

A Christ Central Overview

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[0:00] If you would open up your Bibles to Colossians chapter 1, in your pew Bibles on page 1168.

You know, it's always good to know where you're going. This past summer, you all so graciously gave me a seven-week sabbatical. It was awesome.

And the first four weeks of that was an epic road trip. So my wife Jenny, our youngest Mary, we all got in our little CRV, and we did this epic road trip west.

But I got to tell you something. It was all kind of vague until just a couple months beforehand. And it wasn't until a couple months beforehand that we actually got the itinerary in place where we knew where we were going.

We'd know we were going to go see the mountains in Crested Butte. And then we were going to go see Zion National Park in Utah. Then we were going to hit LA and San Diego, Yosemite. Then we're going to go to the Ruby Mountains in Nevada.

[1:07] And then show up in the Tetons. Hit Mount Rushmore. Badlands. Waldrug. And come back home. Oh man, when we saw this trip laid out on a map and the majesty of the American West laid out before us.

Man, we were ready to go. It stirred our anticipation. It's always good to know where you're going. This morning, my goal is to stir your anticipation.

To let you know where we're going in the book of Colossians. So that you can see the majesty of Christ Central laid out in this book again and again. We've got an epic five and a half month journey as a church through this book.

And we're going to see the glories of Christ again and again and again. So this morning, you may have not heard a sermon like this before. It's an overview sermon.

What I'm going to do is briefly give you a little background on the book of Colossians. And then I'm actually going to walk you through the book of Colossians.

[2:17] There's like seven pearls strung together with one common theme. I'm going to walk you through it to build your anticipation for what God has for us. And then I'm going to show you what the argument is.

What the Holy Spirit is wanting to convince us of over the next five and a half months. And do you know what I'm going to do then? I'm going to take Colossians 4.16 to heart. And I'm going to read you the book.

It takes about 11 minutes. And so we got our work cut out for us. But let's start with me giving you some background. First thing to know is who wrote this letter.

By the way, if you're taking notes, don't write anything yet. Don't waste your note taking space on the background stuff. When we get to the structure of the book, the itinerary, that's when you start to need to take notes.

So background, who wrote this letter? Well, we see in chapter 1, verse 1, Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God. That's the guy who wrote the book. Now, if you don't know who an apostle is or have never heard that word before, an apostle is a man who was commissioned by Christ himself and given authority to preach Christ and to establish the church around the nations.

[3:31] A unique authority. There are no more apostles like that anymore. But that authority continues on today in the writings of the apostles. So when we read a book like Colossians, we're putting ourselves under the apostolic authority of Paul.

Paul was the small A author of the book of Colossians. The capital A author is the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit authored every word, inspired every word of this, so that Paul wrote down everything

that God wanted him to write down for those Colossians and for us, Kenosians.

The thing that you need to know about this book, though, that makes it even more interesting is where Paul wrote it from. He wrote it from a Roman prison cell. And so when you see the centrality of Christ throughout this book, in the midst of all that kind of suffering, it's incredible.

So who wrote the letter? Well, Paul, an apostle. Who were the recipients of the letter? Well, we see that in verse 2. To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae. Now, Colossae was a town in what is now modern-day Turkey.

It was Asia Minor, and it was primarily a Gentile town, a non-Jewish town. Anybody familiar with the seven churches of Revelation chapter 2 and 3?

[4:56] Those churches were in Asia Minor, and Colossae was really close to them. So it's kind of the northern Mediterranean basin, southwestern Turkey today.

And these men and women had been flipped by God's grace in Christ. They had never met Paul. They had never seen him face to face. You'll see that in chapter 2, verse 1.

But what did happen is a guy named Epaphras. You see this in chapter 1, verse 7. Just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved servant. Epaphras was a Colossian, and somehow he had become a Christian.

And he went back to Colossae and started making Christ known among his fellow Colossians. And they started to believe. They had faith in Jesus Christ, and their eternities changed.

And there was such a response that they were able to gather a church there. Paul hears about it. So he writes this letter to them. Now, Paul, remember, is the small author of Colossians.

