

Place: Lurgan Baptist 21:10:2012

COMPLETE IN HIM

Reading: Colossians 1:1-2

1. SETTING THE SCENE

Dr. Baldwin, who was pastor of a church for 41 years said, this, “ *I testify that at thirty, after examining as best I could the philosophies and religions of the world, I said, 'Nothing is better than the Gospel of Christ.'* At forty, when burdens began to press heavily and years seemed to hasten, I said, ‘ **Nothing is as good as the Gospel.**’ At fifty, when there were empty chairs in the home and the mound builders had done me service, I said, ‘ **There is nothing to be compared with the Gospel.**’ At sixty, when my second sight saw through the delusions and vanities of earthly things, I said, ‘ **There is nothing but the Gospel.**’ At seventy, amid many limitations and deprivations, I sing,

**Should all the forms that men devise
Attack my faith with treacherous art,
I'd call them vanities and lies,
And bind the Gospel to my heart**

We live in a day that is filled with a variety of religious beliefs. We live in a day where the pillars of truth, that have stood for years, and, served as a foundation for our nation, are being torn down. Thus, to many, there are no ‘ *moral absolutes,* ’ or no such thing as ‘ *absolute truth,* ’ Society says, that man can get to God through a variety of

ways. Sad, to say, the cause of this delusion rests primarily with the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. The church at large, has drifted from the fundamentals of the faith. We have succumbed to the opinions of men. And, we have become more concerned with being ‘ *political correct* ’ than ‘ *theologically correct.* ’ Thus, we are preaching a ‘ *social gospel* ’ that seeks to make man feel good, rather than a ‘ *sacred gospel* ’ that shows man how bad he really is. Did Paul not face the same issues as he wrote to the church at Colosse ? It was a church surrounded by a conglomerate of false teaching and beliefs. On the one hand there was *Greek Philosophy* which said, *Christ plus knowledge equals salvation*, on the other hand there was *Jewish Ceremony* which said, *Christ plus works equals salvation*. So Paul wrote Colossians to state that *Christ plus nothing equals salvation*. Now this book of Colossians is relevant and that for a number of reasons.

1. There is the Astrological Reason:

The ancient world was dominated by the thought of the influence of the stars. Even the wisest men would not act without consulting the stars. Does that not sound familiar ? Do the heavenly bodies have any influence over our lives ? Will millions who consult their horoscopes each day would say “ *Yes.* ” You see, the false teachers were saying, “ *You need something more than Jesus Christ to rid you of your subjection to the elemental spirits of the world and to the stars.* ” But Paul says “ *No,* ” for Christ, “ *is the image of the invisible God, the pre-eminent one of all creation.* ” (1:15) “ *For in Him dwells all the fullness*

of the Godhead bodily.” (2:9) 1.

2. There is the Practical Reason:

Is this not the age when people want to know what works ? People are asking basically one question. Does it work ? Does Christ work ? Does He really change a life ? Will I have peace ? Does He give joy ? Does He really bring happiness ? Does He give meaning to life, power, hope and purpose ? Paul answers that when he says, “ *In the body of his flesh through death to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouable in his sight.* ” (1:22)

3. There is the Ecumenical Reason:

This is an age of ecumenism. This is an age when people are working for a one-world church, the super-church. I mean can there be true unity without true doctrine ? Well, everything is being thrown into the pot in these days, and we are told we should all get together. My is this the church that God intends ? Who is the head of this church ? What is the basis of its unity ? Paul answers that question in (1:18) “ *And He is the Head of the body, the church.* ”

4. There is the Moral Reason:

We live in age of frustrated relationships. Many people are lonely, many are unfulfilled, people who are unrelated in a meaningful way to their wives, their husbands, their parents, marriages, families, people who have to work

together, and none of them can get along. What about relationships ? Paul speaks clearly about this issue in (Ch 3)

5. There is the Prophetical Reason:

I mean are people not becoming more aware of the fact that we could be near the end of the world ? We could starve to death, food wars and famine are very possible. War could destroy us, nuclear war, chemical biological warfare. I mean, a lot of people think we're moving on towards the end. And Paul has something to say about destiny in this very letter, he says, “ *When Christ who is our life shall appear then shall ye also appear with him in glory,* ” (3:4) My view this age from every angle and you're going to find Colossians is up to date. It's critical for today. It presents an ageless, timeless eternal Christ as the solution to the dilemma of every man. Now this I want to talk to you about “ **Setting the Scene.** ”

