

Colossians: Lessons Learned

Good morning! Please turn with me in your bibles to Colossians chapter 1.

If you're new with us this morning, my name is Mike, and we as a church are wrapping up a series that we began in March through the book of Colossians.

Last week we made it through the end of chapter 4, and this week before we move on, we're going to spend some time reminding ourselves of some of the incredible truths that we've encountered in this little letter that Paul wrote to the church at Colossae.

So let's pray together and ask that the Lord would strengthen and encourage us in this time.

Heavenly Father. We thank you and praise you for all you've done in our hearts and lives as we've studied the book of Colossians together. Thank you for the ways you've convicted my heart, and shown me the areas I need to change how I think and how I live. I pray that you would remind us of some of those truths as we look back at the book as a whole this morning. May you be glorified in the preaching of your Word. In Jesus' name, amen.

Before we dive right in, I need to show you something. Back at the end of June I was preaching chapter 3 verse 16 which says, "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly," talking about what it means for the gospel to "take up residence" in your life, and how we need to be persistent in that.

And I used an analogy of a rat that chose to "take up residence" in my grill. How I kept trying to scare it away for good, but it just kept coming back time and time again.

Well last week Emily was looking through old photos and she found this picture that she had taken that we both completely forgot about.

(SLIDE)

This is me the first time I found the rats nest in the grill. The rat had just ran out and I had just screamed in a way that was not particularly masculine. You can see the fear in my eyes.

Anyway, that doesn't have anything to do with the sermon this morning but when we found that I had to share it with you.

(BACK TO TITLE SLIDE)

For me, Colossians has been a book of great conviction of sin as well as encouragement to press on in the gospel. It's been a reminder of how amazing Jesus is, how important it is that our faith rests in him alone, and how we're called to live lives that are set apart to bring glory to God.

I had a hard time this week as I went back and reread the book and looked back at previous sermons to try to pick out a few key highlights. Colossians is jam packed, but here are the things that have struck a chord with me as we've studied together.

The first is this:

(SLIDE)

Jesus is Supreme

That's what we saw in chapter 1, verses 15-20. Look there with me:

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. ¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

He's supreme for three reasons:

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First, he's unique in creation. There's no one like him. He's the invisible God made visible. He's the firstborn of all creation meaning that he's superior to anything and anyone that's ever been created. He's the greatest.

And because of that, we need to worship him.

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He's also the reason for creation. Look at the end of verse 16: "All things were created *through* him and *for* him." He's the reason that it came into being, and he's the one it was created for in the first place!

Because of that, we need to give him glory. It's easy to live our lives just for our own glory, for our own desires. But Christ was both the creator and the reason for creation. So we need to give him glory.

(SLIDE)

He's also the sustainer of creation. Verse 17 says, "And he is before all things and in him all things hold together."

For me, this was the first mind-blowing truth in Colossians. Sometimes we think about how the world came into being, but, at least for me, I *never* think about how the world continues to exist. But according to Colossians 1 it's clear: Christ is, right now, holding the entire universe together. If it wasn't for his sustaining word, the universe would cease to exist.

And because that is true, because he's unique, because he's the reason for creation, and because he's the one holding it all together as I speak, we need to give him no less than our very lives.

Christ deserves all of us. No part of us should be hidden, no part of us should be kept for ourselves, he deserves it all.

That's really hard. That's a lifetime of battling the flesh, battling our desires, battling our need to be in control. It's not easy. But it's what we're called to do.

Christ is supreme, and he deserves all of us. That's the first truth to remember from Colossians.

Here's the second:

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Your Rules Won't Work

Because Jesus is supreme, manmade rules can't get us any closer to God.

2:20-23 says:

20 If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations— 21 "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch" 22 (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? 23 These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

The reason Paul wrote to the Colossians was because they were facing a temptation to believe false teaching that added rules to the gospel. That said you need "Jesus+other things" in order to be one of the really spiritual people.

That's a huge temptation for us too.

We say "yeah believe in Jesus, but if you *really* want to get into "spiritual shape", you'll read *this* translation of scripture," or "you'll sing this kind of music on Sundays" or "you'll obey *these* rules (whatever they are) that aren't in the bible, but everyone knows you need to do this to be a good Christian."

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We can even look to those rules for assurance of our faith.

“Of course I’m a Christian, I go to church almost every Sunday.”

The problem isn’t in doing those things—you’re supposed to go to church! The problem is when we look to those things to make us feel better about our relationship with God.

If I ask you “are you are a Christian?”, your answer shouldn’t be *anything* you do. It should be *only* what Christ has done.

What can wash away our sins? Following a daily bible reading plan? No. Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

What can make us whole again? *Nothing* but the blood of Jesus.

When the enemy accuses you and makes you feel like you’re not worthy to be loved by God, he’s not wrong. We all *justly, rightly* stand accused of our sin.

But our answer isn’t anything good we’ve done, it’s Christ alone. It’s not Jesus+ good works. It’s Jesus. Period.

Your rules won’t work. I pray that we are a people who cling to Christ alone.

(SLIDE)

Third, because Jesus is supreme and we need to cling to him alone, we need to be people who live in the new self.

Be Who You Are

Live in the new self, or, as we said before: “Be who you are.” There are a few things that entails. The first is putting the flesh to death.

