

“The Cosmic Christ”
Colossians 1:1-2
Sunday, February 5th, 2023

President Franklin Roosevelt was greeting guests at the White House one evening as they came through the reception line. He disliked this ritual, however, since everyone always spoke their rehearsed lines without actually listening to what was said. So, feeling mischievous that evening and to test his suspicions, as the President shook hands with each person he said, “I murdered my grandmother this morning.” As expected, Roosevelt’s guests still spoke their prepared greetings without hearing what he’d said--until finally one man, a South American diplomat, answered, “Well, Mr. President, I’m sure she had it coming to her.” Roosevelt loved it: someone was listening!

An example of *our* failure to listen is found in what is the most prominent greeting of the New Testament, although one that doesn’t even register much of the time. The Apostle Paul begins every one of his 13 letters with these words of blessing: “Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” **(Repeat)** It’s arguably the greatest of all the biblical greetings, but it goes mostly ignored.

Today, we begin a series on a book of the Bible I’ve been looking forward to studying for most of my pastoral ministry. One of the first commentaries I bought was on the first chapter of Colossians by the late Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones. Colossians is the 12th book of the New Testament, tucked between Philipians and First Thessalonians. It is named for the people who resided in the city of Colosse, located some 100 miles east of Ephesus, in the region of the 7 churches Jesus addressed in the second and third chapters of the Book of Revelation.

Colossians is one of the most thoroughly Christ-centered books in the Bible. It is “one of Paul’s most powerful and attractive letters, written from prison to a young church in the province of Asia (modern day Turkey).” (Lucas, 19) Also “one of the shortest of Paul’s letters, Colossians is one of the most exciting of his New Testament letters.” (Wright, 19)

In this book, Jesus is described with some of the loftiest language in the New Testament, focusing on His preeminence (His superiority) and His sufficiency in all things. You see, Jesus is the center of Scripture, the One in whom “all the promises of God” are “Yes” and “Amen,” to God for His glory.” **(2 Cor. 1:20)**

Colossians was probably the first letter written in the group of writings commonly known as Paul’s “Prison Epistles.” This grouping includes Ephesians, Philipians, and Philemon, all of which were written while Paul was serving time in prison. *Why was he in prison?* For preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. Although Paul was clearly behind

bars when he wrote to the church at Colossae (4:3, 10, 18), it is impossible to determine whether he was chained in Rome, Ephesus, or some other city.

Colossians was probably written around AD 60, before some of Paul's other existing correspondence, including his letters to Timothy and Titus.

And so, we begin our "Collision with Colossians" today by reading the first two verses of chapter 1, the greeting in this letter.

Colossians 1:1-2:

1 "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,

2 To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ *who are* in Colosse: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

We're going to look at 10 different parts of these first two verses, beginning with Paul.

Paul. Commonly known as St. Paul, his name means "small, little, humble." He was anything but those however. *Who was Paul?* He is the author of at least 13 of the 27 New Testament books. His name was formerly "Saul" (Saul of Tarsus), which means, "prayed for, asked for." Paul is among the greatest Christians of all time.

An Apostle of Jesus Christ. An apostle is a "messenger," a person who was uniquely commissioned by Jesus to bear authoritative witness to His person and work. "Paul was an official representative of the Anointed Savior. Through Paul no less than Christ Jesus himself is addressing the church." (Hendricksen, 43) Originally, Jesus chose 12 men for this role of apostle (**Luke 6:13**). After **Judas'** betrayal, **Matthias** was "numbered with the eleven apostles" remaining (**Acts 1:26**). After Jesus confronted Saul from heaven on the road to Damascus, Saul—Paul—became "the least of the apostles" (**1 Corinthians 15:9**).

By the will of God. Paul's testimony of saving faith is described in **Acts Chapter 9:**

"Saul, breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way...he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. **3** Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. **4** And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" **5** And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. **8** Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they...brought him into Damascus..."