(1) THE CORRESPONDENT TO COLOSSE

The person, who is communicating to them by letter. Can you see,

(a) *HIS IDENTITY:*

Paul. Apart from the Lord Jesus no other person in the New Testament looms so tall as the apostle Paul. His pedigree is impressive even before his conversion. (Phil 3:3-6) On the Damascus Road he encountered the Risen Lord Jesus and life for him was never the same. He

was lifted to incredible heights as an apostle, evangelist, pastor, missionary and finally a martyr. My no-one was more committed to the cause of Christ than Paul. He penned thirteen of the twenty letters of the New Testament and planted churches throughout the Roman Empire. His life's motto could be summed up in his own words, "*For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain.*" (Phil 1:21) Paul wants nothing out of life but to live Christ, and nothing out of death but to be with Christ. Christ is the sum total of all his desires. He aims to be all for Christ while he lives and to find Christ all for him when he dies. An U.S.A. Christian leader once took a Russian friend to see a world series baseball game. At the end of the game he asked the Russian what he thought of the game. *The Russian answered that he had never before seen such first class dedication to such a secondary cause.* Is that us ? Do you have first class dedication to secondary causes ? What are you living for ? What is your goal in life ? So Paul introduces himself. (a)

(b) HIS AUTHORITY:

"*An apostle of Jesus by the will of God,*" (1:1) The word means "*one who is sent with a commission.*" Now the apostles were very special men. There were no women among the twelve. (Mk 3:14-19) They are defined by the Bible as those who had seen Christ and were genuine witnesses of the resurrection. (Acts 1:21-22) They were a unique group for a unique period of history to lay down a doctrinal foundation and to establish a pattern. Do you know what Paul says ? "*And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets.*" (Eph 2:20)

Now how many times do you lay a foundation ? Once the foundation is laid, the building goes up. My the apostles had no successors. Do you hear people today calling themselves or others "*apostles,*" ? No, they are not for when the church was founded the apostles were no longer needed. Now do you see what Paul is doing here ? In writing to the Colossians he is simply stating that he is an apostle in order that they might know that this is no opinion from some missionary, but it is the authoritative utterance of the divinely appointed mouthpiece of Jesus Christ, this is God's Word. (a) (b)

(c) HIS LOYALTY:

"*Paul an apostle of Jesus Christ,*" (1:1) Now Colossians is one of Paul's prison epistles the others being, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, and 2 Timothy. You see, as Paul pens this letter he is in jail in Rome and he is writing to the saints in Colosse even though he has never visited that city. (1:4, 9, 2:1) Do you see how he finishes this letter ? (4:18) Now in Rome Paul was under house arrest. He had a great deal of freedom to meet with other people and talk to them about the Lord. Some of you have read the book of Joni Eareckson Tada who on a summer day in 1967 dove into the Chesapeake Bay and lost touch with her body forever. She writes,

Before the accident my questions had always been. How will God fit into this situation ? How will He affect my dating life ? My career plans. The things I enjoy." All those options were gone. It was me, just a

helpless body and God. My need for help is obvious every day when I wake up, waiting for someone to dress me. I cannot even comb my hair or blow my nose alone.” Yet to see Joni speak is to see someone who has given her limitations to God so that He can do His great work through her. Was it not the same with Paul ? I mean who would have thought that a chained prisoner could reach Rome and more ? As James Stalker so beautifully pointed out, “ *Paul’s room became a fulcrum from which he moved the world.* ” My what have you done with your limitations ? Like Paul have you taken them and used them to spread His name abroad ? (a) (b) (c)

(d) HIS COMPANY:

“ *And Timothy,* ” Actually it says “ *And brother Timothy.* ” He is not saying Timothy is writing. He is saying Timothy is with me. Timothy’s an interesting character. He was very delicate, frequently sick, timid, hesitant, always in need of encouragement, and cried a lot, that was Timothy. Yet no one ever in Paul’s entire ministry is ever seen in such a relationship to Paul as Timothy. Paul mentored Timothy, he encouraged him, he instructed him. I wonder, is there someone that you are mentoring ? Someone that could fill your shoes when you are gone ? (1)

(2) THE CHURCH AT COLOSSE

The city of Colosse does not exist today. Indeed neither the city or the church is mentioned in the book of Acts. Here was a church of unknown people, in a small town receiving an inspired letter from the great apostle Paul.

