

The Church Must Offer Only Jesus Christ 2

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[0 : 00] The passage that we're looking at from Colossians is on page 188 in your New Testament section of your pew Bible. And I think I would like to reduce the text to three words, which I hope could be burned upon your memory of this day. And those three words in verse 28 of chapter 1 on page 100 on 88 are, Him We Proclaim. Now, the reason I do this is because I was warned not to preach on this passage on Wednesday morning at the men's breakfast because it's too difficult. And I've thought about it quite a lot, and I think it's only difficult because if you pick up this passage without the whole context of the epistle to the Colossians, you can easily get into deep trouble.

So that what I want to do is take these three words, Him, that is Jesus Christ, we proclaim. That's it. Now, what I would like to say about Him, and I think this is what the whole of the epistle to the Colossians is about is that Jesus Christ plus anything is nothing. Jesus Christ alone is everything. And that's the lesson that Paul is trying to establish in writing this letter to the Colossians. Now, he preached in Ephesus, and Colossi was up country, up the river, quite some distance, and Paul never visited it. So his main contact with this congregation was through this letter. And it's a terribly important letter because he saw this community of faith come into being in Colossi.

in response to the preaching of Epaphras, whom he talks about in the letter. I would really like you to have the whole manuscript of the letter on one piece of paper in front of you, but, because you have to read the thing, the whole thing, I think, to understand it.

But what he's saying is that when this congregation was established, then the predators moved in on it.

[2 : 53] Just as the predators move in on this congregation here. John Chapman, to my mind, was brilliant in that he put before us nothing more and nothing less than the person of Jesus Christ.

Now, the whole of our human instinct in our human heart is to say, there must be something more. And so we go in search of something more than Jesus Christ. We want to find something else. The Pentecostals come along and say, Ah, there's a great experience of the Holy Spirit that you must have.

And the Catholics come along and say, There's 2,000 years of church tradition and all the disciplines of the spiritual life that you must have. And the United Church comes along and says, If you don't get involved in the social issues, this whole thing is meaningless.

And the Baptists come along and say, There is one experience and that experience is to be born again. And that alone is the standard. And the Anglicans come along and say, The glories of church music.

[4 : 17] The wonder of the liturgy. These are the only things that make it palatable. And this is virtually what was happening to the church in Colossae.

The predators were moving in and saying, What you've got, that's fine, that's fine. But let's go on to what it really is all about.

And so they suggested a number of things which they thought should be included in any well-rounded picture of the Christian faith.

And they said, Paul says, They made prey of this congregation. They had a philosophy. They had empty deceit.

They built in human tradition. They drove people back to the elemental spirits of the universe.

[5 : 22] They passed judgment on those who professed faith in Christ. In questions of food and drink, You haven't observed this festival as you should.

Are you aware of the significance of the new moon? Have you read your history in the stars? Have you observed properly the Sabbath? Have you abased yourself in the true humility that belongs to

your life?

Have you enjoyed the worship of angels? Have you partaken in heavenly visions? They led them away, Paul says, With minds puffed up with, Not reason, but sensuousness.

The thing that appeals to our senses. They said, You must submit to these regulations if you were to call yourself a Christian.

You are not to touch this. You are not to taste this. You are not to handle this. And so these poor people, Who had just come to a wonderful faith in Jesus Christ, Found that the freight that went with it, And that was loaded on them, In addition to that, Was beginning to weigh them down.

[6 : 44] And Paul writes this letter, And he says, There is nothing else. Just Jesus Christ. That's all. Full stop.

That's the end. Now I've gone through the whole of the epistle, And I want you to look at it. I hate to subject you to this, But it's absolutely amazing When you look at, When you just read it carefully, As I did, And underline, And you can follow it if you like.

Paul says, I am an apostle of Jesus. We are brethren in Christ. God is the father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Your faith is in Christ. Epaphras is a minister of Christ.

You must live a life worthy of Christ. You must be pleasing to him and to him alone. You are transferred by God into his kingdom. Can you handle all this, Or is it just coming too fast?

There's only three more pages of it, So don't worry about it. But this is, Just look at the emphasis on the person of Christ. Listen to this catalog.

[7 : 54] He is the image of the invisible God. He is the firstborn of all creation. In him all things were created. Thrones, dominions, All things were created through him and for him.

He is before all things. In him all things hold together. He is the head of the body of the church. He is the beginning. He is the firstborn from the dead.