[6:01] And the Holy Spirit is the capital A author. That's why this book is not only good for that first century church in Colossae. It's really good for a 21st century church in Kenosha.

So why was this letter written? There was a problem. The church was being influenced by thinking, maybe even better said, a way of being, that was minimizing Jesus and decentralizing Jesus.

And something else had come into the controlling center of this church. And so what Paul is going to argue throughout this letter is that Jesus is the controlling center of all things.

Jesus is enough. You don't need to add to him. And so what we see here happening in the book of Colossians is Paul correcting a decentralizing of Jesus by recentralizing Jesus.

Anybody benefit from hearing that day in and day out? We all have a tendency to decentralize Jesus. This is going to be good news for us.

[7:20] You're going to see a glorious Christ worthy of your life again and again and again. So now, that's the background. Let's get to where the action is.

The structure of the book. The unfolding of the book. There are ten pearls here. No, no. Seven pearls in Colossians. And they're all strung together by one central argument.

Now, if you're taking notes, here's what I'd like you to do on the left side of that kind of note-taking space on the back of your bulletin or on a piece of paper. Just write one, two, three, four, five, six, seven on the left side.

And then I want you to write words next to them. Number one, intro. Number two, purpose. Number three, threat.

Number four. I know I'm going quick here. Number four, who with an arrow that points to how.

[8:20] Number five. Let me show if I got my facts right. Household. Number six, outsiders. Number seven, network.

Okay, my goal here is to prime the pump of your heart to build into you some kind of anticipation for the goodness that God has for us.

So I'm going to walk you through these seven pearls. I'm going to walk you through this itinerary. And I want you to be coming out of this saying, oh, man, this is going to be good for the next five and a half months. So let me walk you through, starting with number one, intro.

The introduction of Colossians takes up the most space in Colossians. Believe it or not, it starts in chapter one, verse one, and goes all the way to chapter two, verse five.

So it's a really big introduction. Paul kind of introduces himself, says hi to the Colossian church. And then in verses three through eight, he starts giving thanksgiving for what God has started in this church.

[9:23] They were loving one another. They had hope. They had faith in Christ. So he's like grateful, thankful for what God had done in this Colossian church. And then in verses nine through 14, he starts praying for the church.

There's an apostolic prayer in your Bible. There are multiple of them. One of them is in Colossians chapter one, verses nine through 14. And he prays something very specific for this church that gets us on what his burden is for this church.

Look at verse nine. Asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will and all spiritual wisdom and understanding. Verse 10, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him.

What Paul is writing for, what he's getting at in this prayer, is he's praying something for this church that they would walk in a manner worthy of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ central. Fully pleasing to him. Christ central. It's a beautiful passage. But then he gets into verses 15 through 23, which is kind of like Christological fireworks.

[10:30] It is believably unbelievable. And so what the apostle Paul does here is he sets forth this glorious vision for who Jesus is and what he's done.

So in verses 15 through 17, he points to Jesus as being the Lord over all creation. And then in verses 18 through 20, he points to Jesus as being Lord over all redemption.

He's Lord over all. He is preeminent over all things and his reign is comprehensive through everything. Christ central. There's a reason why this is in the introduction of this book.

The apostle Paul is already centralizing Jesus for this church. We're going to see this passage played out, echo through the rest of the book.

In chapter 1, verse 24 through 25, again, part of the introduction, the apostle Paul is kind of saying, okay, this is my labor for you.

[11:43] This is, this is, this Christ is who I am serving and suffering for so that you would be, verse 28, so I could present you mature in Christ.

That Christ would be central to your lives. He starts talking about a mystery in this section. A mystery revealed. And that mystery revealed is Christ.

So that's the intro to the book of Colossians. That's the first pearl. That's where he starts. Big Jesus. And now he moves on in verses 2, 6, and 7 to the purpose.

It's a purpose statement for the book. Look, you can read it in verse 2, 6. Therefore, as you receive Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him. Here, I'm going to read that again.

I'm going to read, therefore, as you receive Christ Jesus the Lord. And I want you all to say back to me, so walk in him. Ready? Therefore, as you receive Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him.

[12:51] Just as you received Christ Jesus as the Lord over all creation and the Lord over the new creation, so walk in him.

