

You are in Christ

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[0 : 00] Well, it is such a delight to be back at Holy Trinity Doncaster. I love this church and love being with you, and of course a great privilege to be speaking at these summer Bible studies.

Mark asked me to say a bit about myself. What can I say? I'm older than I was last time I was here, I can tell you that. But this year actually is the 60th anniversary of my conversion to Christ.

So I'm full of thanksgiving. And let me say, if you're just a young whippersnapper like most of you, living with Christ gets better and better.

Because you learn how faithful God is in every circumstance. You see how God answers long-term prayers.

I prayed for my brother John to become a Christian for 50 years, and then he was converted. And you see that things which felt like disasters, actually were not disasters, but...

[1 : 15] Well, they were disasters in a way, but God turned them for good. So I recommend, if you're a Christian, you keep at it, because it gets better and better. What else can I say, Mark?

Well, one thing I do is run preaching... training preaching classes for young ministers, and some not so young.

And I've been doing that for about 10 years. This year I've decided to run groups to train ministers to pray as well, because it seems to me that praying is a really important thing to do.

And we don't often train people to pray, but we do need to be trained and mentored in praying. So that's one thing I'm really excited about this year.

Well, let's head to Colossians. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy, our brother, to God's holy people in Colossae, the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ.

[2 : 22] I want you to focus your mind on one word, and it's a small word.

It is the word in. Notice that Paul addresses the people at Colossae. He says in verse 2 that they are in Colossae, and they are in Christ.

Now, C.S. Lewis points out that when we read ancient texts, we're not tricked by unfamiliar words, we're tricked by familiar words, because we think we know what they mean.

But let me explain to you how important the word in, in Christ, is, because Paul is asserting that as really as people are living in Colossae or Doncaster or wherever, they are living in Christ.

As a matter of fact, in Paul's mind, living in Christ, that's where you live, not near Christ, not around Christ, not away from Christ, but you live in Christ, and that is the great reality of being a believer in Christ.

[3 : 58] That is, when we become Christians, Jesus doesn't just wave to us from a distance and say, welcome to the family. No, Jesus embraces us into himself.

So we live, not only in our geographical location, but we live in him, that is, we derive our life from him.

So, that's why the heading for the whole series is continue to live, where?

In Christ. Let me show you how important this idea is in this letter. Look at chapter 2, verses 6 and 7.

Just as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives, where? In him. In Christ. Rooted and built up, where?

[5 : 09] In him. That is, we're constantly deriving our life from Christ, and we're constantly being built up in him.

Or, look at verses 9 and 10 in chapter 2. Ah. Where does all the fullness of deity live? In Christ.

And where have we been brought to fullness, verse 10? In Christ. So, listen to this. If God is in Christ, and we are in Christ, we couldn't be closer to God, could we?

If God is in Christ, and we are in Christ, then we are perfectly connected, intimately connected, permanently connected, intimately related to God, for we are in Christ.

God is in Christ, Christ. And we are in Christ. So, being a Christian doesn't mean kind of following someone from the past, or following somebody who is like us, but not like us.

[6 : 34] No, living as a Christian is more like being absorbed into Christ, being welcomed into Christ, being embraced embraced into Christ, so that we derive our life from Him.

This is not a very good example, but do you remember being in your mother's womb? Some people do.

It's a bit dark. Not much to do, except grow. Not a lot of daylight. But what does the baby do? Lives inside the baby's mother and derives his or her life from his or her mother.

It's miraculous, isn't it? Extraordinary. And that's a feeble picture of what it is to live in Christ.

Paul says, Jesus rather, says a similar thing in John chapter 15. Do you remember when he says, I am the vine and you are the branches?

[7 : 45] He doesn't say, I'm the stem and you are the branches. He says, I'm the vine, that is, the stem and the branches and the leaves.

I'm the whole vine and you have to keep on abiding in me and deriving your life from me. That's another picture of the same reality.

I am the vine, Jesus says, and you are the branches. You are my branches. Another way it's described in the New Testament is that we are the body of Christ, an equally powerful image of close connection.

salvation. Now, I spent a bit of time on that because it's a key to the whole book and we'll be coming back to it week after week.

To God's holy people in Colossae, the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ. Grace and peace to you from God our Father.

[8 : 49] God's holy love. Now, if you have a bad turn during the evening, we'll get some medical person to come and see if you're still alive. You can do that by poking people.

If they say, please stop poking me, you know they're still alive. Or else you can take their pulse. You're not actually meant to take it. You're meant to note that it's there. If you removed someone's pulse, that would not be very good for their health.

