more* than Jesus Christ *some more exciting experience*. Others propose that we can do with something *less* than Jesus Christ saying all ways lead to one God. And many preach something, or someone *other* than Jesus Christ. Sadly, even among Christians a mild indifference to the centrality and supremacy of our Lord Jesus has set in. I mean is it not so easy to become jaded and faded in our appreciation of our Saviour ? My what we need is a fresh appreciation of who Jesus Christ really is, what place He occupies and how relevant He is to our times. How can we recapture that ? By turning to the letter to the Colossians for the theme of this book is the preeminence of Christ. (1:18 2:10) Now it will help us in our study if we consider,

1. THE CITY:

Of Colosse. Do you see (1:2) ? Colosse was one of a trio of a cities Hierapolis and Laodicea being the other two and it was located about 125 miles southeast of the city of Ephesus. These three cities were almost within view of each other. Colosse in the western part of Turkey does not exist today and even in Paul’s time the town had diminished in importance compared to its two neighbours. One striking feature about the city was that it had a mixed population which meant the town had many different religions.

2. THE CHURCH:

In Colosse is not mentioned in the book of Acts. Indeed it seems that Paul had never visited this city. (2:1) Well, how did the Colossian church begin ? Well, it was the outgrowth of Paul's three year ministry at Ephesus.

(Acts 19, 20:17-18) So effective was the witness at this time we read “ *So that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus both Jews and Greeks.* ”

(Acts 19:10) This would include people in Colosse, Laodicea and Hierapolis. One of Paul's converts in Ephesus was a man named Epaphras who was a native of Colosse. He took the message of the gospel back home and through his witness the church was formed. (1:4-7 4:12-13) Have you ever heard of Philemon ? Well, the church in Colosse met in the home of Philemon for he lived at Colosse with one of his slaves Onesimus (4:9) *Do you know something ?* The Lord does not need an apostle, or a pastor, or a full time worker to get a ministry established. He just needs believers like Epaphras who are available and open to Him. 1: 2:

3. THE CRISIS:

Why did Paul write this letter to the church in Colosse ? Because a crisis had occurred that was about to destroy the ministry of the church. Paul was now a prisoner in Rome. Epaphras had made the 1000 mile trip from Colosse to Rome to report to Paul that a new teaching was invading the church and causing trouble. Now Bible scholars have argued endlessly about what was happening at Colosse. *What was this heresy ?* The heresy was commonly called Gnosticism, from the Greek word gnosis which means “ *to know.* ” The Gnostics were “ *in the*

know, ” that is they professed to have a superior knowledge of spiritual things. Warren Wiersbe says “ *their doctrine was a strange blending of some Christian truth, Jewish legalism, Greek philosophy and Eastern mysticism.* ” You see, it had two basic features.

(a) **A FALSE PHILOSOPHY:**

Paul says “ *Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit.* ” (2:8) The Greeks loved knowledge. They literally gloated over what they knew, and the higher you got in knowledge and the more difficult you were to understand, and the further you got spaced out with strange, weird understanding, the more snobbish you became. The heretics were saying this, “ *The simplicity of the gospel is not adequate.* ” Jesus Christ is not enough, you must have elaborate knowledge in addition to having Him. *Salvation is this, Christ plus knowledge equals salvation.* They said Jesus Christ is not adequate. You see, they were trying to come to terms with the question, *why is there evil in this world if creation was made by a holy God ?* They came to the false conclusion that matter was evil and that a holy God could not come into contact with evil matter, so there had to be a series of “ *emanations,* ” sub-gods from God to His creation. *Do you know who they said the Lord Jesus was ?* They said He was one of the good emanations and the bad ones were the demons. Jesus was just one of those angels, He was not God, He was sub-God.

