

Life in Christ - Colossians 1:1-2

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Date: 09 June 2019

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[0 : 0 0] All right, if you want to turn to the book of Colossians, the book of Colossians is where we'll be.

And then if you have, there's little handouts here that's kind of, I'll follow through that. You can fill in the blank. The church that I used to preach at, there was always a challenge to see if you could guess the next word.

That's where the first letter was there. And I enjoy watching when you get the word right because I know it because you smile at me when I say it. And then I can tell when you've miscalculated because you do that and I see you scribble it out.

But that's there for you if you want to follow along. It helps me. I preach kind of through this outline here as well. And let me say thank you for your hospitality so far. We have felt so welcome right away.

Ross and Joy have taken care of us and incredibly so we have landed in paradise. I mean, I'm pinching myself wondering if maybe I didn't die and end up in heaven already, which would be awkward to be preaching in heaven, but okay.

[1 : 0 6] But it's just, you've been so great to us getting the car and a place to stay. The kids have adjusted well. So thank you so much for all the hard work that you've done in getting us here.

And we'll be in the book of Colossians this summer, 12 weeks in this book of Colossians. So pretty slow, which will allow us to get a little deeper than we would if we were going quick.

And so today we're just going to cover verses 1 and 2. Colossians chapter 1, verses 1 and 2. And I'm going to read those and then pray and then we'll get started. I hear now the word of the Lord.

Let's pray.

Lord, we thank you for the privilege of being able to hear from your word. We thank you for the fact that we have your word.

[2 : 1 2] We ask now that you would open our eyes, that we would see, that you would open our ears, that we would hear. God, would you help us to resist the temptation to change your word to match our theology or to change your word to what we want it to be, Lord?

But would you by your spirit, through your word, conform us more to the image of Christ? Would you be glorified through your own word for your praise and in Jesus' name, Amen.

Well, it's just a little passage, isn't it? Just two verses. It makes up one sentence. And you might be tempted to just kind of blow through it as you read the book of Colossians. And I'll be honest, I was.

The first five or six times even that I read through Colossians, getting ready for the summer, I just went right through the introduction and originally was going to preach verses one through eight this week.

And so it wasn't even on the original schedule that I sent to the elders here. But what happened was a couple things. One, I began to listen to the book of Colossians.

[3 : 16] And I would highly recommend that to you. You can get an app. I'm sure there's several. I was able to download one over here so I know it's possible. Bible.is was the name of the app.

And then I could select New International Version in English. And I could just listen to Colossians. And the reason I recommend that is because this is how the recipients of this letter would have heard it the first time.

It was written by Paul and Timothy, as they say in the introduction. And then they would have given it to a messenger, a courier. And that person would have taken this letter, which takes about 15 minutes to listen to.

And they would have gone from wherever they were sent, probably Rome, where Paul, we think he was at the time, to Colossae. And they would have practiced it the whole way. This was their job to get there and to present the Apostle Paul's letter to this church.

And so when you listen to it, it's a bit different listening to the whole thing at one time. I would encourage you to do that this week or even once a week. Go for a 15-minute walk and listen to it.

[4 : 24] And it kind of comes together a bit differently. And so that was one thing I started doing. And the other is I started going just piece by piece and taking almost one key word per day in a devotional sort of way.

And as I really slowed down, I started to see what Paul was doing. And he was being quite clever in this introduction. He's presenting an idea that he's going to carry through the whole letter.

And he's crafted this introduction in an amazing way. He's given us this big idea, which we've got here, that to begin with, by God's will and through His grace, we can live as His people in this world.

So by God's will and through His grace, we can live as His people in this world. And we'll explore that idea today by looking at three things here, three truths.

First, we'll look at a life lived in two kingdoms. And then a life lived because of grace. And a life lived by the will of God. A life lived in two kingdoms because of grace by the will of God.

[5 : 40] So first, a life lived in two kingdoms. And here's where Paul presents this idea. It's just in verse 2, the first half. He says, To God's holy people in Colossae, the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ.

To God's holy people, the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ. These are the people that live life in the kingdom of God.

And this word holy is probably not a common word. You probably don't use holy all throughout your day, unless you're different than I am with your use of language.