So, Paul, when taking the pulse of a Christian church, looks for three signs of life. They are faith, love, and hope.

Faith in Christ Jesus, love for all the saints, and hope of the return of Christ. Faith, love, and hope.

So, no wonder Paul says in verse 3, we always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we've heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, the love you have for all God's people, and the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven.

[9 : 59] And notice that causes Paul to thank God every time he prays for them. I've found that a great practice, that when I'm praying for somebody, I thank God for them first, because that makes me alert to the work of God in them already, and encourages me to pray more adventurous prayers.

And it's right to thank God for what he's done, isn't it? We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because Paul hasn't met them, but he's heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, the love you have for all God's people, the faith and love that spring from the hope stood up for you in heaven.

And how has this come about? You've already heard in the true message of the gospel that's come to you. That is, they've become Christians by hearing the true message of the gospel and the sign that they are alive in Christ, that they are in Christ, is faith and hope and love, or faith, love and hope.

Now, you know, some Christians focus on faith, don't they? I think it's really important. Some Christians focus on love, that's the most important thing. I don't think many Christians in the West focus on hope, but in some parts of the world that must be really important.

But Paul looks for all three, do you notice that? Faith and love and hope. So if you think to yourself, well I'm quite good on faith but a bit weak on hope and love, then do something about it.

[11 : 38] you've heard of these in the true message of the gospel that came to you, 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.

Yes, if we know the gospel, we know that it is a gospel for the whole world. It's not just that Jesus came to die for you or for me or Jesus came to rise again for you or for me.

No, no, the gospel is a much bigger picture isn't it? It's God's great gospel plan, the world and Paul wants to bring that home to the Colossians and make them world-wise, that is, aware of what's happening around the world and we'll return to that theme in the fourth talk.

Just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God's grace. You learnt this from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who's a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.

We don't know much about Epaphras. We suspect that he heard the good news from Paul and went home to his hometown in Colossae and told others about the Lord Jesus and planted a church of Jesus Christ there.

[13:05] How wonderful. And for this reason since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you.

Busy time, isn't he? We thank God, verse 3, we have not stopped praying for you. Now, what do we pray for our church?

I assume if you're a member of this church, you pray for this church. Is that right? Good. You might be praying for other churches as well.

Well, here's a great prayer to pray. It starts in verse 9. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all through all the wisdom and understanding that the spirit gives.

That is, we're praying that the church and the people in the church will keep on growing as Christians. I hope that's your aim this year. I hope you're not still at Sunday school stage when you left Sunday school a number of years ago.

[14:18] I hope you're still growing. I hope this church is still growing. We continually ask God to fill you with knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the spirit gives. Why?

That you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way. Isn't that a lovely combination? That you can lead a life worthy of the Lord and if you do that you will please him in every way.

Now some Christians I meet are very nervous at the thought that they might possibly please God or please Christ. but actually your average everyday Christian who's living as a Christian actively is pleasing Christ.

Isn't that wonderful? And what will be the signs of this? Bearing fruit in every good work?

Growing in the knowledge of God? Being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might. That sounds pretty exciting doesn't it? But look at verses 11 and 12 and see what the result of God's power is.

[15:37] His all power according to his glorious might. The answer is the result is great endurance and patience and joyful thanks. God's grace.

So the sign that God's great power is at work in your life is that you are still a Christian, that you're enduring as a Christian and that you're joyfully giving thanks to the Father who qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light.

what a wonderful prayer to pray for Christian people whom you know. What a wonderful prayer to pray for this church.

Verse 13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves. In whom oh in whom we have redemption the forgiveness of sins.

Not just from whom but in whom we have redemption the forgiveness of sins. So because we are in Christ we have redemption the forgiveness of our sins.

[16:57] You can't be in Christ and not have the forgiveness of your sins. If you are in Christ your sins are forgiven. If you are in Christ your sins are forgiven.

Well I told you that being in Christ was a major theme of this book and that's why Paul now spends the next verses talking about the glory of the Son.

And please notice the first point that Paul makes here is the Son and creation. We often think that God the Father made the world and then Jesus came along later and then the Holy Spirit came along but actually we discover that the Son verse 15 is the image of the invisible God the firstborn over all creation for this sounds a bit like John chapter 1 doesn't that in him all things were created. In him all things were created things in heaven and earth visible and invisible whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities all things have been created through him and for him.

He is before all things and in him all things hold together. Now there are lots of important things here.

[18 : 28] The first thing I want to say is that if you lose the idea that God has created the world through Christ then you'll eventually come to think that the world is out of control, beyond the control of God and outside the power of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And if that's the way you think you'll be more and more nervous about the way our world is going. And in a way rightly so. We keep on developing more and more effective ways of killing each other, don't we?

