

Title: Introduction to Colossians. (Jesus is Lord, and God Has Grace for us All)

Text: Colossians 1:1-2

Date: Feb 21, 2021 at FBCW

INTRO. Can God's grace change a life that's been wrecked by sin? Or a family that has existed in dysfunction and chaos? Or a city that's fallen on hard times? Is God's grace sufficient?

Question → do you think God's grace is strong enough to change the life of a murderer? I'm not just talking about any murderer...

- But a mass murderer.
- One who masterminded intentional attacks on a group of people? ... All because that group of people dared to have a religious view that was different from his own.
- And then to go after them and to try and destroy their movement.
- Can God change a man's heart like that?

Question → do you think God's grace is strong enough to change someone who was...raised by a single mom...someone who is multi-ethnic, multi-racial...someone who undoubtedly struggles with self-esteem, confidence, and other physical ailments.

- Can God's grace take someone like that and make them a significant, courageous leader of people?

Question → or what about a city? A city, that at first glance, its best days are behind it? The buildings downtown are closed. Things are boarded up. Everyone talks about how it used to be alive and hopping. But not anymore. And the folks who live in that city, frankly, seem to live there because they aren't able to make it in the more progressive city?

- Does God have grace and plans for a city like this?

Background.

Here's how Colossians begins → Col 1:1-2 begins with servant leaders, addressing faithful saints, to encourage their relationship with God.

Paul and Timothy...to the saints in Christ...brothers and sisters...grace to you and peace from God our Father.

The authors → Paul and Timothy (servants of God).

The audience → The saints in Christ at Colossae (faithful brethren).

The greeting → Grace and peace to you, from God the Father.

First, who was Paul? (1:1). He didn't begin as the great Apostle Paul – writer of approximately half of the New Testament. In fact, his life didn't begin even remotely close to this.

I want to quickly tell you three things about Paul – who he was before he met Christ...how he met Christ as Savior...and how his life was transformed since he was converted to Christ.

He was originally known as Saul of Tarsus.

- He was born to Jewish parents who also possessed Roman citizenship.
- He was very educated. He was trained under the famous Rabbi Gamaliel.
- Saul (Paul) was a Hebrew/Israelite, of the tribe of Benjamin.
- His whole life was steeped in strict, religious Judaism.

When Stephen was martyred, Paul approvingly held the jackets/cloaks of the stoners (Acts 7). Paul would seek to ravage/threaten the early Christians.

- Jail...threaten...murder...stir up mob rule.
- Some say in Acts 8:3 it meant Paul would kill the men and imprison the women.

But in Acts 9, as Paul is traveling to Damascus to locate/destroy more Christians and churches.

- A light from heaven beamed upon Paul...it knocked him from his animal...
- Paul fell to the ground...and he heard a voice in the light speaking...
- *Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? For I am Jesus...*
- From this moment, Paul was gloriously saved.

Paul would spend the rest of his life – approximately 30 years – telling everyone he could the good news about Jesus Christ. That Jesus Christ saves!

- Paul went from being the church's top persecutor and antagonist...to becoming a key leader. He was a missionary, pastor, and author.

Paul is a great reminder for us – God's grace can change you, no matter how dark/shameful your past!

Second, who was Timothy? (1:1). Timothy was not just a young man mentored by Paul, who became a great evangelist, and the pastor of the thriving first century church at Ephesus. Before Timothy became one of the great leaders of the early church, you need to know:

Timothy was from Lystra in Galatia (also near modern Turkey).

Timothy's mother was a Jew...but his father was a Gentile.

Timothy was raised by two women: his mother (Eunice) and his grandmother (Lois).

Timothy had a mixture of two cultures in him as a child.

- This was especially difficult on him when he was young...but it proved to be an asset when he was older (as a spiritual leader).

Paul's discussion of Timothy seems to indicate two things: perhaps Timothy was naturally timid, and had to overcome soft-spokenness, and that he was also sickly, or physically ill at times.

But when Timothy was in his late teens or early 20s, God let Paul see something in him! He trained under Paul and ultimately became a great leader for the cause of Christ!

Timothy is a great reminder for us – God's grace can find you, no matter how broken your childhood or family situation.

Third, who were the Colossians? (1:2). Colossae was located 120 east of Ephesus. Colossae was an ancient city of Phrygia, in the Roman province of Asia Minor. It was located in modern day Turkey.

In the 5th century BC – Colossae was a thriving city. The Persian King Xerxes put it on the map.

