

Colossians Part 1: Col 1:1-14

Eric Cepin
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Pastor Michael did a great job last week with the survey of this book; today, we will talk about Col 1:1-14

First, let's talk about Epaphras, who was actually named after Aphrodite. Three numbers will help you learn more about him:

- **120 miles** - Paul was in Ephesus for 2 yrs and the whole Gospel went out to Asia Minor. Epaphras met Jesus in Ephesus and traveled 120 miles to Colossia to tell his friends and family about Jesus.
- **45 people** - In Colossia, a tiny little town, the church was no bigger than 45 people, perhaps made up of three households.
- **1200 miles** - Things started happening with Pastor Epaphras and he traveled 1200 miles to Rome to find Paul in prison and get answers. Paul then wrote this letter to the Colossian believers.

Why would Epaphras do this? The word "Gospel" is really important in the letter to the Colossians. In the first century, the internet was 50,000 miles of roads built by the Romans. Apostles and heralds brought good news (the gospel) along these roads. In this way, the Romans kept people connected and peaceful with useful information. Today, the definition for "Gospel" is more narrow and means truth or good news about Jesus.

The Gospel:

1. **Narrative shift:** From you to Jesus. We all tell our own stories throughout our whole lives. This is how we narrate our lives and within narratives, we take responsibility for all of the things we do. Jesus says you don't have to have the pressure to get it right and the shame of getting it wrong because **I will be at the center**. You can tell your stories with Jesus as the center.
2. **Identity transition:** When you follow Jesus, you become **holy** and a **child**: he changes your relationship with the Father. You are holy, not unholy, and you are his child, not an orphan. When you embrace this story, you end up with a....(#3)
3. **Internal Kingdom Combustion:** Spirit transformation: you explode internally. Everything in you goes haywire: you have been shifted into a new kingdom and life.

Identity and Salvation are one-time occurrences but learning to involve the Spirit in your story is a process. With this background, let's jump straight into the text:

First, let's talk about the **THEME** of Colossians: **It's not Jesus PLUS something that brings life.** Discipleship is removing the PLUS! Jesus plus my time, plus learning about attachment theory, Jesus plus working out, Jesus plus drugs, plus hobbies, plus money, plus peace and quiet...what is your Jesus PLUS? The Gospel uproots the PLUSness.

Colossians is about removing the plusses.

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, Christ is KING and kings rule. Paul is a herald of the gospel: even though he is not the supreme taco, he is not an ordinary taco.

and Timothy our brother,

He is saying that he and Timothy are on the same mission. He means Timothy walked along with him on his mission and is making his mission better. **Who are you walking alongside, empowering their mission?** Empowering and strengthening them?

2 To God's holy people in Colossae,

God's holy people implies there are also unholy people. There are people who have embraced Jesus and those who have not, same as Tucson. If you follow Jesus, you are a part of those. I worshiped in 10 churches all over Tucson this summer and there are many people in Tucson who are in this category.

the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ:

Faith in this verse doesn't really mean trust; it means swearing allegiance. Have you read the citizenship oath to become a US citizen? I don't think about this in my country. But it's someone who has cast off other things and is firmly connected with Jesus.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father

Grace and peace show up often in Paul's letters. If you struggle with PEACE in your life, you don't have grace. You are piling shame on yourself over what you've done or not done. You have a well built persona you are protecting and this takes a lot of work. If you aren't at peace, what do you need to process in order to embrace Jesus's story? How does a person open up and receive it? Why am I resistant to this?

3 We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, **4** because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people—

Last year, we had a sermon series on Radical Discipleship: this is simply you continually asking **where in your life are you refusing Jesus's lordship?** Is it my food, the way I eat, the way I deal with my anger, my personality, etc? What are you afraid to let go of? The second part is that you are called to love ALL of God's people. ALL is the key word: sometimes they are easy to love and sometimes hard to love. This starts in your home! What does it look like to love God's people?

Paul makes a long prayer now:

5 the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel **6a** that has come to you.

Faith, love and hope are talked about all the time. But without hope, you are a nihilist. Life has no meaning. Having **vain hope** would be like hoping that Tucson would have snow in the summer for 30 days in a row. This kind of hope would make you discouraged.

True hope is true because Jesus has saved you, brought you into his kingdom, is coming back, and has a place for you. If I make a reservation for my wife and I at a nice restaurant, I have a true hope that we have a table and therefore, I can be excited about going there. Likewise, Jesus is holding a place for you and is coming to make all things new. This allegiance is your confidence that there is a table you will sit at with Jesus.

6b In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world—just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God's grace.