There's probably words you use quite a bit through the day. And holy is probably not one of them. Am I right? We use, we were laughing before we came here, we use the word dude in California.

Is there a stereotype about Californians? And that's true. We use dude for everything. It's singular. It can be a greeting. Hey dude, what's up? That's pretty normal for California. It can be plural.

[6 : 40] Those dudes over there. It can be masculine, feminine. It can be an adverb. Dude, what happened right there? We just use the word dude all the time. And dude is normal. Holy is not a common word for us in California.

And so we want to spend just a few minutes looking at what is meant here when Paul calls them God's holy people. And we see two things.

First of all, they are set apart for God. But the Christians in Colossae are people who, through Christ, have been set apart for God.

And then the same is still true today. Out of the seven billion some people on planet Earth, not all are considered holy, unfortunately. But some are and have been set apart for God.

I think Peter says here to the congregation he writes to in 1 Peter, he says that they are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession.

[7 : 43] I like how Peter says that. They are God's special possession. He has set them apart. And then secondly, we see that holy means that they are able to approach God.

Able to approach God. And now this, to a first century citizen, would be absolutely mind-blowing. And it should really be mind-blowing to us today. Someone is able to approach a divine being.

In the first century, that just did not happen. Not until you'd made the right sacrifices. Not until you'd done everything. You'd purified yourself. You'd been through the rites of initiation, which we'll see later in Colossians, are still a big deal to them.

This idea that I could just approach a divine being would be absolutely foreign to a first century citizen. And in fact, maybe we take that for granted a bit today, don't we?

I do at times. I mean, I wake up, and before I've even brushed my teeth, I can just talk to God. Morning breath and all. It's kind of crazy if you think about it.

[8 : 51] I can just approach God Almighty because of who I am in Christ. I can just begin a conversation with the God who created everything that I see, including me, including the air I breathe.

I can, because He has set me apart in Christ and called me holy, I can just approach Him and enter into conversation with Him. And Paul, by opening his letter with this, he's saying, I'm talking to a group of people, he's saying, but I'm talking to a very specific and very special group of people.

I'm talking to a people who are living life in the kingdom of God. A people that God has set apart, His own special possession, who can approach Him.

Yet, who are still in Colossae. And this is fascinating as well. He says, right in the middle there, to God's holy people in Colossae.

So while they're citizens of the kingdom of God, they are at the same time living life in the kingdom of man. And this concept too would be weird.

[10 : 05] Most people, even still today, aren't citizens of one country living in another. And in Roman times, this would be even crazier. You wouldn't be a citizen of another kingdom and live in Rome, unless something had, frankly, just gone wrong.

That wouldn't happen. And you certainly would not, as king of a nation, take your citizens and place them in someone else's nation.

It would be absurd to think of doing that. But what Paul says is what God's done here is He's taken His people, His holy people, and He has placed them in the kingdom of man, specifically here in Colossae.

And there's a reality to that. And it's very important for us to understand what that would be like for these people receiving this letter.

We have to ask, what would life in Colossae look like? And we have to remember a few things. The recipients of this letter, they're not Irish.

[11 : 12] Okay? So we don't expect the letter to sound Irish. Right? The recipients of this letter, they're not Americans. So we don't expect it to sound American. We expect there to be some amount of a foreign nature to the letter, because they're different people than us.

They're not modern people. So the first recipients of this letter, a cell phone would blow their mind. And they would probably think it completely useless. What would you do with the little square?

They'd probably try to hammer something with it, would be my imagination. They have never flown on an airplane. They have never ridden on a train. They don't have electricity.

And in an interesting way, specifically in Colossae, they are considered by the Roman Empire a very unimportant people. Colossae is about, if we have the map, yeah, we have the map here.

It's about 200 kilometers inland from Ephesus. And that's important to note, that they're 200 kilometers inland from Ephesus. Because in the Roman Empire, everything happens along the Mediterranean Sea.

[12 : 20] All the shipping is by the Mediterranean Sea. And all the commerce really occurs on the Mediterranean Sea. And so if you're not a coastal city, you become less and less important the further you move away from the coast.

And the Roman Empire, they really only cared about 200 kilometers inland from the sea. After that, they didn't really bother. So Colossae is on the edge, on the fringe of the Roman Empire.