(b) **A JEWISH CEREMONY:**

(2:11) What was this part of the heresy saying ? *Christ plus works equals salvation*. The philosophy part said Christ plus knowledge equals salvation, this part said Christ plus works equals salvation, and God says, *Christ plus nothing equals salvation*. Now that's the message of Colossians. That is why,

4. THE CORRESPONDENCE:

This letter was written to Colosse by Paul and delivered by Tychicus. (4:7) You see, Paul wrote three kinds of letters. He wrote to *individuals*, known in the Bible by the name of the individual, he wrote *occasional* letters to address a particular situation in a church, then he wrote *general* letters which were for general circulation and did not deal with particular problems. When Paul wrote Colossians an occasional letter, he also wrote an individual letter to Philemon, and a general letter known as Ephesians, though it was probably intended for use in a number of churches. They were probably sent at the same time and sent with the same postman, Tychicus to the same area. Now in many ways Ephesians and Colossians are twin letters. They contain similar expressions yet there are differences.

The emphasis in Ephesians is on the church, the body of Christ, the emphasis in Colossians is on Christ, the head of the body. In Ephesians the believer is “ *in Christ in the heavenlies*,” (Eph 1:3) in Colossians Christ is “ *in the believer on earth*.” (1:27) In Ephesians we read of “ *the Spirit filled man*,” in Colossians we read of “ *the Scripture filled man*.” Perhaps you're saying, “ is

Colossians relevant for today ?” Well, let me ask you, do the heavenly bodies have any influence over our lives ? Six out of ten men and seven out of ten women read their horoscope every day. Some even take business decisions based on what their stars purport to tell them. Do the Eastern religions have something to offer the evangelical Christian ? What about transcendental meditation ? What about interest in “ *the spirit*,” world ? What about those who promise “ *a deeper life*,” a system for victory and fullness that bypasses devotion to the Lord Jesus ? Do these questions not sound contemporary ? Well, these are the issues that Paul dealt with at Colosse. You see, wrong views of Christianity are usually born out of wrong views of Christ. That's why Paul theme in in this letter is the preeminence of Christ. Notice then,

(1) **The Preeminence of CHRIST AFFIRMED Ch 1**

Many people today like the false teachers at Colosse will give Jesus Christ a place but they will not give Him His rightful place of preeminence. The Lord Jesus is not a “ *great man among great men*.” He is God's Son, preeminent in all things. Now after an introduction as to how they were saved and Paul's prayer for their growth we see that the apostle in the midst of fierce onslaughts from a pagan world affirms the preeminence of Christ. Much of the heresy in the Colossian church centered on the person of Christ. So Paul declares that Christ is,

(a) **Preeminent in His PERSON:**

“ *Who is the image of the invisible God.*” (1:15) “ *He is*

the visible expression of the invisible God.” (Phillips)

Now remember these Gnostic teachers claimed that God made the worlds through a series of “*emanations*,” from Himself and that Christ was one of these emanations but Paul asserts that Christ is not an emanation from God but God Himself. “*Image*,” (*eikon*) means “*the exact reproduction*.” Do we wish to know what God is like ? We may so do for “*he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father*,” (Jn 14:9) said our Lord Jesus. In the person of the Lord Jesus God has shown us exactly what He is like. The lines of Deity have been reproduced in Christ’s humanity. So to find out what God, is like we need only to look at Christ. Now do you see that term “*firstborn*,” ? It does not refer to time as though Christ were the first thing God created but to position or place or status.

“*Firstborn*,” simply means “*of first importance of first rank*.” Solomon was certainly not born first of all of David’s sons yet he was named the firstborn. (Ps 89:27) “*The firstborn of every creature*,” simply means “*prior to all creation*.” My Jesus Christ is not a created being, as Arius and the Jehovah Witnesses and many of the cults teach, He is eternal God. I love John’s wording of it, “*In the beginning was the Word*,” (Jn 1:1) The verb John uses takes us into the sphere of the timeless. In other words the Word belongs to a realm where time does not matter. The Word did not have a beginning. The Word will never have an ending. The Word belongs to eternity. My is this not where we must being when we think of the Lord Jesus ? We must think of Christ as never having begun at all. He is eternally God. “*Thou art the everlasting Word*,” (a)

