

THE PREEMINENCE
AND
SUFFICIENCY OF CHRIST



Sermon Series Notes



“Epaphras the Missionary” (Colossians 1:1-8)

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Introduction:

Background on the church at Colosse

- * Philemon was from Colosse (see Col.4:9).
- * Philemon 1: 2 to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier and to the church that meets in your home:
- * Colosse was a small agricultural town in western Asia Minor (Turkey). It was approximately 100 miles east of Ephesus, 11 miles from Laodicea, and 15 miles from Hieropolis (Col.4:13). It was rather insignificant in Roman history, but very significant in Christian history. This letter to the Colossian Christians from Paul is the most Christ centered of any of his letters. The resounding theme is the preeminence and sufficiency of Christ in all things.
- * The environment in Colosse was religiously pluralistic, just like any city in the Roman Empire in that day. Colossian coins that have been discovered depict a variety of gods and goddesses. They worshipped Artemis, Zeus, the moon god Men, the lunar goddess Selene, Isis and Sarapis (Egyptian deities), Greek deities such as Athena, Demeter, Hygieia, Helios, and Tyche (goddess of fate). They believed that astral spirits influenced the affairs of day-to-day life. Numerous inscriptions have been discovered in the area illustrating that people called on angels for help.
- * A mixture of Eastern philosophy and Jewish ceremonialism was creeping into the church, and that is the main reason Paul writes this letter. Colossians speaks of the preeminence and sufficiency of Christ more than probably any other book of the Bible. But before we get to those sections that directly counter the heresy that was seeking to corrupt this church, we open with an amazing topic, especially in light of this being "Missions Celebration Week" here at CCSP. In anticipation of this, our missions pastor, Art Dykstra, months ago asked me if I would consider doing a missions message to kick things off. He then added that it usually works out to be in the text we're studying at the time anyway. It has happened many times over 28 years of ministry here. God in His divine providence orchestrating things in such a way that where we are in our study through the Scriptures just happens to line up perfectly with what is presently happening in our church body. And it has happened yet again! Read Col.1:1-8.

I. THE MESSAGE

A. The Certainty Of The Message

* v.5 Someone coined the phrase, "the gospel truth."

* Gospel = 2098. euaggelion, yoo-ang-ghel'-ee-on; from the same as G2097; a good message, i.e. the gospel:--gospel. We get our English "evangelism" from this word. The word originally was used to refer to a messenger that came bringing news of victory in a battle. He brought good news, so he was an "evangelist."

* I Cor.15: 3 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance : that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures...

* Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection is the gospel truth.

* The Bible is the best documented book from the ancient world. And one of the most important documentations is that of the accounts of those who claimed to see the resurrected Christ. If Christ is not resurrected, Christianity has nothing to stand upon...

* How many people saw Jesus after His resurrection?

- Mary Magdalene (John 20; Mark 16); The women returning from the tomb (Matt.28); Two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24; Mark 16); Ten gathered in the upper room (Luke 24; Jn.20); The Eleven (Jn.20; Mark 16); More than 500 at one time (I Cor.15:6); James (I Cor.15:7); Some disciples (Jn.21:1-23); The ascension (Acts 1); Many infallible proofs (Acts 1).

- John 21: 25 Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.

* But there are still those who refuse to believe despite so many documented eyewitness accounts. You see, the eyewitness accounts were primarily those who claimed to be followers of Jesus Christ (except for the apostle Paul, who was not a believer at the time he saw the resurrected Christ).

* The eyewitnesses' willingness to suffer and die for their faith.

* Immediately someone might object, pointing out that many people are willing to die for what they believe. But the more important question is –"Is what you are willing to die for, the truth?" If you knew that what you believed was not true, would you be willing to die for something false?

* Some say Jesus never really died on the cross, and so what these eyewitnesses of the resurrection saw was really Jesus, but a Jesus who never died. The

disciples certainly believed he was dead. They were filled with hopelessness and bewilderment after the cross. The centurion assured Pilate that he was dead (Mark 15:44-45). One of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side, and blood and water came out, indicating that the red and white blood corpuscles has separated, an indisputable medical sign of death.

* Writing in the March 21, 1986 edition of the Journal of the American Medical Association, three medical doctors, including a pathologist from The Mayo Clinic concluded: "Clearly, the weight of historical and medical evidence indicates that Jesus was dead before the wound to his side was inflicted and supports the traditional view that the spear, thrust between his right rib, probably perforated not only the right lung but also the pericardium and heart and thereby ensured his death. Accordingly, interpretations based on the assumptions that Jesus did not die on the cross appear to be at odds with modern medical knowledge."

* It is highly unlikely that Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus would have mistakenly embalmed a living Jesus (Jn.19:40).

* Even if everyone was wrong about Jesus being dead when he was placed in the tomb, how would a badly injured and bleeding man still be alive thirty-six hours later? And even if he did survive that cold, damp tomb, how did three days later unwrap himself (from 75 lbs of embalming cloth!), move a two ton rock that covered his tomb, get by the elite Roman guards, then convince the scared, scattered skeptical crowds that he had triumphed over death? When they saw him in that kind of condition, instead of being convinced of His resurrection, they might have said something like, "Let's get you to a doctor!"

* Note: the overwhelming evidence suggests that Jesus really died.

* Some say that the disciples stole Jesus' dead body from the tomb and created the greatest hoax of history.

- Matt.28: 12 When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, 13 telling them, "You are to say, 'His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.'

- They would have had to get by The Roman Guard, a four to sixteen man security force where four men at a time were placed in front of what they were guarding, while the other twelve slept in a semi circle in front of them with their heads pointed in. Every four hours they rotated shifts.

