

Paul, People and Pastoral Encouragement

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: 08 March 2020

Preacher: Rev. David Parker

[0 : 00] If you could turn with me back to Colossians, Paul's letter to the Colossians, and we'll read again verses 1 and 2.

Colossians 1 and 2, 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. So these are words I'm sure that we're all fairly familiar with, and of course in all of Paul's letters, this is the way that he introduces himself and introduces his letters.

We're going to be looking at some of this first chapter of Colossians over the next few weeks, and I suppose you could see this evening's message as an introduction to this letter.

It's fascinating is it not that the New Testament is made up of so many letters sent to the first Christian and early Christian communities, mainly by Paul, but not only by Paul, by the Apostle James and by the Apostle John and the Apostle Peter and Jude.

[1 : 47] But it's fascinating, I think it is anyway, and I hope you do, because here we have woven into the stuff of history, real human beings with real history, with real things happening, and yet this is how we end up with the Word of God.

So it's not, the Bible isn't full of abstract statements or treatises or anything like that. It's real stuff, real history, and real situations, and real problems.

And yet, so was the Holy Spirit overseeing and supervising all of that, that this constitutes as when I was doing my theology, I heard, this is not only a human word, which at one level it is, but it is God's word.

So we're going to look at how Paul introduces himself. If I could say to you that in the letters in introducing himself, it basically uses the conventions of letter writing of his day.

Anyone writing a letter in Paul's day would have stated their name, Paul, and they would have stated the addressee, the person to whom they were sending their letter, to David, or Mary, or John, or Donald, or a Catholic, whoever.

[3 : 51] And they probably would have had a greeting as well. So we're going to look at this introduction, and we're going to see that while most times we kind of skip over it, I'm not suggesting that we're disrespectful to it, but we skip over it, we're not going to skip over it tonight, and we're going to see if we can get any honey, as it were, out of these statements, introductory statements that are characteristic of all of Paul's letters.

And I'm going to do that by looking at Paul, looking at very briefly the place where this letter was written, and looking at the people of God to whom it was written, and looking at the personal greeting that Paul offers these people, as indeed, as I say, it's the same way that he introduces all his letters in the New Testament.

Firstly, Paul. Now, the interesting thing, which again I'm sure you know, is that Paul had two names. Saul of Tarsus, Saul the persecutor. Now, the name Paul, the English translation of Paul, is from the Latin Paulus.

And therefore, Paul had this name, this Roman name, and he also had his Hebrew name, we know in the Old Testament of the First King, King Saul.

[5 : 51] Well, this was also Paul's name, Saul. So we've got these two names for Paul. Now, the interesting thing is that, for example, in the Acts of the Apostles, he's described as Saul until the 13th chapter of Acts.

Why is that significant? It's significant because in the 13th chapter of Acts, remember that Paul has been apprehended on the Damascus Road on his way to persecute and slaughter and close the mouth of as many Christians as he can.

But he's arrested and apprehended on that Damascus Road by a blinding light, as we know. And he hears a voice. Paul saw why persecute me.

And he falls down and he said, who are you, Lord? I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.

There's something magnificently encouraging in that, isn't there? And remember later, Paul called himself the chief of sinners. I mean, for all I know, there could be somebody here tonight that might be thinking, my sins are too black.

[7 : 27] I've resisted so long. I've pretended for so long. There's no point in me even knocking on the door of God for forgiveness.

Is there not? Think of Paul, think of Saul.

But the 13th chapter of Acts is where Saul called by God to be the apostle of the other nations other than Judaism and Jewry and Israel is thereafter named Paul.

Now, don't misunderstand me. It may well be that he always had the two names because he was a Roman citizen, Paul of Tarsus.

But certainly, it's of some interest, I don't think it might be stretching it too far, to note that this is the name that he used as he was engaging with non-Jewish and mainly Gentile people to whom he was called as a missionary and to evangelize.

[8 : 46] My interest in this fact is Paul's readiness and flexibility to change in order that he can communicate the gospel.

Indeed, this same Paul famously said that he would become, listen to all the alls, all things to all people that by all means he might save some.

We have to get real sometimes. We have to distinguish between the core and pulse and heart of the unchanging and unchangeable gospel and the packaging around it that's ever changing for every new culture and every new generation.

This is not the 16th century or the 18th or the 19th or even the 20th.

Paul. What does Paul say about himself? He says he's an apostle of Jesus Christ.