(b) Preeminent in His POWER:

He Creates all things: Did you notice (1:16) “*For by Him were all things created*.” (1:16) **1. In heaven:** angels and cherubim, the invisible. Galaxies, stars, planets, and moons, the visible. **2. In earth:** animals and rocks, oceans and rivers, clouds and mountains. **3. In governments:** ranks of spiritual beings, “*thrones, dominions, principalities and powers...*,” (Eph. 6:12; 2:15) Again, this was an area that was attacked, and assaulted by the false teachers at Colosse. They viewed Jesus Christ as the first and most important of the emanations from God. But they were convinced it had to be a lesser being, much further down the chain, who eventually created the material universe as we know it. But Paul rejects that blasphemy insisting that by Him all things were created. My have you ever paused to consider the vastness of our universe ? Astronomers tell us that there are a hundred billion stars in our galaxy, a hundred million galaxies in known space and that known space is only billionth of theoretical space.

According to Sir James Jeans “*the total number of stars in the universe is probably something like the number of grains of sand on all the seashores of the world*.” And Jesus Christ made them all. Are you facing a crisis at home, in business? Does there seem to be no way out ? My your Saviour is the Creator of the Universe and “*nothing is too hard*” (Jer 32:17) *He Claims all things:* if we ask why the Lord created all things, the answer is found in (1:16) “*And for him*.” As John Calvin says, “*Creation is the theatre of His glory*.”

(Rev 4:11) He Controls all things: For its “ *by him all things consist,*” or “ *hold together.*” (1:17) Can you imagine what would happen if the Lord Jesus relinquished His sustaining power to the laws of the universe ? I mean the sun has a surface temperature of twelve thousand degrees Fahrenheit. If it were any closer to earth we would burn, and if it were any further we would freeze. Do you know the reason this universe is a cosmos and not chaos is because of the upholding power of Christ. Are you doubting the ability of Christ to keep you ? Oh, He is able to keep you from falling. (Jude 24) He is able to make all grace abound toward you. He is able to do exceeding abundantly above that we ask or think.

(c) Preeminent in His POSITION:

“ *And he is the head of the body the church,*” (1:18)
That's His Supremacy: The word “ *head,*” gives the sense of origin and source as well as leader and ruler. When Ronald Regan was president of the U.S.A. he appointed Dr. Everett Koop, a committed Christian as the Surgeon General. Dr. Koop was the first man to separate Siamese twins successfully. You know a body with two heads would be a freak of nature. My God gave His Son to be the Head of the church which is His body, and Christ is the Sole and Only Head of His Church. And just as my head (brain) controls my body so Christ is in control of His body, the church. He is “ *the beginning,*” that is the Originator of the new creation, the church. “ *The firstborn from the dead,*” means first to rise again never to die again. That's His Sovereignty: “ *For it pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell.*” (1:19) That's His

Sufficiency: have you noticed the repetition of the word “ *all,*” in this chapter ? It shows the universal rule of Jesus Christ over everything that exists. Still again do you see that Greek word translated “ *fullness,*” ? (pleroma) That was one of the words the false teachers at Colosse were using ? They were focusing how fullness could be found through their practices so Paul uses the same word to describe Christ. It means “ *the sum total of all the divine power and attributes.*” “ *For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.*” (2:9) My do you see what Paul is saying ? He is saying there is nothing lacking in Christ because the fullness of deity, power and grace are His. Today there are many voices which tell us we need something **more** than Jesus Christ, some more exciting experience.