- Acts 12: 4 After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover.

* If the disciples stole the body, it means they were then willing to put themselves and their families through threats from the supreme court, beatings, imprisonment,

and even death, all for a hoax. There is really very weak evidence (actually none at all) that the disciples stole the body.

- Matt.27: 62 The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. 63 "Sir," they said, "we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again.' 64 So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first." 65 "Take a guard," Pilate answered. "Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how." 66 So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard.

* Some say the Roman or Jewish authorities stole the body.

- When the disciples began to proclaim the resurrection, why didn't the authorities simply produce the body? Instead, they arrested, threatened, flogged, imprisoned, and finally killed many of Jesus' disciples.

* Note: The evidence suggests that, if the disciples had stolen the body, when persecution began, they would have produced it pretty quickly.

* Micah 5: 2 "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."

* John 13:18...But this is to fulfill the scripture: 'He who shares my bread has lifted up his heel against me.'

- Psalm 41: 9 Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.

* Zechariah 11: 12 I told them, "If you think it best, give me my pay; but if not, keep it." So they paid me thirty pieces of silver. 13 And the LORD said to me, "Throw it to the potter"--the handsome price at which they priced me! So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the LORD to the potter.

- Matt.26:15 "What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?" So they counted out for him thirty silver coins.

- Matt.27: 5 So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself. 6 The chief priests picked up the coins and said, "It is against the law to put this into the treasury, since it is blood money." 7 So they decided to use the money to buy the potter's field as a burial place for foreigners.

* Matthew 12: 40 For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

* Psalm 22:16...they have pierced my hands and my feet.

- Before a Roman cross was ever invented!

* Psalm 22: 18 They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.

- John 19: 23 When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. 24 "Let's not tear it," they said to one another. "Let's decide by lot who will get it." This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled which said, "They divided my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing." So this is what the soldiers did.

* Isa.53: 12 Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

- Luke 23: 32 Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. 33 When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals--one on his right, the other on his left. 34 Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

* Isaiah 53: 9 He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death...

- Matt.27: 57 As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. 58 Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body, and Pilate ordered that it be given to him. 59 Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, 60 and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away.

* Note: What are the chances that eight prophecies would be fulfilled in the life of one individual? The "Law of Compound Probabilities" tells us that the chance is one in 10 to the 28th power. In other words, if you covered the state of Texas two feet deep in silver dollars, and mark just one of those silver dollars with a red mark, then tell your friend to walk through the entire state – through the panhandle down to the Gulf, through Dallas, Houston, Corpus Christi, from north to south, east to west, and choose one silver dollar. The statistical probability that he will choose the one with the red mark is 1 in 10 to the 28th power.

B. The Simplicity Of The Message

C. The Power In The Message

* Col.1:6

* Rom.1: 16 I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

* I was talking to my son Tanner last Friday as I began preparing for this message, and he shared with me that his pastor in Orlando where he goes to college loves to emphasize that as Christians we are to "be the gospel." What he means is that our lives are to reflect the difference the gospel has made in our lives. And certainly Scripture backs that up. See Titus 2:9-10; I Peter 1:14-15; 2:13-17; 3:1, 7; Eph.4:28; 5:8, 15; Phil.2:14-16a.

* While it is true that God wants our lives to reflect the impact the gospel has had in our lives ("be the gospel"), we must be careful to never forget that it is not our changed lives that save people. The power to save a soul is found only in the **message** of the gospel.

* Changed lives, good works, miraculous experiences all may be witnesses to truth, but it is only "the gospel truth" that saves.

* Luke 5: 12 While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along who was covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he fell with his face to the ground and begged him, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." 13 Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" And immediately the leprosy left him. 14 Then Jesus ordered him, "Don't tell anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them."

* John 9: 25 He replied, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!"

* John 4:39-42

* Acts 2 - sound of a mighty wind, supernatural gift of tongues got the people's attention, but it was through the message of the gospel that they were "cut to the heart" (v.37) and saved.

II. THE MISSION

A. The Great Commission

* Mark 16: 15 He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news (gospel) to all creation.

* II Cor.5: 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

B. God's Specific Call Individually

1. People that he intends for **me** to reach.
2. Special giftings for some of us.

a. Evangelist

- Eph.4: 11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.

b. Apostle

- Means "sent out one"

III. THE MESSENGER

A. Epaphras

* Paul did not start the church at Colosse. Interestingly enough, a man named Epaphras was the missionary that reached the Colossians.

* Acts 19: 10 This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.

* We are not told the details, but we know that Epaphras came to know Christ through Paul's more than two year ministry in Ephesus. We know that Epaphras was from Colosse (Col.4:12). So the church in Colosse began as a result of a man named Epaphras sharing Christ in the town where he lived, probably his hometown. Epaphras was not an apostle. There is no mention of any special gifting that he had (not called an "evangelist"). He was simply a faithful Christian doing what every Christian is called to do - sharing the gospel.

B. Requirements To Be A Successful Missionary

1. Respond to the call.

- Isaiah 6:1-11; Mark 16:15

- Jonah initially ran away...

2. Be flexible concerning God's will (faith).

- Persecution (Acts 8:1-4; Paul's imprisonments; Philemon 1: 23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greetings.)

- Physical infirmities (Gal.4:13)

- Completely new direction (Phillip)

- Closed doors (Acts 16:6-10)

3. Be faithful.

- John Mark

- Archippus (Acts 4:17)

- Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:36-40); Number one reason missionaries leave the mission field? Interpersonal conflict.

C. Where Missions Begins

- * Acts 1:8

- * Mark 5: 18 As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. 19 Jesus did not let him, but said, "Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you."

CONCLUSION

- * Matthew 4: 19 "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men."