They're not thought highly of. They are considered the breadbasket. That's really all they are. They're a farming town. They have farms and they have sheep.

And Rome considers them people who produce food and clothing for the coastal cities. And that's all they are. In the eyes of the Roman Empire, in the eyes of Ephesus, in the eyes of anybody that's anybody in the kingdom of man at this time, these are an unimportant people.

And yet, interestingly enough, these unimportant people who provide bread and clothes to the Roman Empire have amongst them in their city citizens of the kingdom of heaven walking about.

[13 : 37] I think that's interesting to see right away that God's design is that in Christianity, there is within the city of man kingdom of heaven citizens strategically placed all around.

That there is in Karageline Christians, citizens of the kingdom of heaven, holy people that God has placed here. That there is in County Cork, that there is in Ireland, that in San Diego, and anywhere you go, there's God's holy people, citizens of His kingdom, placed in the kingdoms of man.

And so it's worth noting that God wants His people in the cities of the world. He wants His people in the kingdoms of man.

When I saw Polo, I think you call it, Parents of Little Ones, am I getting that right? And then the Rock camp Friday night, it's perfect. It's wonderful. Because we have citizens of Karageline that are interacting with citizens of the kingdom of heaven, God's holy people.

And we got to see, I was 30, 35 children or something on Friday night, and only about a third are from this church, which meant there were roughly 20 kids from Karageline interacting with God's holy people.

[15 : 10] Kids who cannot right now approach God interacting with people who are able to approach God Almighty. This is God's design. This is God's plan for the church.

And the kingdom of man needs Christians. And I think it's worth pausing and saying, why? Why would God put His citizens in man's kingdoms?

And we have two things that we bring as God's people. We bring an understanding of what is true. And we bring an understanding of what is temporary. We bring an understanding of what is true because we have God's word, which is truth.

And we bring that into a culture that is desperately seeking truth. And I'm sure if you sit and you just take a little bit of time and you think through the relationships that God has put you in, you can quickly think of people who have no idea what is true and are desperately seeking for truth.

I can Google. I think this is crazy. We can Google what is true. And there's websites that people can go to. More than one.

[16 : 21] And more than one person a day literally Googles what is true. And God has placed citizens of His kingdom around those people in their midst who know truth, who can point them to truth, who can read truth to them.

And so God has put people who have an understanding of what is true and God has put people who have an understanding of what is temporary. Jesus says, He says in Mark, He says that some people, they gain the whole world and yet lose their soul.

And if Caragalline is anything like San Diego, which I think there's some similarities, there are people in Caragalline who are literally spending all of their time and energy and resources chasing things that are absolutely temporary and have no eternal value at all.

And they probably don't know it. And it's heartbreaking to think of that's why God put His citizens right here in this place at this time.

It's because not only do we know it's true, but we know it's temporary and we know what's eternal and we have access to those things through God's Word and we can be representatives of the Kingdom of Heaven right here in man's kingdom.

[17 : 36] And God has given us the ability to interact with those people who are not yet citizens of His Kingdom in a gracious way and to be, as Jesus says, the salt of the earth and the light of the world and to live lives of grace.

Namely, because of the grace we've been given. And that's our second point here is that we live lives because of grace. And here's what happens is because of God's grace to us, we can be a people of grace to others.

Okay, so Paul picks this up in verse 2, the second half of verse 2 here. After he marks out who he's speaking to, God's holy people in Colossae, he's going to say, grace and peace to you from God our Father.

And I find that interesting because the very last thing he's going to write, if you go to the end of the letter, his very last phrase is grace be with you. Paul's gone out of his way to say grace and peace to you and grace be with you.

And what he's saying is we live life in two kingdoms, we are God's people in the cities of man, and we are God's people because of grace, the grace that we've been given, and because of that grace that we've been given, we then become a source of grace towards other people.

[18 : 57] And this is all by design. This is one of the beauties of the Gospel. And here's how it works. We'll go through just a few points here. We are born enemies of God.

We are not born God's people. We are not born able to approach God. We are born into sin, unable to approach God, and frankly, unable to do anything about that.

We are so depraved. But God, in love, because of His mercy, God saves us by grace.