Others propose that we can do with something **less** than Jesus Christ, saying all ways leads to God. And many preach something or someone **other** than Jesus Christ. But Paul tells us that Christ has no rival. He needs no supplement. He is not deficient at any point. I wonder like these folk is your view of the Saviour too low ? Have you become indifferent to the centrality and supremacy of the Lord Jesus ? Listen, He is Pre-eminent in (a) (b) (c) and,

(d) Preeminent in His PASSION:

For here Paul takes us to the cross and shows us that the reconciliation made by the Lord Jesus at Calvary removes the enmity and restores harmony between God and sinners. Do you ever notice that the “ *sometime,*” of (1:21) is replaced by the “ *yet now,*” of (1:21) It is we

who were enemies. It is God who reconciles. My are you impressed with the wonder of His death ? We scarcely need to go beyond this chapter alone. For do you see what we have through the Cross ? Through the Cross we have **Redemption:** “ *In whom we have redemption through His blood,*” (1:14) Through the Cross we have **Forgiveness:** “ *even the forgiveness of sins,*” (1:14) Through the Cross we have **Peace:** “ *Having made peace through the blood of His cross,*” (1:20) and through the Cross we have **Reconciliation:** (1:21-22) My do you know these benefits of the Cross ? Redemption, forgiveness, peace, reconciliation ? My Christian do you appreciate the work that Christ accomplished on the cross ? Is this why you stay for the Lord’s Table ? Is this what you motivates you in Christian service ?

When Christians say, “ *Christ is a big part of my life,*” they reveal Christ is not preeminent in their life. He doesn’t want to be simply a part of your life. He wants to be pre-eminent number one in your life. Is Christ pre-eminent in your daily life ? Can you say with John the Baptist, “ *He must increase, but I must decrease,*” (Jn 3:31)

(2) The Preeminence of CHRIST ATTACKED Ch 2

Here Paul gets to the heart of the problem and defends the simplicity of the Christian faith against a four-fold danger. In essence he says, “ ***Believer beware.***” We pick it up in (2:4) where Paul says “ *And this I say lest any man should beguile you with enticing words.*” Three more times in this chapter you find a similar statement. Look at

(2:8) “ *Beware lest any man spoil you,*” in (2:16) “ *Let no man therefore judge you,*” and (2:18) “ *Let no man beguile you,*” Now what does that little phrase tell you ? It tells you that these false teachers who had come to the church at Colosse wanted the Colossian believers to accept what can only be called additions to Christ. They were basically saying you need something in addition to Jesus Christ. The basic premise of those false teachers was this. Jesus Christ is not a unique Saviour, Jesus Christ is not an all sufficient Savior, you need something in addition to Jesus Christ, or you need a substitute for Jesus Christ. You see, these false teachers,

1. Wanted to teach an additional philosophy: (2:8)
2. Wanted to introduce a system of astrology: (2:8)
3. Wanted to impose circumcision on Christians: (2:11)
4. Wanted to lay down ascetic rules and regulations: (2:16, 20-23)
5. Wanted to introduce the worship of angels: (2:17)

No wonder Paul says “ *Believer beware.*” (2:8) You see, in this chapter Paul is dealing with the proposed substitutes for Jesus Christ, those philosophies, those theologies, those doctrines, those beliefs that would say that you need something more than Jesus Christ. You see, here in this section which lies at the heart of the epistle Paul deals with four substitutes for Christ that are proposed. Look at the first one.

(a) THE PERIL OF INTELLECTUALISM: 2:1-10

Do you see the word “ *philosophy*,” in (2:8) ? It simply means the “ *the love of wisdom*.” Now the word philosophy in and of itself is not a bad thing. I mean had Paul not one of the most brilliant minds in all the world ? You see, you do not have to check in your brains at the door when you enter into the Christian faith. I heard about an old boy that prayed one time, he said, “ *Lord I thank you for my ignorance and I pray you’ll make me ignoranter*.” Will God does not put any special merit on ignorance in the Christian faith. But Paul is speaking here of pagan philosophy. Philips translates it “ *high sounding nonsense*.” You see, philosophy that disregards Christ is empty and vain. “ *For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily and ye are complete in him*.”

(2:9-10) Do you see the Christ here ? Do you see **His Deity**: “ *For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead*,” Is this not what the false teachers at Colosse were denying ? My the sum total who God is resides permanently in Jesus Christ. All the fullness of the divine essence dwells in Christ.