As these verses reveal, Paul's new life and his apostleship were not a matter of choice on his part, but on God's part; it was by *the will of God*.

Timothy, our brother. Paul's protege and the most important of Paul's ministry associates. He was a pastor, and Paul's faithful traveling companion. Two letters in the New Testament are named after him (1 & 2 Timothy), though not written by him.

Saints and faithful brethren in Christ. Saints are not super Christians, or super spiritual people. Paul writes to a small church and calls those who worship there **saints**. Only in this address of Colossians does Paul use the word (*pistos*) which might be translated either "believing" or "faithful" brethren.

In Colosse. The church at Colosse was located in a once thriving city, but its population gradually declined. It was a small town. Colosse had previously been prosperous because it was located on a main trade route, but its fortunes changed when this road was rerouted and Colosse was bypassed. By Paul's day, the Colossian church was located in the smallest town of all the churches he wrote to in the New Testament.

Grace to you. Paul doesn't refer to "grace" very often in Colossians. We see it again in verse 7 of the first chapter. The next time we see it is chapter 4, verse 18. Grace is God's favor poured out upon those who don't deserve it; in fact, they deserve precisely the opposite.

Peace. This means peace with God. It is serenity. The hymn writer E. H. Bickersteth captures the thought well when he wrote, "Peace, perfect peace; in this dark world of sin. The blood of Jesus whispers peace within." In **John 14:27**, Jesus speaks of this peace. "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

God our Father. God is Father to those who profess saving faith in Jesus Christ. As Father to the ones whom He gave to Jesus to save from eternal damnation, the Bible knows nothing about a universal Fatherhood or brotherhood of man. Your brothers and sisters in Christ, if you are a Christian, are on a very different pathway than those who do not honor Jesus for what He has done for them. To become a child of God, you must acknowledge Him as Lord. "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become Children of God." (**John 1:12**)

The Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of God; the Son of Man. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords. He is the Alpha and the Omega; the Bright and Morning Star. He is the Messiah, the Savior of the elect, the Holy One of Israel; the Redeemer; the Bread of Life, the Light of the World, the Good Shepherd, the Door, the Resurrection and the Life; the Way, the Truth, and the Life. He is the Creator, Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. He is Emmanuel, God with us. He is the Lamb of God, the Chief Cornerstone, the Word, the Rock, the True Vine, the Branch, Bridesgroom, and Dayspring. He is all of those and more.

Paul hasn't yet indicated why he is writing the letter. He writes to encourage the churches to stand firm on gospel truths; even in the midst of heresy, as we'll explore in detail next Lord's Day. But, as we prepare to close this message...

It is estimated that the average size of most New Testament churches was 75 people, which is the average size of small churches in our own day. Three to four years ago, Trinity Church was averaging about 145 persons in worship, almost twice the size of the church in Colosse. Over the last 3 years, our attendance dropped drastically at the beginning of COVID, and since then we've scratched, tugged, and dragged to get that number back to about 115.

Note something special in **Colossians 1:28** - "Him (Jesus) we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ." Looking through the lenses of a small church in a small town, it seems ironic that of all the places Paul wrote, it was here that he says maturity in Christ is attainable. Paul tells us the small church is the total package; it is the right size to fulfill all that God calls the church to be and do.

Every biblical purpose for the church can be fulfilled just as well in a small church as in a large one. We don't need to wait to grow to a certain size before we can be all that a church should be. We are already there. It is up to us to maximize the gifts and graces God has blessed us with.

I close with some questions of application for each of us to consider..

- *Are you a Christian?*
- *Are you bearing fruit, realizing the growth necessary to live as becomes believers in Christ?*
- *Have you been born again?*
- *Is there a new spirit in you?*
- *Do you want to know God?*
- *Is it your chief complaint that your love is weak and faint?*
- *Do you love God's law?*
- *Would you like to keep it and love it?*
- *Do you long to know Him and honor Him?*
- *Do you like His people?*
- *Would you put them before the whole world?*

