

Various Bible Studies of Colossians

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 28 October 1987

Preacher: Harry Robinson

[0 : 00] Having not attended any of Kathy's talks on Colossians, I have left myself free to say what I want to say without any awareness of whether I'm repeating what she's already done.

But I've just picked a theme that runs through Colossians and thought I would work with it. And I pray that God would use it in our lives as we seek to work out the reality of living in relationship to the Lord Jesus.

So let's pray that God, by his grace, will take this hour and help us mightily in that essential core and focus of our lives.

Father, there is none but you that understands who I am or who any of us is. And you have, in your wisdom, chosen to impart wisdom to us through your word that we might be taught by grace, that we might understand your love, that we might experience your forgiveness, that we might know your reality and in that reality find our own.

So guide us as we look at these words today. And may these words come to life in the circumstances of each of our lives.

[2 : 16] We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. You all know that the Mediterranean has a place like this, which is Asia Minor.

And on the coast of Asia Minor, there was a great city called Ephesus. And one of the great wonders of the ancient world was Diana of the Ephesians that stood over the harbor of the great city of Ephesus and a great temple existed to her there.

And Paul went there and Paul preached there. And that the result of his preaching was that people went out to all the parts of Asia Minor, the Roman province of Asia Minor, and took the gospel.

And one of the places that it went to was way up in the high country where there was three little cities that are all hung together. And one of them was Colossae, which is the one to which this letter is addressed.

Another is Hierapolis. Now I've forgotten what the name of the third was. Thank you very much.

[3 : 34] Who's the... The church in Laodicea. So there they were up there. And this letter is addressed to Colossae, to the church, which would probably be a home church, a house church or churches, in the city of Colossae.

One of the famous householders in that city, his name was... I got you this time. Philemon. And he had a special problem for which a special letter accompanied this letter to the Colossians to address Philemon on the subject of his slave, Onesimus.

So that this was... this tri-city area here was a Hellenistic or Greek city.

They had the usual incursion of Jews that formed synagogues here. And these synagogues were the center of their worship and very often became the basis of how the gospel first got to the community was through the synagogues.

Though the synagogues generally became fairly intolerant of the gospel, just the way modern churches become intolerant of the gospel and force it out.

[5 : 04] You know, so that somebody, if you want to preach it, go out in a street corner and preach it, but don't preach it here. Well, that kind of activity was going on.

And you know that Laodicea was the city which got into trouble because he said, you think you are, what he said, rich and well-fed and all those things.

And he said, but the fact is, the truth of the matter is that you are poor, miserable, blind, and naked. It's wonderful the way scripture says the things that need to be said without apology.

And of course, we can dismiss them because that was then and were now and it wouldn't possibly apply to us. But that's what it said. That was said to this church in Laodicea.

And that church was famous because it was a prosperous, a commercially prosperous city and had lots going on in it.

[6 : 15] But one of the interesting things that is implicit in all this was that the economy of these cities was based on slavery.

You know, that that's how the households ran. They didn't go in for washing machines and drying machines and electronic ovens and all sorts of wonderful things like that.

They didn't need them. They had slaves. And so they carried on with this slavery and slavery became a very integral part of the social structure of this part of the world as it was probably an integral part of the social structure of the whole Roman Empire.

So you have this question of slavery. So you can, I thought that that might be helpful for you and me to look at this particular letter and some passages that occur in it from the point of view that it was written to slaves.

In other words, slaves got something out of it so why don't you? You know, they found something significant here. And so I'd like just to look at it from that point of view.

[7 : 41] The first thing I'd like you to look at is the verse which is the, probably one of the really unique demonstrations of the core reality of Christian faith in the whole of Paul's letters and that is where in verse 13 of chapter 1 987 in the Red Bible where it says he has delivered us from the dominion of darkness.

You know that we once took great pride and my grandmother was one of them I remember particularly that she never put her address down as Plimbridge Road, Toronto, Ontario, Canada. It was always Plimbridge Road, Toronto, Ontario, the dominion of Canada. So that nobody would forget that that's what it was.

So anyway, and this dominion word in this instance is the dominion of darkness that they're talking about. And that word dominion comes from we use something else that derives from that word don't we?

Dominate that's a good word that comes out of it. And anyway this means this is authority what? You think domestic comes from it too? I won't I won't acknowledge that necessarily yet.