[10 : 22] Now, today in the church globally there may well be people that call themselves apostles that there's no apostles with a large capital A. And the reason for that is in order to have been, remember that the scripture, I think it's in Ephesians, it tells us that the church is built on the foundation not simply of the prophets but of the apostles and prophets.

An apostle was someone that had seen the risen Christ. Of course, although there are no apostles, will be tied to church if it's not apostolic.

Because that word apostle means sent one and it means one sent with a message. And did not Jesus say, as the Father has sent me, so send I you.

Who's the apostle of the church?

The denomination? The country? No way. There's a technicality and grammar.

[12 : 06] No doubt there will be grammarians here. The genitive. Is it a genitive, a subjective or an objective genitive?

Does this mean that Jesus Christ is the subject of his proclamation?

Or does it mean that he is the object, the objective one of whom he is an apostle?

Well, if we go down a little to verse 7, we read this.

Just as you learned it, that's the gospel from Apathras. I should have said to you that Paul didn't found the church in Colossae. He had never been there.

[13 : 09] How do we know? Well, there it is. Just as you learned it from Apathras, our beloved fellow servant, he is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf.

Now there can be, now you will understand me, I'm not in any way here anti-intellectual, far from it, or anti-theological, or carefully constructed sermons or anything like that.

I remember seeing the late Martin Lloyd-Jones being interviewed on television. Also heard Martin Lloyd-Jones many times live in the Tent Hall in Glasgow.

Anyway, he was on TV and the interviewer said to him, what was the message of the church?

And Lloyd-Jones in his own inimitable way retorted, Jesus and the resurrection.

[14 : 41] What we've got to offer people as an apostolic church is Jesus and the resurrection.

The person and work of Jesus Christ, the great saviour.

But notice he adds, we're still on Paul by the will of God.

I have never believed that anybody should go in for the ministry who's not called by God.

Loads of people could. I don't mean it's not easy at all. Three-year Cyprus, two-year Greek, systematic theology, church history, pastoral theology, Old Testament, New Testament.
[15 : 53] Many people can pass exams, could do a theology course. That's great. I'm happy about that.

It's not equivalent to being called by God.

Paul talks about that, doesn't he in Galatians? He talks about it was God and Jesus only that called him to this apostolate and to this calling of mission to the Gentiles.

By the way, we read at the very end the last sentence or so of this letter in chapter 4, verse 18.

I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains, grace be with you.

[17 : 04] Paul is a prisoner as he writes this letter. But before we leave Paul, let me just add this.

He also says this, and Timothy our brother. And Timothy our brother.

If you carefully study Paul, you'll notice he's not a lone ranger. You'll notice that he has helpers, encouragers, supporters, people around him.

Don't ever think that a minister is a solution to everything. A minister is part of a team, it's the team that will work for God.

Yes, led by the minister. But actually that's not what I wanted to say about this here.

[18 : 14] And Timothy our brother. Here is this great apostle who's a seminal figure in history, never mind anywhere else.

Some of his ideas have been seminal and that they have been developed and furthered by great thinkers in the early church. I'll not go into any of that just now.

But notice his language here, and Timothy our brother. Yes, I might have the office or the role because God called me in that.

But you know what, we're all brethren. Male and female.

From the person that's the most seemingly apparently insignificant in the church, but be careful about that. Paul has a lot of teaching about the body and one of the things he said about the body, but the so-called most insignificant parts of the body are the most important.

[19 : 23] His point is nobody is insignificant in the church of God. Paul.

What about the people? Secondly, to the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae.

I'm puzzled right enough why the ESV here says at Colossae because see the bit before that that says in Christ, the little preposition in Greek.

It's the exact same preposition and in my view we should have here in Christ in Colossae.

Anyway, maybe it sounds a bit better in Christ at Colossae. I don't know. But first thing I want to say is to the saints.

[20 : 28] How many times do you wake up in the morning and say I'm a saint? I have to confess I don't really do it very often myself.

But guess what? If you're a Christian you are. Saints aren't special people, holy people, towering above most of us, touching the clouds or something like that or that have been given such status by any kind of church.

The teaching of the old and New Testament is very simple and very clear. Saints are the people of God.

They are gods, the apple of God's eye. They are God's treasure. They are God's redeemed people. They belong to Him.

Now I belong to Jesus and Jesus belongs to me, not for time alone but for eternity.

[21 : 51] To the saints. Yes, that word means set apart for special use and in the context that these are the people that have been set apart by God as His special people.

Of course if we probe further deeply into that or more deeply into that, Israel was chosen he tells us you weren't chosen because you were, that this language is actually used in the Old Testament because you were a better nation than anybody else.