Do you see **His Humanity**: “ *For in bodily*,” Jesus Christ fully God and at the incarnation fully man. Do you see the Christian here: “ *And ye are complete in him*,” same word translated “ *fullness*,” in (2:9) is translated “ *complete*,” in (2:10) You are filled with all fullness in Him. Why do I want anything else then if I’ve got it all in Christ. My when you get Christ you get it all. You are complete in Him. (a)

(b) THE PERIL OF RITUALISM: 2:11-17

Now again ritual in and of itself is not wrong. For instance the Jewish people had all kinds of rituals and those rituals had been given by God Himself. That’s the background of what we find in these verses here. But Paul says you no longer need the shadow when the substance has come. Do you see (2:17) ? You see, these false teachers were telling the Colossians that it was not enough to have Christ they needed to keep the Jewish ceremonial law in relation to diet (Lev 11:1 Acts 10:9 Rom 14:17) and in relation to days. (Lev 23:1 Num 28:11) But Paul says these things “ *are a shadow of things to come*.” (2:17) A believer who puts himself back under ritualism would be like a son admiring the photo of his father but ignoring his father’s actual presence. You see, all of the observances of the old covenant simply shadowed the main object, the Lord Jesus Christ. Roy Laurin puts this matter into perspective when he says,

Any system professing to be Christian which makes days and diets a condition of salvation or even a virtue after salvation is doing so in the face of Scripture.

My don’t let anyone tell you that by keeping a certain day is going to make you any holier. True spirituality does not consist merely of keeping external rules but of having an inner relationship with Jesus Christ. (a) (b)

(c) THE PERIL OF MYSTICISM: 2:18-19

This may be defined as the pursuit of a deeper or higher subjective religious experience. Paul is thinking here about Oriental mysticism the belief that a person can have

experience with the spiritual world completely apart from the Word of God and the Holy Spirit. Here's what they were saying at Colosse " *I am not good enough to come directly to God so I will start with one of the angels.*" My trying to reach God the Father through anyone, or anything other than His Son, Jesus Christ is idolatry. (Jn 14:6 1 Tim 2:5 Matt 4:10 Rev 19:10 22:9) You see, our Christian faith is essentially supernatural in nature, but we must beware of all counterfeit supernaturalism. Dreams, visions, voices rappings, trances, spirit manifestations, ecstatic utterances, tongues, mass healings and angel worship. That's why Paul says in (2:19) Spiritual growth comes from union with Christ. (a)(b)(c)

(d) THE PERIL OF ASCETICISM: 2:20-23

An ascetic is someone who lives a life of self-denial in order to become more spiritual. Evidently there were some at Colosse who were subjecting themselves to rules and regulations. " *Touch not, taste not handle not.*" (2:12) It reminds of a little boy who was introduced to his new school teacher. The teacher asked him for his name, and the young lad replied, " *My name is Don't,*" The confused teacher said, " *Son, you have misunderstood my question. I asked, what is your name ?*" The frustrated lad replied, " *No I understood your question. My name is Don't.*" *Whatever I do, my parents are constantly saying, " Don't Don't Don't Don't. So, my name is Don't."* I wonder is that how I how you look at the Christian life ? As a series of " *Do's and Don'ts.*" In Finland apparently if you are a good Christian you don't whistle. For others good Christians don't wear makeup, lipstick, rouge or that

other pancake mix. David Johnston writes, " *I used to wonder why bowling was so evil while being a dried up old soured puss was ok.*" Do you know what we need to realize ? Our spiritual position. " *If ye be dead with Christ.*" (2:20) My Christianity, spirituality and holiness is a matter of the heart. Legalism says don't do this because of an outward set of rules. But Christianity says I don't want to live that way any more for I am saved. *You see, Christianity is not being inhabited by rules its being inhabited by a Ruler.* " *Christ in you the hope of glory.*" (1:27) We have the blessed Holy Spirit on the inside who enables us to so that which is right. (1) (2)