[9 : 28] But this it's the dominion of darkness and that this has authority and this has rules. The reason I think this is helpful and perhaps provocative for us is the remembrance that when you come to faith in Christ you don't move from a vast morally and spiritually neutral territory into a specific obedience to Christ you move from a territory where there is tremendous authority into the territory of another and higher authority.

And so that's why verse 13 says that he has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved son in whom we have redemption and the forgiveness of sins.

So there was a transfer of dominion to dominion you know from dominion to kingdom something that is a structure under authority a kingdom has a king in authority and we live under authority and the great thing about slaves is that they were under authority 24 hours a day for as far as they knew the rest of their lives they did that I remember working in Kingston penitentiary and the problem of recidivism which in those days they used to talk about 70% recidivism which means that prisoners came back into prison and it was obvious why and that was that there was clear lines of authority they didn't have choices as to how to behave they didn't even have to choose where their next meal was coming from or how they were going to get clothed the whole thing was laid on and they were told when to get up when to go to bed when to eat when to roll over when to watch television it was all laid on and they just did it and they had that kind of dominion which some of them they needed it that was the only way they could live their lives

I mean it was not unusual in those days to take the train to Toronto and see the big black limousine pull up to the train with the guys that had just been released from the penitentiary all in obviously penitentiary made suits and penitentiary made shoes and they would get on the train and by the time we got to Oshawa even they would be so drunk they couldn't stand up the whole order and structure had gone out of their lives and they were celebrating that fact well you see we all live under some kind of authority and slaves of course live under authority all the time the dominion of darkness so that you get you get slaves now the verse that I'd like to concentrate on and I still want you to remember that you are a slave for purposes of hearing this is the one which comes in Colossians 2 6 which says as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord and this is the operative word there for the moment is that he is the Lord that now this is important I think to recognize

because the thing that Paul points out is different about people who have been transferred out of the kingdom of darkness is that they have been transferred into a kingdom where Jesus is Lord he is the one in authority now most of us you know come at some time in our life to recognize that we are slaves that we're trapped and we're trapped in various ways we may be trapped by certain bad habits that we have no freedom from at all and we may be trapped by a marriage that we don't enjoy any longer we may be trapped by by a domestic situation with five small kids or something like that and it's not unusual to hear people in that situation talk about being trapped we experience in a highly personal way being trapped in a body from which health has disappeared you know the sort of radiant bouncy careless health that we once enjoyed is gone and we're trapped and there's no escape from it or we may be trapped in the process of disease we may be trapped with terminal illness we may be trapped by our investments on the stock market and watch helplessly as they go up and down these kinds of things they're traps for us and they enslave us and

[15 : 58] I suppose there's no doubt about it that lots of them are just symptoms of the dominion of darkness and the authority of that dominion but we are enslaved but the thing that happens is as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord what you have to do at that point is to say Jesus is Lord my body may be wracked with disease but Jesus is Lord I may be the victim of this bad habit but Jesus is Lord I may be caught in an unbearable marriage but Jesus is Lord and so that in every situation in which we find ourselves we don't submit to that situation we in that situation say

Jesus is Lord so that when you go to visit your sick friends or your troubled friends the message that you've got to communicate perhaps very with great skill and great sensitivity and great love is that despite what they may be feeling or even experiencing the reality is that Jesus is Lord they are not slaves of the dominion of darkness darkness is not Lord fear is not Lord Jesus is the one who has authority and it's to him that we have to submit and it's him that we have to trust in the midst of the darkness in the midst of the pain in the midst of the sense of dereliction

Jesus is Lord and that is the bottom line which we need to recognize in our lives you know and I mean I find it the most amazing thing to visit people in the hospital where I am so upset by my knowledge of their condition that I hardly know how to talk to them and then you do start to talk to them and you realize that they know that in that situation Jesus is Lord and so they minister to me and I feel better and go home and that happens all the time because of the recognition that Jesus is Lord and the reason we read our