I have been speaking the gospel to you just now. The key word in the verse above is **HEAR**. The Holy Spirit is doing work right now as you hear it. Speaking the word powerful. The more you make room and try to understand it, the more it bears fruit and transforms you. This is Jesus's story in you. Just hearing this changes you: Let it change you.

7 You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, **8** and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.

I love Epaphras; I hope I can be like him!

9a For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you.

Paul reiterates his position of supremacy to deliver this message. (vs 7) He hasn't stopped praying for them. What inspires prayer is hearing about others looking for God. When we hear about this, we pray!

9b We continually ask **God** to fill you with the knowledge of **his** will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives.

God and his are the keywords here. This is about being filled with **God's** wisdom, not someone else's. This is his first prayer: it means that you will seek knowledge of God and will listen to the Spirit of God who offers you wisdom and knowledge and understanding. First, he wants the Colossians (and us!) to have a sensitivity to tune our ears to what he is saying.

10 so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way:

This is all about seeking relationships, not doing things right. You are grasping at and developing a relationship with God. The more you stop telling your story, the more you go to God, the more you will please him and make him central to the story. For example, let's say I have \$10 in my bank and it's not working for me. Jesus says he was on a hill and broke a fish and loaf and fed 5000 people. Jesus says it's about him and about you connecting yourself to him. Why are you concerned about your bank account? I can lean into God because I know what Jesus can do. I begin to live and rest on God. I'm not saying to be irresponsible: Jesus won't give you an answer. We want a fix right now.

10b bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, **11** being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience,

When you swear allegiance to Jesus, you are transferred from one kingdom to another. You need a special, new endurance and patience to deal with this. The voices of your own sin nature get very distinct. In order to walk along the path with Jesus, you will need these things. The rest of Colossians explains how to do this.

12a and giving joyful thanks to the Father,

We deal with life by being thankful: in the hardest moments, we can give joyful thanks. This comes from anchoring ourselves in what is true. Paul lays out what you are giving thanks for in the next verses:

12b who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light.

The Gospel made you right and gave you an inheritance; You are not in the kingdom of darkness any longer and you can see the gospel.

13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves,

Here is the gospel again: the Father has rescued us from being walking dead people without sight into the Kingdom of the son he loves.

14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

We thank God for this! Notice that the forgiveness of sins is the last thing. This is what we need but **it isn't the whole gospel!** It's all this other stuff: It's being forgiven, redeemed, being thankful. In our thankfulness we find endurance and patience. In the discipline of remembering what has happened to us, we become less Jesus PLUS. This is how we knock off the plusses, getting rid of all the other things we think we need.

What are the plusses you need to knock off? What is Jesus asking you to say "Knock it off from me!" There *is* something: these questions might help you find out what it is:

1. ***What parts am I telling the story about me?*** Every time Paul talks about the Colossians' love and faith, he thanks GOD, not them. This is what our story needs. Jesus says you are holy and you are my child.
2. ***What parts of my life have shame?***
3. ***What are the kingdom practices that are missing?***
4. ***Who are the people you don't want to love?***

Questions:

- Comment: I've been observing myself that when I receive a compliment I stifle it. What stood out to me is that I'm lacking grace and peace in those moments. If I was aware of the Lord's grace and peace, I would be OK in receiving a compliment.

- Comment: I appreciate what you brought up at the end: that forgiveness is central but not the whole thing. Early in my Christian walk, I wanted to know what the Gospel was and I was told it was the Roman's Road: I am a sinner and Jesus is the solution. I think what can happen is that if all we receive is fire insurance, we need Jesus plus. There is something a lot bigger.
- Q: How do you catalyze hope to get more faith and love?
- A: I think the more you tell Jesus's story, the more hopeful you become. My story makes me lose hope: I am broken. When I center on what Jesus wants me to do, what his story is in this, then I'm hopeful. Then I want to anchor in Jesus and we look to him to show up.
- I am interested in neuroscience; Jesus did care for his people and I feel grateful for the neuroscience behind why we do what we do but I want to invite Jesus into this. I can slow it down and practice it because Jesus is with me.
- Q: "Always be prepared to give an answer for the hope you have." Based on this verse from I Peter, 3:15 we should aspire to be exceedingly hopeful! What would that look like, how would we manifest that in a way that people would ask us about our hope?
- A: I think part is understanding that is when you swear allegiance to the KING, you hold a certain authority. The world is depressed and overwhelmed: You walk into these places with his grace and mercy. You rest in that, not in your to-do list. It's a mindset: you are telling Jesus this is HIS mindset. I am doing Jesus's thing, not my thing.
- Comment: I love the emphasis and allegiance to the King: This comes from the way we live and participate in our culture: how obvious it was then who was NOT participating in the games and in the temple sacrifices. There is a clear separation; **how much do we live in this way?** To be different from the world around us?