(3) The Preeminence of Christ APPLIED: Ch's 3-4

For in this closing section Paul tells us how we should " *practice the preeminence of Christ.*" He says,

(a) THERE WILL BE PURITY: 3:1-17

You know, Oriental, Greek and Roman religions said little or nothing about personal holiness. A person could bring sacrifices, say prayers and go away from the altar to commit terrible sins and no one would think he was inconsistent but not so with Christianity. The new life within demands a new life without. Since we have died with Christ we should be put to death " *mortify,*" (3:5) impure behavior. Paul says, " *don't live the way you used to live, the way the unsaved lives. Christ is your life and you died with Him. Now let His life show through you day by day.*" (a)

(b) THERE WILL BE HARMONY: 3:18-4:1

You see, Christlike living extends to the home, it extends to the workplace. You see, the Christian faith is not just personal its relational. And the nitty-gritty, the place where the rubber meets the road is the family, the home, and the workplace. You see, in our domestic life we should take the place that God has ordained for us, as wives, husbands and children. In our business relationships we should be not be men pleasers but Christ pleasers. My have you grasped the fact that in serving your employer you are serving the Lord ? (a) (b)

(c) THERE WILL BE TRANSPARENCY: 4:2-6

There will be an openness about our lives in relation to our *praying* (4:2-4) our *walking* (4:5) and our *speaking*. (4:6) Indeed we will so live that others will wish to become Christians.

(d) THERE WILL BE MINISTRY: 4:7-18

You see, Paul never lost sight of the fact that there were others in the battle besides him. He was not only a great soul winner, he was a great friend maker. Indeed he closes this letter by referring to his “ *co-workers*,” whom he was associated with in the ministry. We could write across this closing section “ *with a little help from my friends*.” Here are believers dear to Paul, known to the Colossians and ministering for the Lord. Now let me ask, is Christ preeminent in your life ? Then, what ministry are you exercising for Him ? Steve Wagers tells the story of a

wealthy man who had only one son whom he loved dearly. The wealthy man was also interested in collecting expensive, and rare pieces of art. He taught his son to love art, as well, and, together, they began to collect some of the most exquisite pieces of art in the world. A war broke out and the son was called away to fight. After a few months, the father received a message that his son was missing in action, and, not long after, he received word that his son had been killed in battle. The father was overwhelmed with grief and heartbroken. He had accumulated all of these treasures, but none of them could compare to his only son.

One day, a knock came to the father’s door. As he opened the door he saw a soldier standing there who said, “ *Sir, I was a good friend of your son. I want you to know that he died trying to save the lives of other people. Sir, I am not an artist, but I painted a picture of your son just before he died, and I wanted to present it to you.*” The father was overjoyed. He had seen better, and more quality art work, but none of that mattered, because this was a portrait of his beloved son. The father took that painting and put it over the mantel in his house, in the midst of millions of dollars worth of art. In time, the old man died. Invitations were sent to come to an auction of the old man’s art collection. Many came from all over the world over to bid, and get in on these rare finds. As the auction opened the auctioneer started off with the painting of the man’s son. Many of the famous art collectors shouted, “ *That isn’t worth anything. We came to see ' real, ' art. Let’s get to the good stuff.*” The auctioneer stated that the stipulation of the father’s will was that the painting of the

son was to be sold first. They started the bidding at one hundred dollars, but there were no bids. Fifty dollars, but there were no bids. Finally, the bidding went to ten dollars, and a fellow in the back said, “ *Ok, I’ll give ten dollars for the painting.*” Suddenly, the auctioneer said, “ *The auction is over.*” There were cries from the crowd, “ *What do you mean over ? You only sold one painting.*” The auctioneer then explained, “ ***According to the will of the father; whoever gets the son, gets it all.***”

My according to the will of the Father, the day that we were saved, when we got the Lord Jesus, we got it all. He is all we need, because He meets our every need and we are complete in Him.