Bible together and the reason that we pray together and the reason that we worship together and the reason that we talk together and try and help and support one another is to say it starts always with the question is it possible in this situation that Jesus is Lord what you work your way through to as you wait patiently on him is the recognition that in fact he is Lord yes as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord he is in command well that's that's how how it how I think you have to understand it in terms of of a slave reading this particular passage of scripture because look what happens when you go over to chapter four and he starts to deal directly with slaves now you know the the operative word for slaves presumably is freedom now but what does that freedom mean and when Paul when Paul comes to to the end of chapter three of Colossians he's he's talking he's talking to slaves and he's not telling them to run away in fact you have the wonderful example in the letter of Paul to Philemon of Paul sending a runaway slave back to be a slave he's sending him back into the situation from which he's run away he's sending him back in a totally different way but the outward circumstances of his life are the same the same thing that he originally ran away from so you see Paul is implicitly saying the solution to slavery is not to run away that's not how slavery is to be dealt with and in our particular slavery that we experience in the course of our lives there is you can't run away from it and

[22 : 07] Paul doesn't advocate that you run away from it and so when he turns and addresses slaves he says in verse chapter 3 verse 22 slaves obey in everything those who are your earthly masters so that he almost reinforces the slavery I don't know whether you will fight with me on this issue or not but I will put it before you for your prayerful consideration and to say that the parallel statement here is if you want to find freedom submit to your situation that's the contradiction which which Paul seems to be preaching that's what he's telling the slaves to do if you want to find freedom submit to your situation and so he says slaves in everything obey those who are your earthly masters and so there is the

Lord Christ Jesus the Lord and then underneath that there is what Paul describes here as earthly masters and the difference is that the slave is now no longer subject to his earthly master up here

but he's now from the heart to be subject to the Lord and this is his subjection to the Lord is by submitting to his earthly master obey in everything those who are your earthly masters become a more obedient slave don't live in rebellion but submit to your earthly masters and you submit not with eye service as men pleasers and of course that's that's the temptation of everybody is to be men pleasers is to quick give me some inclusive language for saying men pleasers people pleasers

I guess we okay I have to keep working on that not with eye service not seeking to attract their attention not seeking to please them but in singleness of heart fearing the Lord your earthly masters may have no understanding at all of what it is you are up to but you do understand that what you're doing is in singleness of heart fearing the Lord living out of that relationship to the one who is Lord back to the verse we started with as you have received Christ Jesus the

Lord and of course that's that's what makes our Christian life on a day to day basis very exciting is there's all sorts of people who want to exercise their tyranny over you and I particularly like fighting with parking lots attendants because I think they have a tyranny complex as far as I'm concerned and they they want you to do I mean they have their moment in which they can tell you what to do and you're stuck because there's nothing and I but there's all sorts of people in the world who get these little tyranny complexes and want to command you around and the fact of the matter is that fighting them as I've often tried to do is the most frustrating is far more frustrating than anything else because their tyranny is absolute there's nothing you can do and so he's saying slaves in everything work on the basis of fearing the

Lord and what that means in effect and I use the poor old parking lot of tenants but your relationship doesn't come to them I mean there's some wonderful ones too you all run into these people too but your relationship to them does not emerge from whether you find them nice people or not very nice people your relationship to them comes from the fact that with singleness of heart you fear the Lord and out of that fear you relate to them you don't relate to them in terms of their petty tyrannies or their acquisitive instincts or anything else you relate to them out of singleness of heart fear fear the Lord and that's how we are to build and it takes a lot to learn how to do that isn't it

[28 : 23] I mean that's that's a very difficult thing to do maybe it isn't for you because you all are nice people but it's very difficult I think to do that to relate to people out of a single heart that seeks to fear the Lord in that relationship which is perhaps only a momentary relationship only a flick of time but that relationship is to come out of fearing the Lord so that's that's how slaves are to behave so that you see slaves who are way down at the bottom of the scale socially become for the Christian community the sort of models of how you live the Christian life you want to know how to live the Christian life look at the slaves because they have to live it in the most difficult circumstances and so they are obey in everything those who are your earthly masters not with eye service as men pleasers but in singleness of heart fearing the

Lord whatever your task work heartily as serving the Lord and not men I would think you drive your master nuts doing this be utterly frustrating for them but that's what we're told to do whatever you do do it heartily as unto the Lord and not unto men not with eye service as men pleasers but because out of with singleness of heart you're you're living in relationship to Jesus as Lord as you have received Jesus the Lord so walk in him that's where your relationship is coming from all the time and that's why in all the permutations and combinations of our daily interactions with people you know and situations we're not compelled to respond to that particular situation or that particular person that happens to be just the coincidental circumstance of the moment the ultimate reality for us is that we are to be doing whatever we do whatever task heartily as serving the