Central, functional to all that you are. This is the purpose statement of the book. Paul is impressing upon this church. Jesus is enough, and he's central to all that you are and all that you do.

Christ central walking. That word walk, so walk in him.

You might think kind of like walk. What he's talking about is like living your life. Living your life in every detail of your life. Wherever you find yourself living, that is where you're walking.

And what he's arguing here for is Christ is be the controlling center of all that you do. So that's the purpose. Let's move on to the third pearl.

[13:54] The third pearl is threat. In verses, chapter 2, verses 8 through 23, Paul identifies the threat to the church in Colossae.

And there is a corresponding threat to the church in Kenosha. There's this, back in the day, there's this dangerous teaching, a dangerous way of being that was toxic to the church.

Now, this threat came in a particular form. And it's what's called syncretism. And what syncretism is, is when a Christian starts adding things that are not necessary or essential, and adding them to the Christian faith and making them necessary and essential.

Even making them central. And so instead of this beautiful body of Jesus, the church, what can happen with syncretism is a Frankenstein beast that stops being Christianity.

And so when you read through verses like 8 through 23, you see a number of these things that are coming up. There was this secular influence. Look at verse 8.

[15:15] See that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world. And notice that, next phrase, and not according to Christ.

They were buying into some kind of philosophy that had nothing to do with Jesus. And they were making it important to following Jesus. And then there's all these kind of religious, Jewish kind of religious references.

There's a phrase talking about verse 11. In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands. By the circumcision of Christ. Apparently circumcision was an issue.

Look at verse 16. Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. So somebody was influencing the church by saying, you know what, it really matters what you eat and drink in order to walking and living for Jesus.

Or it really matters that you keep this religious calendar. That's really important. And look what Paul says in verse 17. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance, the centrality of all things, belongs to Christ.

[16:33] He goes on to talking about asceticism, about the worship of angels, about getting caught up with visions.

And then in verse 20, he starts talking about 2021. These things that were being said in the church. Do not handle. Do not taste.

Do not touch. No, no. No, no. No. Don't do that. No. No. And Paul wraps up by saying in verse 23, hey, these have an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion, self-made religion, Frankenstein religion, and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

They are no value to your godliness. They are no value to living for Christ. These things are a shadow. These things can be toxic. Guess what, gang?

As it was true back in the first century, it's true in the 21st century. There are toxins in American culture that we're breathing in.

[17:43] And we've got to point them out and say, no, no, that's not healthy for us. No, that's not central to our walking with Jesus. That's at best on the outside.

So there's a real threat going on to this Colossian church. The threat of syncretism. It's still a threat today.

The fourth pearl is in chapter 3, verses 1 through 17, and it's actually Paul's response to this Frankenstein Christianity that has no value for stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

It is the who to how of Christian living. This is what it means to truly walk in a manner worthy of Christ, walking in a manner that pleases Him.

He says that's not the way in chapter 2, and then lays out for us in chapter 3, this is the way to live for Christ. And what I want you to see is a very important relationship.

[18:47] In chapter 3, 1 through 4, Paul is going to say, this is who you are in Christ. And then in chapter 3, verses 5 through 17, he says, and this is how you live for Christ.

Who you are in Christ determines how you live for Christ. Who Christ is and what Christ has done defines and determines who we are and how we live.

This is a very important passage for us because he's going to get into the nitty-gritty of some things. It's going to help us recognize that Jesus is enough and Jesus is central to our daily living.

And so he hits, in this part of chapter 3, he hits on Jesus kind of like general godliness. It's what progressive sanctification, becoming more and more like Jesus, looks like day in and day out.

The fifth pearl is he now moves from these general kind of principles of godly living for Christ to now living godly lives in real relationships with one another.

[20:08] Household relationships. And this is chapter 3, verse 18 through chapter 4, verse 1. If you look at it, it's really interesting. He identifies three sets of relationships.

He talks about marriage, 18 and 19. He talks about the family, children in verse 20, parents in verse 21. And then he talks about the workplace. Bond servants and masters.

We're going to think about that in terms of if you are playing some kind of what's the word? If you're playing, I want to say a subservient world, but that's not it.