Well, how did the Colossian church begin ? Well, it was the outgrowth of Paul’s three year ministry in Ephesus. (Acts 19, 20:17-38) So effective was the witness at this time that we read, “ *So that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus both Jews and Greeks.* ” (19:10) This would include people in Colosse, Laodicea and Hierapolis. One of Paul’s converts in Ephesus was Epaphras who was a native of Colosse. He took the message back home and through his witness the church was formed. (1:4-7 4:12-13) Have you ever heard of Philemon ? Well, he was a convert of Paul’s also and it seems that he and his family opened up their home for the church meeting. (Philemon 1) 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 and Philemon who are available and open to Him.

So here’s how this little assembly was formed. But it was not long before they ran into problems and Epaphras showed up in Rome because he needed Paul’s help. So Paul writes this letter to refute heretical teachings and establish the truth of the gospel. Do you see how he greets the believers ? He speaks here about,

(a) A NEW RELATION:

“ *To the saints and faithful brethren,* ” (1:2) Or “ *To the saints even the faithful brethren,* ” Now the word “ *saints,* ” speaks of ownership and the word “ *brethren,* ” speaks of relationship. The word “ *saints,* ” speaks of

“ *consecrated ones*, ” “ *set apart ones*. ” It’s interesting that in the New Testament it never refers to *spiritual condition* but only to *spiritual position*. So Paul is not talking here about people in the local cemetery, he is not talking about dead people, he’s talking about living people. “ *To the saints*, ” it means that God has set you apart for himself. It means that you are very special to God. It means that you now belong to God. It means that you are not your own, you are bought with a price, you are paid for in the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, you are now set apart, you now belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, you’ve got a new relation to God, you’re a saint. Can I ask, are you seeking to be what God says you are ? Are you living worthily of the name He has given you ?

(b) A NEW LOCATION:

Do you see that ? Paul talks here about,

1. Their Geographical Location:

“ *At Colosse*, ” (1:2) Paul was writing to a church in a city in Asia Minor, 100 miles east of the city of Ephesus. It is what we know today as Turkey. It was one of triplet cities. There was Hieropolis, Laodicea, and Colosse. At one time all three cities were growing and prosperous but gradually Colosse slipped into a second rate position. It became what we would call a small town. Now geographically speaking their location was in Colosse. But did you notice,

2. Their Spiritual Location:

Spiritually speaking, their new location was “ *in Christ*. ” They were now a citizen of two worlds. They possessed a physical address, but now as the ‘ *saints of God*, ’ they possessed a new spiritual address. The saints were physically in Colosse but spiritually in Christ. Incidentally, are you in Christ ? Are you saved ? Or are you still without Christ ? You see, just as a letter in a bottle is in the ocean, the letter is in the water, but the letter is also in the bottle untouched by the water. So we are in the world but also “ *in Christ*. ” Paul says, “ *Christ in us the hope of glory*. ” (1:27) But “ *us*, ” in Christ is the hope of our security. You see, the Lord Jesus is presently seated at the right hand of God the Father in Heaven. Therefore, if I am in Christ, I am positioned with Him in the heavenlies. That means, I am as sure for heaven as if I was already there, because I am “ *in Christ*. ” I have been given a new relation, and a new location. But notice something else here,

(c) A NEW SALUTATION:

Do you see it in (1:2) ? Those were common words by the way, for when you look at the original words they were words that were commonly used to say hello in those days. If you were in a Greek city someone might walk up to you and say, “ *Karis*, ”, which was the Greek way of saying hello, it's the word grace, karis. You girl’s who are named Karen, your name means grace, karis, Karen, grace. Or if you were walking the streets of Jerusalem someone might walk up to you and say, “ *Shalom*, ”, which is the Hebrew way of saying peace,

that was their way of saying hello. Shalom, peace. Now did you notice the order ? Peace follows after grace. Peace only comes when through grace we are rightly related to the Lord Jesus. Now is that not what the believers in Colosse needed ? No doubt they were confused, bewildered and disheartened and Paul says “ *Grace be unto you and peace.* ” Do you stand in need of His grace ? Saving Grace: “ *For by grace are ye saved through faith* ” (Eph 2:8) Serving Grace: “ *But I laboured more abundantly than they all, yet not I but the grace of God which was with me.* ” (2 Cor 15:10) Sustaining Grace: “ *My grace is sufficient for thee.* ” (2 Cor 12:9) Now do you see here (1) (2) and now,

(3) THE CRISIS AT COLOSSE

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. I mean here is Paul in Rome and he's a prisoner, but as a prisoner he has liberty for people to visit him. So, in the Roman confinement, chained to a soldier, Epaphras arrives from Colosse and tells him about the Colossians and out of that comes this letter. Now what did Epaphras tell him that made him write this thing ? What was it ? Well, it was a heresy that's beginning to creep into the congregation and Epaphras, possibly their pastor, is really concerned. So Paul writes this letter to counteract this heresy. Now, I want you to see that,

(a) THIS HERESY IS REVEALED:

You see, it had two basic features. Firstly it included,

1. 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 nor come into come 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.

2. JEWISH CEREMONY:

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

(b) THIS HERESY IS REPEATED:

Do we have any of this heresy today ? Yes, we do. You see, when we make Jesus Christ and the Biblical revelation only part of a total religious system we cease to give Him the pre-eminence. Christian believers must be beware of mixing their faith with such things as yoga, transcendental meditation, and eastern mysticism. Moreover, we must beware of those who promise a “*deeper life*,” those who offer a system for victory and fullness that bypasses devotion to the Lord Jesus. My in all things He must have the pre-eminence. (a) (b)

(c) THIS HERESY IS RESISTED:

That’s why Paul writes this letter. To set forth the pre-eminence of the Lord Jesus. Do you see what this heresy attacked ? *It attacked the deity of Christ*. So do you know what becomes the theme of this letter ? Jesus Christ is God. Paul says, He is “*the image of the invisible God*.” Do you know what this heresy attacked ? *It attacked the sufficiency of Christ*. So Paul writes in (1:28) Do you see what Paul is saying ? He’s saying Christ is God and Christ is all you need. You don’t need anything else. You don’t need anymore knowledge, for in Christ are hidden what ? “*All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*.” Do you see what this heresy attacked ? *It attacked the adequacy of Christ*. Some were saying you had to be circumcised to be saved. It was Christ plus works equals salvation. So Paul writes in (3:11) My do you see

where Satan always attacks ? He always attacks the sufficiency of Christ. But do you see Paul’s response ? “*For in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily*,” and you are what ? “*Complete in him*.” (2:10) Isn’t that wonderful ? There’s the answer. You want to know God ? Christ is the image of God. You want knowledge ? In Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. You want to be accepted by God ? Worship Christ not angels or celestial intercessors. You want holiness ? It doesn’t come from abusing your body, it comes from setting your affections on Him.

The story is told of the celebrated German sculptor, J. H. Von Donaker. Napoleon came to Von Donaker and he said, “*I want you to make a statue of Venus for the Louvre in Paris*.” Von Donaker said, “*No*.” An enormous sum of money was then offered to him by Napoleon. He still refused. The emperor angrily demanded the reason why, and this is Von Donaker’s answer, “*Sir, I have made a statue of Jesus Christ and I can never lower my chisel to carve an inferior subject*.” Then he proceeded to tell a story, Von Donaker did. He said, “*The first time I molded Christ, after two years of work, I uncovered the finished statue in the presence of my little girl. And I asked her, ‘Who is that ?’ She clapped her hands in admiration and cried, ‘It is certainly a great man.’ And I smashed the statue and went to work again, praying as much as I toiled. When I invited the girl again later to enter my studio, she went to the figure as if it were alive and said in awe, ‘Oh, I know Him, He is the One who said, Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not’*” My is this not

the message of Colossians ? Is this not Paul's masterpiece
of Christ ?