Listen, God in choosing a nation such as Israel to be His people is something that is privy to Him out of His good pleasure.

However, things that were set apart for sacred use were either to behave in a particular way or to be carefully polished or whatever it would be, whatever it was, a vessel for the church.

So there is an implication there that the saints are people who, what shall we say, shine in some way.

[23 : 24] However dimly they reflect the Christ whom they are in union with and united to.

And of course the people of God are no longer ethnic Israel. The people of God are all those, let me use a phrase that Paul used that walk in the footsteps of the faith that Abraham walked, not simply because they are Jews or simply because they have a particular ethnicity.

Because what Paul was called to was to have unfolded and disclosed before him the great mystery as he called it hidden from all ages that the people of God were going to be from all nations.

This was the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ to the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae.

By the way that's a wonderful phrase, it's a standard phrase that Paul uses in Christ. Every day I thank God for that truth.

[24 : 59] I'll tell you why I thank God for that truth. I would hate to think that I'm outside Christ in its David Parker that's coming before God.

I'd be consumed in a moment for our God is a consuming fire. But you see, God bless him, seize me in Christ.

Do the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae. That phrase, faithful brothers can be understood to mean people of the faith, people of the faith of Christ.

I was saying I referred this morning to some of what they call the solas of the Reformation and of the Reformers.

And one of them, well I mentioned sola scutura by the scripture alone, sola christus by Christ alone and sola fide by faith alone.

[26 : 25] And Paul puts it this way. I love the way that he puts it. He says it's by faith from first to last, from alpha to omega, from beginning to end.

What is faith? I'm not going to go into any technical definition of faith. But let me just put it this way. It's where we entrust our whole being and our whole destiny and our whole acceptance by God on Him, on Jesus Christ.

Common to me all you that labour in their heavy laden and we were thinking about that rest this morning, I should have brought that scripture. I will give you rest.

Rest for your souls. So we've looked at Paul and we've looked at the people of God.

[27 : 34] All I want to say very briefly about the place, because I want just a few minutes to talk about the last part. Colossi.

Colossi was also in what is today modern Turkey, near Syria in a way, but down in the south of Turkey, of modern Turkey, near the coast and near the river.

Anyway, I could be getting mixed up with Tarsus, so you better not quote me on that.

But anyway, whatever it was, it was awash with mystery cults and all kinds of religion and all kinds of practices and religion and all kinds of ideas, brimming with them.

If you read history, you know, sometimes you think, well, what's our world coming to? And I suppose this is the worst that's ever been and all this sort of stuff.

[29 : 02] Actually, if you read history, you don't say that too quickly.

All I want to say is they certainly had their challenges in Paul's day. And the Christians that inhabited Colossi certainly had their challenges.

And perhaps the reason that the translator has made it at Colossi, he wants to emphasise maybe that these Christians were in the public square, that these Christians, as I said this morning, did not have a privatised faith, a personal, prioritised, privatised faith.

They were in some ascetic monastery. They were right there in Colossi, or at Colossi.

Okay, finally, in exploring Paul's introduction to all of his letters, we've noted a few things about Paul. We've noted some things about the people of God and we've noted some things about the place where this particular letter was written to. And finally, what I might call Paul's wonderful pastoral reference to all, in all his letters, grace to you and peace from God our Father. What a beautiful set of words.

[31 : 17] Was it Newton who said, maybe it wasn't, but here's the phrase I'm going through my head, it is a charming sound. And you know, it says that Jesus came not only with truth, but with grace. Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. It also tells us that they wondered the people that heard Jesus at the gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth.

Paul could say in his letter to the Ephesians, by grace you're saved. The word grace is found first in the book of Genesis. You'll know it right away when I say it. Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. The basic meaning of the word is favour. I tell you, if you're a believer tonight, let me use the

word of the angels to the shepherds, I think it was highly favoured. Grace to you says Paul and peace. It's a shame, the Greek word that sounds a bit harsh. Irini, listen to the Hebrew word, shablon. Shablon for God, our Father. Our Father. We, his children, not for a day, not for a year, not for a hundred years or five hundred years, but for length of days. Forever. That word peace is such a rich word in the Old Testament and our Saviour, as you know, is called the Prince of Peace. And not only is he called the Prince of Peace, Paul makes us of a remarkable statement and I finish with this. He is our peace. Here he is, hand stretched out on the cross, hanging with ignominy and shame and disgrace, cursed as everybody that hangs on a tree, the Prince of Peace. May God bless these thoughts to each one of us for his own glory and for our eternal good.