The word I'm looking for, where did I write this word? Subordinate world. Sorry about that.

What he's going to address is how to live as a subordinate in the workplace and then how to live if you're a supervisor in the workplace. So it's really interesting how he lays all this stuff out.

[21:14] And what I want you to notice is that Christ is central to it all. Wives, you should look at verse 18.

Wives, submit to your husbands as is fitting in the Lord. Children, obey your parents in everything for this pleases the Lord.

Christ central. Bond servants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters fearing the Lord. Work hardly for the Lord. You are serving the Lord Christ.

Christ central. Masters, supervisors, treat your subordinates justly and fairly knowing that you also have a supervisor, Christ central, in heaven.

Christ central all the way through. The next stop is in chapter 4 verses 2 through 6 and then Paul makes a very quick move to those outside the faith.

[22:14] In verse 2, he calls this church, God is calling us to be praying watchfully, evangelistically.

And then in verses 3 and 4, Paul asks this church to pray for his gospel work. And then in verses 5 through 6, he moves to the Colossians themselves and says, okay, this is, here's some instructions in order, how to engage those outsiders that you're living among, those who are not in Christ but outside of Christ.

And so, in verses 2 through 6 of chapter 4, he's helping us think evangelistically. And then finally, in chapter 4, verses 7 through 18, is the close of the book, seventh pearl.

And you might see that and start thinking, oh man, there's a lot of names. Isn't that interesting?

That's wonderful. You can dismiss it. Let's not dismiss it. The Holy Spirit has this here for a reason.

In this passage, in 7 through 18, Paul name drops 10 people. And if you include himself, it's 11. No, verse 18.

[23:31] Including himself, it's 11. But interwoven throughout these names are greetings. Christians from all over the Mediterranean basin greeting one another.

There's a network here. And intermingled with all these greetings, Paul is making reference to this gospel labor of people who are seeking to make Christ known in these cities around the Mediterranean Sea.

And so what you have here at the end of the book of Colossians is a Christ central missional network. The book ends with this sense that the Colossian church is not alone in what God is doing around the world.

They have a part to play. So these are the seven pearls. This is the itinerary of the book of Colossians. There is a lot here. But there is a cord holding all these pearls together.

All these seven distinct moves. They unfold with one common theme. Christ central. Christ preeminent over all.

[24:56] Christ comprehensively reigning through all. The main argument of the book is not just that Christ is central. The main argument of the book is that Christ is the functional center of our lives.

He controls and determines everything. You can say it this way. Because of who Christ is and what Christ has done, what Christ is doing, He must be the controlling center of who we are and what we do.

Christ central. Jesus is enough. I hope it's kind of stirring some anticipation in you. We've got some majesty of Jesus coming our way through the book of Colossians.

So now what I'd like to do is read the book of Colossians to you. In chapter 4, verse 16, Paul says, and when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans.

This letter was meant to be read. This letter was meant to be heard by Christians. So I'm going to read it and I'm going to ask you right now, ask the Lord, Lord instruct me as I listen.

[26:24] Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God and Timothy, our brother, to the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae, grace to you and peace from God our Father.

We always thank God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ when we pray for you since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints because of the hope laid up for you in heaven.

Of this you have heard before in the word of truth, the gospel, which has come to you as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing as it also does among you since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow servant.

He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf and has made known to us your love in the Spirit. And so from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and in increasing in knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. And then he starts talking about Jesus. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

[27:54] For by him, all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities, all things were created through him and for him.

And he is before all things and in him, all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He's the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him, all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil things, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven and of which I, Paul, became a minister, now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake.

And in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's affliction for the sake of his body, that is the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you to make the word of God fully known.

The mystery, hidden for ages and generations, but now revealed to his saints, to them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

[29:24] Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom that we may present to everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those that Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, that their hearts may be encouraged being knit together in love to reach all the riches of the fullness of assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery which is Christ in whom are hidden all treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments for though I am absent in the body yet I am with you in spirit rejoicing to see your good order in the firmness of your faith in Christ.

Therefore, as you receive Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him. Rooted and built up in him and established in the faith just as you were taught abounding in thanksgiving.