He is to be preeminent. In him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. All things are to be reconciled through him. He made peace by the blood of his cross.

The estranged he has reconciled in his body of flesh. By his death. He is to present us blameless and irreproachable.

And on and on it goes. I just, you see, what he's saying is that it is in Christ. So that what we need to know is Jesus Christ.

[9 : 07] That's why Paul says, him we proclaim. No matter what it is we're trying to talk to.

The thing we're trying to say is Jesus Christ. No matter what temptation or what illness or what desire or what longing or what failure or what guilt may touch you at this point.

The cure for it is Jesus Christ. And what happens to us is we try and switch the emphasis on to who I am and what I need and where I'm going and how it will fulfill me.

Preaching Christ in our kind of society is always trying to prove that this is better than something else.

That you'll have a nicer home, a nicer family, a nicer disposition. That you'll be a better person.

That's not the gospel. The gospel is Jesus Christ and who he is.

[10 : 16] And if he is who Paul claims he is, then your only problem is to know him.

That's all. Knowing him will be the very basis of your life. To know Christ. In him all the fullness of God is revealed.

In him all the fullness of man, what it means to be a human being, is revealed in Christ.

And Paul goes on and on emphasizing this throughout the whole of this letter. That you have come to fullness of life in him.

That he is the head of all rule and authority. You were circumcised in the circumcision of Christ, putting off the body of flesh. You were buried with him in baptism.

[11 : 16] You were raised with him. When God raised him from the dead, you were dead. God made you alive together with him. All our trespasses are forgiven.

The bond which stood against us is canceled. They are nailed to his cross. He disarmed the principalities and powers. He made a public example of them.

Triumphing over them in Christ. Everything else in our religion. All those good things that the Catholic tradition and the Baptist tradition and the Pentecostal tradition and the United Church tradition and the Anglican tradition.

All those things are but a shadow, Paul says. The substance is Christ. I strongly suspect that you don't know what I'm talking about.

And it's partly because I don't know what I'm talking about either. And it's very hard for us because we are so profoundly self-centered.

[12:31] And we're so absorbed with our own circumstances and our own situation and our own dilemmas. We become so terribly introspective.

We become so concerned about what's in it for me. That we can't hear this. And you see, the thing is that if Christ is all that Paul says he is, that's the end of the story.

There's nothing more. And you see, what Paul is saying is that these false teachers are breaking in on the congregation and saying, there is something more.

And how do we get our minds and hearts around it? You know, because as soon as we hear the gospel, we tend to say, well, there must be something I can do.

What I'll do is I'll go to church every Sunday morning. Or I will teach Sunday school. Or I will sing in the choir. Or I will lead the Boy Scouts.

[13:53] Or I will conduct my business in a different way. And soon what happens is that what I am doing becomes the focus of my faith.

And not what Christ has done. Do you see how subtle that is? How it moves in on us. And suddenly the whole focus of our life is changed?

Away from the person of Jesus Christ to our response to, our involvement in, our aesthetic appreciation of, our intellectual understanding.

All those things suddenly become important. And we put our faith in them. And they collapse on us in due course. They're not good enough.

The one in whom we are to put our faith is Jesus Christ. Well, that's what I want to tell you.

[15:04] There's a lovely parable that Christ tells in the Gospels about a tree, a mustard tree, a mustard tree that grows up to be big.

And all the birds come and nest in its branches. And those birds represent the forces of evil, the ones who pick the fruit from the tree.

They don't belong to the tree. They don't grow with the tree. They don't do anything for the tree.

They take away from the tree. And Christ says that that's what happens.

And so in the life of a congregation like Colossae, Paul sees this vibrant church rooted in Christ growing up.

Then he sees the birds coming and taking all the fruit of it away. And I think we're at a very difficult time in the church because there's not many trees and there's a hell of a lot of birds.

[16:28] And you excuse the expression, but that's the feeling I have. And that's where no doubt they're from. And that's the difficulty.

And that's the thing that we have to be absolutely straight on. We have nothing to offer people except Jesus Christ. And we have a whole lot of people who are inclined to say or provoked into saying, but that's not enough.

Well, there just ain't any more. And if you think that's not enough, you do what I've done. And you go and see what it says about Jesus Christ in the epistle to the Colossians.

And you write it out. And then say at the bottom, that's not enough. You couldn't, on a good day, in the full possession of all your faculties, add anything more to that.