- It was useful for black wool, dye, and chalk deposits.
- It was the hub of major north-south and also east-west trade routes.
- By land and river, it was a significant, wealthy city.

But by the time of Paul in the 1st century AD – the main road into Colossae had been rerouted through nearby Laodicea.

- This led to the decline of Colossae.
- This led to the rise of Laodicea and Hierapolis.
- Colossae became the forgotten, overlooked city.
- It had a rich history...but it was rather insignificant by the time of the New Testament.

Colossae's population was mainly Gentiles (Greeks), but there was also a considerable population of Jews there.

- The mixed population of Gentiles and Jews contributed to religious confusion and heresy.
- The Jews were all about Judaism/legalism.
- The Gentiles were into paganism and mysticism.

Ironically, there is no evidence that Paul ever personally visited Colossae. But according to Acts 19, this is the backstory of the book.

- On Paul's third missionary journey, he ministered in the city of Ephesus for over two years.
- But a man named Epaphras happened to be visiting Ephesus while Paul preached there.
- Epaphras came to know Christ under Paul.
- Epaphras traveled back to his home city of Colossae to begin a Christian church there.
- Several years after Epaphras founded the church, dangerous heresies arose to threaten it.

These heretical threats were numerous, but among them:

- Gnosticism, or secret knowledge. A higher, secret knowledge above Scripture must be obtained.
- That God is good, but matter is evil. So Jesus was just an emanation from God...
- Jesus couldn't be the Son of God...he wasn't truly human (denied hypostatic union).
- Jewish elements mixed in:
 - Must keep a certain diet...must worship on a certain day.
 - Rigid asceticism – no pleasure, must constantly practice self-denial.

Epaphras was so concerned about these heresies, that he travels all the way to Rome, where Paul/Timothy are under house arrest (Acts 28:16-31).

- Epaphras seeks counsel and wisdom from Paul.
- Paul writes this letter in response to Epaphras' alarming report that heresies (false teachings) are threatening the young church.

Colossae is a great reminder for us – God has big plans for every community/city. Every place is a region where God wants His Kingdom to come and His church to thrive!

So what's the theme of Colossians? To counter the false gospel being advocated by some in Colossae, Paul wrote this letter from prison to present a clear picture of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as the Supreme Lord of all.

- Christ is the divine Son of God – and all are accountable to Him! Jesus is Lord of all!

Big Idea. How powerful is God's grace? Strong enough to change a life, family, or city, at any time. Jesus is Lord of all.

Application of Col 1:1-2

When I think of Paul, I can't help but think for all of us:

- God has bigger plans for you than you can imagine – are you listening for His voice?
- No sin is so big to disqualify you from service to the King.
- Paul never gloried in his sin...but he remained forever amazed by God's grace.
- What if instead of being known as the big sinner...you became known as the gloriously changed person?

When I think of Timothy/Epaphras who first heard the gospel and started the church in Colossae:

- You never know who is in your audience (school, work, neighborhood).
- You never know who is here today...that will be a great leader someday.

Be encouraged single moms...

Be encouraged young men without godly dads...

Be encouraged people from little towns with no money that seem so small...

- God has BIG plans for us!!!

Colossae is a great example about praying for our own communities.

- There are people in this city that God wants to save!
- What do you think God wants to do in this city?

Colossae – a city that was dealing with confusion.

Epaphras – a young man God raised up for clarity.

- God wants us to have clarity about what we believe, and how we're to live.

But not only does God want to save people in this city, he wants to “keep” people engaged in the mission of the church.

- If salvation is the starting line...the sanctification and glorification are the finish line.
- If I am not daily in worship, the Word, and prayer – then I will drift!
- I MUST guard and pursue faithfulness, or I will suffer from theological and spiritual drift.

CONCL. Jesus is Lord of all! And His grace is strong! Strong enough to save any life...to change any family...to renew any situation.

First Baptist Woodstock, let us remember: Because Jesus is Lord...

- God has plans for every life, no matter the past.
- God has plans for every family, no matter how broken or chaotic.
- God has plans for this community – he desires every person to know Him here.

Who are we? We are sinners who have been saved by Christ.

Who is on our team? All believers in Jesus...we are a family, a body, we are teammates.

- Different skills...different backgrounds...one mission!

What is our message? The Gospel! Jesus is Lord of all...Jesus died for you; Jesus will save you.

Who are we seeking to reach? We are pursuing busy people, broken people, confused people, overlooked people, unchurched people.