See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty conceit according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily and you have been filled in him who is the head of all rule and authority.

[30:39] In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands by putting off the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ

having been buried with him in baptism in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God who raised him from the dead.

And you who were dead in your trespasses in the uncircumcision of your flesh God made alive together with him having forgiven us all our trespasses by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands this he set aside nailing it to the cross he disarmed the rulers and the authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in him.

Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath these are a shadow of the things to come but the substance belongs to Christ.

Let no one disqualify you insisting on asceticism and the worship of angels going on in detail about visions puffed up without reason by a sensuous mind and not holding fast to the head from whom the whole body nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments grows with the growth that is from God.

If with Christ you die to the elemental spirits of the world why as if you were still alive in the world do you submit to regulations do not handle do not taste do not touch referring to things that all perish as they are used according to human precepts and teachings.

[32:09] These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism in severity to the body but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

If then you've been raised with Christ seek the things that are above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. set your minds on things that are above not on things that are on earth for you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God when Christ who is your life appears then you also will appear with him in glory.

Put to death therefore what is earthly in you sexual immorality impurity passion evil desire and covetousness which is idolatry on account of these the wrath of God is coming in these you too once walked when you were living in them but now you must put them all away anger wrath malice slander and obscene talk from your mouth do not lie to one another seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and put have put on the new self which is being renewed in the knowledge after the image of its creator a reference to Jesus here there is not Greek and Jew circumcised and uncircumcised barbarian Scythian slave free but Christ is all and in all put on then as God's chosen ones holy and beloved compassionate hearts kindness humility meekness and patience bearing with one another and if one has a complaint against another forgiving each other as the Lord has forgiven you so you also must forgive and above all these put on love which binds everything together in perfect harmony and let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts to which indeed you were called in one body and be thankful let the word of

Christ dwell in you richly teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom singing songs and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God and whatever you do in word or deed do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus giving thanks to God the Father through him wives submit to your husbands as is fitting in the Lord husbands love your wives and do not be harsh with them children obey your parents in everything for this pleases the Lord fathers do not provoke your children lest they become discouraged bond servants subordinates obey in everything those who are your earthly masters not by way of eye service as people pleasers but with sincerity of heart fearing the Lord whatever you do bond servant subordinate work heartily as for the Lord and not for men knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward you are serving the Lord Christ for the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done and there is no partiality masters treat your bond servants supervisors treat your subordinates justly and fairly knowing that you also have the ultimate supervisor in heaven continue steadfastly in prayer being watchful in it with thanksgiving at the same time pray also for us that God may open to us a door for the word to declare the mystery of Christ on account of which

I am in prison that I make it clear which is how I ought to speak walk in wisdom toward outsiders making the best use of the time let your speech always be gracious seasoned with salt so that you may know how you ought to answer each person Tychicus will tell you all about my activities he is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant of the Lord I have sent him to you for this very purpose that you may know how we are that he may encourage your hearts and with him Onesimus our faithful and beloved brother who is one of you they will tell you of everything that has

taken place here Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you and Mark the cousin of Barnabas concerning whom you have received instructions if he comes to you welcome him and Jesus who is called Justice these are the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God and they have been a comfort to me Epaphras who is one of you a servant of Christ Jesus greets you always struggling on your behalf in his prayers that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God for I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in [36:49] Laodicea in Hierapolis Luke the beloved physician greets you as does Demas give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea and to Nympha and the church in her house and when this letter has been read among you have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans and see that you also read the letter from the Laodicea and say to Archippus see that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord I Paul write this greeting with my own hand remember my chains grace be with you brothers and sisters we we have an epic journey in front of us over the next five and a half months we are going to see the majesty of Christ lifted up and worked through our lives would you join with me now as we ask God to do a work a lasting work in our lives father god we thank you for every book of this bible we thank you for every word that has originated in your mind and is now available to us in our own language we thank you for the book of colossians and its unique contribution to our lives the centrality of Christ in all things father would you pour out your spirit upon us week after week over the next five and a half months and that you would capture us with this glorious vision of Christ central preeminent comprehensive in all things it's your name we pray amen