I think even Friday night, the leaders of the Rock were presenting the same Gospel outline to the children. It's beautiful. We're born enemies of God, but then God saves us by grace.

Paul could be more clear in the letter of Ephesus than he is. You have been saved by grace. So we go from enemies of God to saved by grace, and then this grace brings us peace, which is why Paul will say grace and peace to you.

[20 : 00] God's grace towards us places us in a position of peace with Him, and then we become a source of grace towards others. We can point them to truth.

We can explain to them what's eternal and what's temporary, and we become agents of grace, not in a saving way, in a common way. We become people that God has gifted to the cities of men.

All of it because of grace. And what's beautiful about the Gospel is that grace is what brings us in. Grace is what grows us up. Grace is then what we bring to the cities of men.

And it's not that we become a source of grace to others so that we can please God. It's not that we do this so that we can earn God's grace.

We are who we are towards other people because of God's grace. And that's important to note. It's very important to understand the difference. So we don't do something like Polo or The Rock or Rooted.

[21 : 03] Am I learning all that? We don't do those in an effort to please God so that He will be gracious to us. We're not partnering with God so that He'll be gracious to us. We're not saying, okay God, we'll meet you halfway and we'll trust that you'll meet us halfway.

God's not extending His hand saying, okay, you do your part, I'll do my part. God has done the entire thing. He's done the entire thing all because of grace. He has saved us, set us apart, made us His people, and then placed us in the cities of men and said, now you can be gracious to them.

And I think sometimes it's also worth pausing to say, well then who has God put in my life that needs His grace? Who has God put in our lives that is trying to please God or maybe even what they've determined to be God, not realizing that by grace, through faith, Christ's active obedience, Christ's death on the cross can absolutely bring them into God's kingdom all as a gift.

Not by their works, lest they should boast, but all by God's grace. And I absolutely guarantee you, if you take time this evening or this week to just pray through and ask God, who in my life needs your grace?

names will start coming to mind. And you will be shocked to realize God has put you here in Karagoline and surrounded you by people who are literally dying to know that they can have salvation through Jesus Christ.

[22 : 44] Not by their efforts, but because of His grace towards them. You will, as you think through people, as you think through names, as you start praying for individuals that you're in a relationship with, I think you'll see our final point just come to life, which is, you aren't where you are by accident.

You don't have the friends you have by accident. You're not in the relationships you're in by accident. All of it is by the will of God. That's how Paul starts his letter.

And I have to be honest, I went past it so many times in my studies, God had to just put the brakes on me. But it's right there in the beginning. Paul, in verse 1, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God.

And I have to be honest, I didn't even catch it until I was going through, my kids and I, we do evening devotions at times, we're going through the book of Acts, and we were just reading, Paul was a terrible person.

Oh, he was a horrible man. When you read him early in the book of Acts, if you don't know the end of the story, you're ready to lynch the guy. He's a terrible, terrible person.

[23 : 52] He's imprisoning the Christians, God's citizens, in the kingdoms of man. Paul is awful towards them.

But then he says here, oh, now I'm an apostle. And if you pause and you think, who? How could Paul be an apostle? He says, by the will of God.

By the will of God. Which means that if Paul can become an apostle by the will of God, as terrible as he was, by his own admission as the chief of sinners, then you are who you are, and I am who I am, and we are where we are, also by the will of God.

Do you see that? That if you're a school teacher, you're not just a school teacher, you're a school teacher by the will of God. And if you have any other relationship, you're in that relationship by the will of God.

That person that maybe drives you crazy. That boss that's too hard on you. That child that won't stop crying or screaming. Whatever it is. It's not by accident. It's not because you've done something wrong.

[24 : 57] It's by the will of God that you have been placed where you have been placed, in the occupation that you're in, surrounded by the people you're surrounded by, so that you can live a life of grace towards those people, because you're a citizen of the kingdom of heaven right here in the cities of men.

All by the will of God. It's a beautiful design. And here's what I find incredible about God's will. Two things.

One, it's secure. God's will is secure. I don't know about you, sometimes life does not feel secure to me.

In California, we have earthquakes. Literally, the ground shakes below our feet. And we were at Ross and Joy's house, and I'm looking at, there's decorations on the wall just sitting there. And I keep thinking, any moment now, the ground's going to shake and everything will fall over.