You simply couldn't. And that, you see, is what's at the heart of the gospel.

[17:49] And that's why, if you're on your deathbed, the thing that you need to know is that Jesus Christ is who he says he is, and you trust in him.

If you have the most insurmountable and difficult problem that human beings have ever faced, if Jesus Christ, who he says he is, who he says he is, you don't have any problem anymore because your life is in his hands.

And he has done for you what you most need should be done for you. And that's why Paul says, about Jesus Christ, him we proclaim.

Now, Paul says, people really find it difficult to say that that's all there is. There isn't any more.

Jesus Christ, his life, his death, and his resurrection, that's all. There isn't any more. And if you get caught up in adding to that, or in trying to complement it, or in something else that you then come to put your confidence in, then you're in deep trouble spiritually.

[19:30] And it's going to get worse. You need to constantly be stripping it all away. That's what Paul says, if you then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.

That's what you're to seek, is Christ. To know him in the circumstances of your life. Whatever those circumstances may be.

Paul was in trouble because he was, he was having a hard time. He was being flogged, left for dead, abused, and all sorts of things.

He suffered. Because he said, that's all there is. There isn't any more. And all the birds come and they tear at him and say, there's got to be something more.

And he says, no, there isn't. And that's the thing that Colossians has to teach us.

[20 : 45] And we need to look at Colossians between now and Lent, on these Sunday mornings, to try and get hold of the fact that if you do what Paul says he did, you proclaim Jesus Christ, warning every man, teaching every man, that you may present every person mature in Christ.

If you do that, then you've done all that can be done. There isn't any more you can do. And that's why the passage, almost at the end of the letter to the Colossians, Paul writes these words and says, he says, my prayer is that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God.

And the will of God is that which is expressed in Christ. And that's the freedom that you have.

And when predatory preachers like me come along and try and add to that, we're betraying the inheritance that belongs to you in Christ.

We can do anything to help you appropriate what belongs to you in Christ. That's wonderful. But if we try and add something to it, then we're failing to be the ministers of Christ.

[22 : 41] Christ. Well, that's, that's what, that's what's at the center. And that's what's, that's why Paul suffers.

Because people want something else. And people move in to try and give us something else.

But there is nothing else. And when you do as we will do this morning, partake of this is my body, this is my blood, my body broken for you, my blood shed for you.

Then you are partaking of Christ himself. Nothing more, because there need be nothing more.

Amen. Amen. Let us pray.

[24 : 07] Amen. O come, let us worship and bow down.

Let us kneel before the Lord, our maker, for he is our God. And we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand.

Father, this morning we pray for our world. We pray for men and women who carry tremendous responsibility of leadership throughout the nations.

may they be given discernment and courage always to choose good and refuse evil in obedience to your will.

Father, break down any barriers of fear and mistrust that may divide or threaten our world.

[25 : 41] Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. Lord Jesus, this morning we bring to you the needs of many whose lives are shadowed by suffering.

We pray for the lonely. We pray for the children, for children in trouble. We pray for those who are sick and discouraged.

And this morning we would like to pray especially for Beth Bourne's sister who is seriously ill in Toronto.

Let's pray for her a psalm of prayer. Amen. Lord, we pray for those who are working to alleviate the stresses and helping us to know better physical, mental, and social health.

And so this morning we would pray for the caregivers, the health field people who endeavor to meet our every need in medicine and in every skill.

[27 : 24] We pray in your mercy that you will be to them all that they need. Now, Father, we want to give you many thanks for the fresh look of Jesus Christ we received in our mission this past week.

We thank you for your Holy Spirit that made your word press us closer to you.

Father, we do thank you for a new life in Jesus Christ. And we pray this morning that those of us who have made or taken a step towards you will come round to those people who can help us, coach us in coming to know you better.

In your name we pray. Now, Father, we ask your blessing on all who share in the life and work of St.

John's. We thank you for their vision and their commitment. And we especially thank you for the amazing gifts that we have in the men of God that are here to teach us and instruct us in your way.

[29 : 23] Lord, we do thank you very much. In closing, I would like to read the last verse of our mission hymn.

Oh, Lord, your works are wonderful. all things that you have wrought. The greatest is redemption which Jesus has bought.

Your promise is to keep us through all our earthly days and bring us home triumphant to be with you.

always. Amen.