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Put the Flesh to Death

That comes from 3:5-11:

⁵Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. ⁶On account of these the wrath of God is coming. ⁷In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. ⁸But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. ⁹Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices ¹⁰and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. ¹¹Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

It’s one of the great conundrums of the Christian faith. There is nothing that you can do to make yourself one ounce more deserving of God’s grace. His grace is 0% based on what you’ve done and 100% based on what Christ has done.

So, Romans 6 asks, “Should we keep on sinning so that God can show us more and more of his wonderful grace?”

By no means!

Because we’ve been raised with Christ, because we’ve been brought from death to life, because we’ve been shown grace in Christ, we are called to seek the things above.

And that starts with putting the flesh to death.

We talked about when we think about putting the flesh to death, we need to think less about a single act of killing, and more about starvation. Killing the flesh isn’t a one time thing. It’s a series of decisions made over and over and over of resolving not to give in. And as you make those decisions, the desire becomes less and less.

One thing we said was If there was a monster in your closet that was trying to kill you, and you couldn’t get it out of your house, would you feed it? Would you put food and water out for it before you left for work and before you went to bed? No! This thing is trying to kill you!

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You would starve it! And slowly, day after day, that monster would become weaker

Putting the flesh to death is not about giving it a deathblow that will get rid of it once and for all. It doesn't work that way. It's about letting it atrophy.

We need to be people who let our flesh atrophy.

When we feed the flesh what we're ultimately saying is "God isn't enough for me." Did you hear that? When you indulge the sin of the flesh, you're telling God, "You're not good enough for me. The cross wasn't enough for my joy. The hope of eternity isn't enough to satisfy my desires. I want to be in control God. You're not good enough."

As Christians, as people covered by the blood of the lamb, we cannot continue to live according to the old self. We need to start by putting the flesh to death.

But it's not only about what we put off, it's also about what we put on.

(SLIDE)

Put on the New Self

We are called to clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience. We're supposed to forgive each other as Christ has forgiven us.

We're supposed to let the word dwell in our hearts like that stinking rat was dwelling in my grill. We're supposed to encourage one another by the way we teach and admonish and sing to one another.

And we're called to remember that Jesus is Lord of your Life

(SLIDE)

Submit to the Lordship of Christ

That means he's the Lord of your marriage. And since he's Lord, there are specific ways husbands and wives are called to live in order to model the beauty of the gospel to a watching world.

A Christian marriage is a beautiful model of the way that Christ loves the church and the way that the church willingly and joyfully follows Christ's leadership.

Jesus is also Lord of your family, which means children are called to obey their parents, and parents are called to lovingly discipline their children.

He's also Lord of the workplace, meaning whatever your role is, you're called to remember that you are working not for man but for Jesus Christ.

In Christ, you are a new creation. So be who you are in the way that you put the flesh to death, put on the new self, and submit to the Lordship of Christ.

Finally, in Colossians we saw that we are called to make the most of our time.

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Make the Most of your Time

That was from a few weeks ago, in Colossians 4:5-6:

***⁵Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time.
⁶Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.***

As Christians, we're called to be "bargain shoppers" of our time for the kingdom of God. Pam Frayzee buys the food for our food pantry, and she never lets a 10 for 10 deal at Meijer go to waste.

We need to view our time like that. God has placed you where he did and when he did for a reason.

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He gave you the gifts he did for a reason too. We talked about that last week. You're called to live your life for the kingdom of God. That means using your opportunities as gospel opportunities, and letting your speech be seasoned with salt as you share the good news of Jesus Christ.

When Paul wrote to the Colossians, he was calling them to follow Jesus wholeheartedly. He was calling them to recognize his supremacy, to see just how short false teaching falls from the gospel, to live as new creations, and to live their lives for the kingdom of God.

The Christian life isn't easy. Nowhere in scripture are we promised ease. The Christian life is hard work. It's a daily grind. I struggle with the temptation to coast in my faith. But that's not how it works. The Christian life is a life lived wholeheartedly for God.

And while it's not easy, it's good. In Christ is the only place to find true joy, true satisfaction, true forgiveness, true hope, and lasting peace.

In Christ we've been brought from being enemies of God to being reconciled and brought near to him.

And as we look ahead to where the Lord is calling us as a church, the only way we can be who we're called to be as a church is by being a people who commit to seeking after the Lord with our whole hearts.

No fancy mission statement, no new logo or slick website can replace the genuine work of the Holy Spirit in and among us.

And like we said last week, that starts with prayer.

So we're going to do something a little different this morning. For the next 10 minutes or so, we're going to pray in small groups with the people around us.

If you need to get up and move, you can. If you're in a group and you see someone by themselves, please invite them to pray with you.

We're going to pray for the direction of our church. I'll have on the screen some prompts, and I'd like us to pray through these things.

(SLIDE)

If you're nervous about praying with other people, I completely understand but I promise no one is judging you. Don't think about what other people are thinking, just pray to God.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer now, and in 10 minutes or so I'll come back up and close us.

(PRAYER)

Father, we do praise you this morning for the good news of the gospel. That before the foundation of the world you decided that you would send your son to redeem a sinful humanity that didn't even exist yet. And the fact that we, as your children were chosen to be part of your plan of redemption is incredible. We give you glory for that this morning. God I pray that as we move forward as a church that you would continue to be our guide. That Christ would continue as the head of this church, and that we would be willing to submit to his headship no matter where that leads. May we be a praying church. Help us recognize our dependence on you more and more. Thank you for loving us. Thank you for your Son. It's in his name we pray, amen.