And every time we invent a new kind of bomb or something like that we think this means there'll be no wars because people will be frightened of it. That's happened all through the 17th and 19th and 19th century, it's happened through the 20th century, but actually when push comes to shove we do use these better weapons, don't we, to destroy more people.

Or else we think that the world is a meaningless place. I was so amused to see the title of a recent book and then an ABC program which was Making Meaning in a Meaningless World.

It's a magnificent statement, isn't it? You see, if you don't believe in God, then you might well think the world is meaningless, that we are just specks of accidental cosmic dust.

[20 : 04] We don't quite know how it happened, but it happened and it's a meaningless world, there was no purpose to it. If there's no God, there's no purpose. But our task is to make meaning of a meaningless world.

But actually, by definition, if the world is meaningless, it's pretty hard to make meaning out of it, isn't it? So we need a robust and positive view of God's creation of and sustaining of this world.

Not just his creation of it, but his constant care for it. And that's why I love verse 17. He, that is, the Son, is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

That is, Jesus is the power, is the one in whom the whole universe holds together. So, if Jesus lost concentration for a moment, the whole universe would disappear.

Isn't that extraordinary? We're constantly sustained by the power of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ. Your digestion is currently functioning, I hope, by the power of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[21 : 19] Your brain is currently working, I hope, by the power of the Lord Jesus Christ. And you are breathing in and breathing out and getting oxygen from the process, and your heart is beating because of the power of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ. It's not that God set up the world, made it, and then walked away and let it kind of function all by itself. No, our world, indeed the whole universe, is under the constant care and provision, is constantly sustained by God in Christ.

In him, all things hold together. And, verse 18, he's the head of the body, the church, the firstborn, beginning and firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might have the supremacy.

Not only that, but verse 19, God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood shed on the cross.

God's love. But this being in Christ is not universal and not automatic.

[22 : 47] Verse 21, once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior.

It's fascinating, isn't it, what a big theme alienation is in our world and how easily people feel alienated, not at home, somehow not belonging.

Well, as a matter of fact, the most significant alienation is from God. And if you're not reconciled to God, then no wonder you feel alienated, not at home.

But he says in verse 22, but now he's reconciled to you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish, and free from accusation.

If you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard.

[23 : 59] Well, we discovered that back in verse 5. You've already heard the true message of the gospel, the good news about Jesus Christ. This is the gospel that you heard, and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

Colossae was a small and unimportant town. But the thing Paul wants to know is that they're not only in Colossae, but even more importantly, in Christ.

They're in Christ because they demonstrate faith in Christ Jesus, love for God's people, and hope for what is stored up in heaven.

And they're people of faith and love and hope because they've heard the true message of the gospel that has come to you.

And they heard that from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, and who has told us of your love in the Spirit.

[25 : 32] Well, they are in Christ, they are people of faith and love and hope, but there's still some growing to do. Lifelong learning is one of the great joys of being a human being, and one of the great privileges of being a believer in Jesus Christ.

So Paul prays for them. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will. that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way, bearing fruit in every good work, growing the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might, that you may have great endurance and patience and give joyful thanks to the Father for his rescue of you in Christ.

Christ. And this Christ is a big Christ. He's the image of the invisible God. All things were created in him and for him and he holds all things together.

He is the head of the body, the church, and indeed all God's fullness dwells in him. And through him God reconciles himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, making peace through his blood shed on the cross.

And these Colossians were once alienated from God, but now reconciled by Christ's physical body through his death.

[27 : 10] And Christ's aim is to present you holy in his sight, without blemish, and free from accusation. If you continue in your faith, established and firm, and don't move from the hope held out in the gospel.

May God reassure our minds, our hearts, our feelings, our deepest selves, that if we are believers in Christ, we are in Christ.

And the Christ in whom we are is the one through whom the creation exists, Christ, and he holds it together. He's the head of the church, and all God's fullness dwelt in him, and through him reconciled all things to himself.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, we are in Christ. Christ. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, we are in Christ.

I was talking to a lady in Tasmania in October. She didn't have a lot of English, and I didn't have a lot of her native language, so the communication was slow.

[29 : 05] but the thing that I loved saying to her, very simply, was that God loved her all through the night, and God loved her when she woke up in the morning, and God loved her all through the day, and God loved her as she went to sleep at night, and God loved her all through the next night too.

For how could God not love those who are in his Son? How could God not love those who are in his Son, Jesus Christ?

Praise him. Amen.