But it does, in California, we literally stand on shaking ground. You just, boom, it moves. And you go, okay. That reminds me, it's not so secure at times. God's will is secure.

[26 : 02] He, yeah, I love in Deuteronomy, it says like an eagle, he spreads his wings over his people. And when you're in God's will, when you are God's people, even though we're in the city of men, we are secured in these cities because of God.

We're secure in what he's called us to because it's by his will. So you can't, you can't move outside of his grace. You can't be somewhere where God goes, how did you get there?

I never saw you. Come back. No, you can't. You cannot move outside of God's will because his will is secure. Jesus says, no one can pluck you from his hand. He holds you tight.

You are his. And then also, I see God's will, it provides a sense of purpose. Paul's purpose changed from early on in Acts to the point that he's writing this letter.

And as we'll see, if you can even look at the end, you know, spoiler alert, he's in prison. He's in chains. He's about to die for the gospel.

[27 : 11] And he's completely fine with it. He's secure in who he is in Christ. And he knows he has a purpose. He knows that he's not a prisoner by accident.

He knows that God still has a purpose in his life. And he's writing letters to churches. And he probably doesn't even know that some 2,000 years later, we'll still be reading these letters, written by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, nourishing and feeding our souls, as we too live as God's people, citizens of heaven, in places that Paul had never even heard of.

And so what part of our lives do we need to remember is secure and has a purpose in God's will? Sometimes it's good to just take a moment and rest and be comforted in that truth.

That we're not here by accident. That we're not just wandering purposely around planet Earth. But that God has placed us in a place, in a time, as his people.

That he's placed us in relationships where we can be light and salt, where we can be grace to other people. And that he's given us a purpose.

[28 : 35] And we're secure in that purpose as his people, as citizens of heaven, right here in Cargilline or County Cork, all the way to San Diego and everywhere in between.

That main idea, I think, is worth just keeping in your mind this week. It's by God's will and through his grace that we can be his people in this world.

We're citizens of the kingdom of heaven. We are, like the Colossians, we are God's holy people. Faithful brothers and sisters in Christ. In modern day Colossia, whatever that might be for each of us.

By grace, at peace with God, all by the will of God. I'll close this in prayer and before I do, I'll just say, if you need, if you want to have tea or you need time, just going back through that.

Or you need someone to pray with you because I think we can all agree, it's not easy, is it? It's not easy to live in the cities of men as citizens of heaven. It's very difficult, very challenging, very tempting to fall for what's temporary or to fall for what's not true.

[30 : 00] It's not easy to remember how gracious God has been to us. We need reminded. We need to encourage each other through difficult times. And it's very easy to feel insecure and to feel like I have no purpose.

So if you need someone to pray with you or to walk you back through this or just encourage you, I really am happy to do so. Happy to do that with you anytime this week. Let's pray. Let's pray. God, we thank you so much for the fact that you give us through Paul this letter.

That now some 2,000 years later we can, not as Colossians, but as Irish and Americans and anywhere else, that we can look at what Paul wrote to your holy people in Colossae.

That we can read this and we can be anxious to read more and we can want to learn more because it's still so applicable to who we are today.

God, we thank you that we are secure and we can be confident in the fact that we are citizens of heaven. And oh God, we long for the day where we get to come home to our true land, our true country.

[31 : 11] And yet in the meantime, Lord, we know that you have a purpose for us right here. That by your will, through your grace, you have placed us where you've placed us, you've put us in the relationships you've put us in, and that you have a plan for your glory to continue to build your kingdom right here in Carragalline, right here in County Cork, right here in Ireland and everywhere else.

God, we thank you for the chance to be a part of that. We thank you for the chance to be your people and we recognize that it is only by grace through the precious blood of Jesus Christ that that has happened.

Would you send us out this week with your spirit, Lord? Would you continue to conform us to the image of Christ? Continue to help us to be salt and light. When we're tired, would you give us energy?

When we're struggling, would you give us peace, Lord? Would you remind us of who we are in Christ and see us through this week? It's in Jesus' name we pray.

Amen. Alright, I think if you'd stand with me now, we have one more song.