Lord and not men and it's a tremendously liberating experience in our lives to do that I mean that is freedom that running away after dark is well it's not the same thing at all this is a far more explosive kind of freedom and you're to do this Paul says knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance of your reward now that's difficult and Paul didn't know what he was writing about there so we will dismiss that and go on to the next part you know part of our world is that you know rewards are for Sunday school kids and not for mature people and that it's bad to do that and of course

Marxism you know has taught our world that you do things for its own sake you know you don't look for any reward and that you know it's a shameful thing to look for a reward you should find in the occasion itself justification enough for doing it but look at it again whatever your task work heartily as serving the Lord and not men knowing from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your

reward well when you were baptized you were baptized as a child of God a member of Christ and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven that is the spiritual inheritance that belongs to us that's the perspective by which we live that we are being trained for an inheritance the big difficulty with winning a lotto you know winning a million dollars is that you haven't got the training and how to use it so you probably make a mess of it and end up miserable because you won't know how to handle a very temporary happy mess

I would suggest to you Mrs. Jackson a lot of people would like to get in that kind of mess I admit but the fact of the matter is that it takes a good deal of discipline and the enormous wealth of the inheritance that belongs to us in Christ is such that it takes a lot of training to prepare us to receive that inheritance and that's what Paul is talking about here when he talks about whatever your task work heartily as serving the Lord living with that kind of singleness of heart knowing from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward you are serving the Lord Christ that that so it's a tremendous exaltation isn't it when he when Paul comes down the line and says husbands and wives submit and children submit but then he comes to slaves and slaves are in a sense exalted to this peculiar position of being the real examples of what it means to acknowledge

[35 : 11] Jesus Christ as Lord you have received him as Lord in your life you are no longer subject to your earthly master you are subject to Jesus as Lord in your life and I think that you are serving the Lord Christ the wrongdoer will be paid back for his wrong that he has done there's no partiality then in chapter 4 verse 1 he says masters treat your slaves justly and fairly knowing that you also have a master in heaven well you see that's in a sense the he now moves back and and of course the letter to Philemon is a letter to a slave master telling him how to treat his slave and telling him that this one who ran away as a slave is now to be received back as a brother so that the master has to become a brother to his slave because he too has to serve the

Lord Christ he too is has to live in singleness of heart fearing the Lord and so he has to he has to be in in that kind of relationship masters treat your slaves justly and fairly knowing that you also have a master in heaven and that you know I mean that in a theoretical way is the way that we have set up the state in the British Commonwealth of Nations we make a great fuss about the coronation of the king or queen so that the king or queen will be at the beginning of their reign forcibly reminded that they have a master to whom they are responsible and that they only exercise authority over others as they acknowledge the authority that is over them so that as kings and queens have authority over governor generals and prime ministers and legislators and premiers and mayors and so on the whole structure is one of responsibility and that masters have their master and without acknowledging their master they haven't the right or the capacity to be masters and so they are called upon to recognize this masters treat yourselves slaves justly and fairly knowing that you have a master in heaven well that's that's then the picture of slaves in the epistle to the colossians the verse that

I started with as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord so walk ye in him that that is the acknowledgement of your position of Christ as Lord and the fact that having acknowledged him you walk in fear and singleness of heart seeking to serve him in the circumstances of your life and you minister to one another by helping by our helping one another to be able in the circumstances of our life to acknowledge that we are serving we are slaves to the Lord Christ and he is absolute and sovereign Lord and we need to come to that to the tremendous freedom of knowing who it is that we serve and that's where our freedom is found and that's why of course the lovely line in the prayer book says his service to be his slave is perfect freedom well do you have any questions that I could possibly answer or points that you would like to make yeah the kind of the dominion of darkness is structured this way and the dominion of the kingdom of his dear son is structured the other way turns it upside down you remember the other passage about you weren't that you're not like the gentiles in the christian community to lord it over one another but you're to submit to one another and to learn how to do that as you watch the stocks go down you say

Jesus is Lord I was I was I found it very Sunday morning when I was you know one of these CBC programs where they bring in the experts who know everything that's happened and can explain it to everybody else and so there was this whiskey voiced senator from the deep south who said of the week just gone by on the stock market we'll have to see what God has rot which means that at least I might say that he was acknowledging that

God was in charge an acknowledgement he was probably less able to make the week before it's funny that God is always in charge of disasters isn't it Nah Nah