

Jesus Over Everything: The Gospel of Jesus and the Colossian Church
Colossians 1:1-8

Dan Hamel
July 23, 2023

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to God's holy people in Colossae, the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ: Grace and peace to you from God our Father. We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people—the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel that has come to you. In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world—just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God's grace. You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, and who also told us of your love in the Spirit. (Colossians 1:1-8)

Welcome everyone. I'd like to thank Gary Johnson for preaching for the last four weeks and casting a vision for life in the Spirit!

(Dan discussed the prayer night on Friday, thanked the children's and student teams for leading our kids to camp, and reported how many decisions were made for Christ at camp.)

Today we kick off thirteen weeks in the book of Colossians. This is a book that is all about Jesus. If you are here today and you want to grow in your knowledge of Jesus (who he was—his identity, majesty, glory), if you are here and you want to grow in your devotion to Jesus (you want to mature in your faith and grow as a disciple, etc.), Colossians has something for you. Paul wrote this letter to people who had made a faith commitment, to people who had heard the gospel and believed it, but then as life went on their devotion to Jesus diminished, their focus on Jesus faded, and their commitment to Jesus became compromised. This entire letter is written to tell them: get your eyes back on Jesus because for every problem you are facing right now, for every difficulty you are facing, Jesus is sufficient, Jesus is more than enough, Jesus is all you need! That's why we have called this series: **Jesus over everything**. That is our hope and prayer for everyone in this series, that Jesus would truly be placed over everything. Jesus over my life, Jesus over my marriage, Jesus over my family, Jesus over my friendships, Jesus over my work, Jesus over my thoughts, Jesus over my finances, Jesus over everything! There is no better place we can be in all of life than to have Jesus over everything!

I would love to take you on a journey to the ancient city of Colossae. (Watch the online sermon to see the Google Map video.) What do you notice about the ancient city of Colossae? There is nothing there! It is just a mound of dirt. For over a century, archeologists have known exactly where Colossae is. But unlike many other ancient cities—cities like Ephesus, Corinth, and Philippi, which have undergone massive excavation efforts—no one has invested the time and money to unearth this ancient city. Though we can't all fly to Turkey to move the dirt and get a window into life in this town from 2,000 years ago, we can dive into God's Word and uncover the spiritual lives of the people living in this city. We can learn about their worldview, we can see what their relationships were like, we can see the issues they struggled with, we can see what they spent their time thinking about, their hopes and aspirations.

What we are going to learn is that in every area where the Colossians are struggling, Paul directs their attention to Jesus. You need more wisdom, look to Jesus. You need power to overcome the temptation of sin, look to Jesus. You want insight into philosophy and theology, look to Jesus. Your relationships aren't as healthy or as strong as you'd like, look to Jesus. You want a stronger relationship with your spouse, look to Jesus. You want insight on how to best parent your children, look to Jesus. You want to know how to point your family and friends to Christianity, look to Jesus. No matter the question, the answer can

be found in Jesus. The same is true today in our lives. **For every problem, difficulty, and challenge we face in life, the answer is found in Jesus.** So the next 13 weeks, we are going to take all of our energy and attention and focus on Jesus Christ, and trust him for everything we need!

As we kick off week one, we are going to focus on the gospel of Jesus, the good news about him, and how it changed the people in the Colossian church.

Let's dive into the first few verses.

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people—the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel that has come to you. (Colossians 1:3-6)

Paul begins his letter by talking about **the impact of the gospel**. This week I spent time researching the impact of meteorites that have struck earth throughout history. This one in particular caught my attention (<https://solarsystem.nasa.gov/resources/2257/meteor-crater-arizona-usa/>). It is called the **Barringer Crater**. It is located in Arizona and is nearly a mile wide and over 500 feet deep in the center. Scientists estimate that a meteor half the size of a football field stuck the earth going roughly 30,000 miles per hour. When a large rock hits the earth, it leaves an impact that is unmistakable—it changes the landscape for a long time. The same is true of the gospel. When the gospel of Jesus Christ collides with our lives, we cannot be the same!

The impact of the gospel on the Colossians was threefold. First, it brought about **faith in Jesus**. Paul says in verse 4, “We have heard of your faith in Jesus.” They didn't just hear about Jesus, they placed their faith in Jesus, which means they believed in their heart that Jesus was the Son of God, that he was the Messiah who was promised, that he died on the cross for their sins, that he rose from the dead, and that he has the power to forgive sins, bring us into God's family, make us a new creation, and save our souls for eternity. Hebrews 11:6 says, “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”

If I came to you fifteen years ago and told you to take all your money and buy this thing called bitcoin, the first cryptocurrency, you probably would have thought I was crazy. What's a cryptocurrency? It was worth just fractions of a penny. Now each bitcoin is worth over \$30,000. If you not only listened to my message but had faith in me, trusted me, put what I said into practice, you'd be a billionaire. That's how it is with faith. Sometimes when people hear the message of God coming to earth, dying on the cross, and rising from the dead they think it's too crazy, too far out, but those who listen and believe, those who place their faith in Jesus, they utterly and radically forever transform!

The impact of the Gospel also resulted in **love for people**. Paul says we have not only heard about your faith in Jesus, we have also heard about the way you love other people, which is of course the ultimate sign that you love God. 1 John 4:20-21 tells us, “Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.” The gospel brought about this change in their lives. Do you remember two weeks ago when Gary was preaching about the Holy Spirit? He said one of the questions we need to ask ourselves and one another is, “Do you see more of Jesus in my life now than you did before? As the years go by, do I look more and more like Jesus?” Of course, looking more like Jesus has nothing to do with growing a beard and becoming an ancient construction worker. It has to do with a life filled with genuine, sincere, servant-hearted love for others.

The impact of the gospel also brought about **the hope of heaven**. The gospel not only brings God's love and goodness into our lives today, the gospel not only transforms our present reality, it transforms our future reality! The Bible makes it abundantly clear that everybody spends eternity somewhere. If you are a follower of Jesus, you will spend eternity with him, in a resurrected body, in a remade world, where there is no more sickness, sadness, or death, where God reigns supreme and the entire universe is in harmony. That is our hope the gospel brings. "In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you" (1 Peter 1:3-4). If you have a living hope that is in heaven, it changes the way you live on earth! I think about my mom. So many of you have asked me how I am doing now that it's been a few months since she passed. I still cry when I think about her most days. But the truth is, I am doing really, really well. Mom loved Jesus. Mom is with Jesus. And one day, by God's grace, I will see her again. When you have the hope of the gospel, you grieve in a different way than the rest of the world. Hope changes things!

I was speaking to someone the other day who was making an exceptionally generous gift to the church. As far as I know, this person isn't a particularly wealthy individual, but they gave a very large gift. Out of true curiosity I prodded just a bit: "What prompted you to this level of generosity?" They said, "I think it is important to invest into heaven. Jesus told us to store up treasures where moth and rust do not destroy, where thieves do not break into steal. My hope isn't in a larger bank account or in retiring a year or two earlier; it's in heaven. That's where I want all my wealth to accumulate." I was so humbled and inspired by his faith. That's the impact the gospel makes.

Paul not only highlights the impact of the gospel, he also talks about **the growth of the gospel**. Paul speaks about this in 1:6, "In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world—just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God's grace." There is an inherent quality to the gospel that results in it growing wherever it goes. The growth is twofold: it is both macro and micro; it is global and at the same time personal, as you can see in this passage. Paul says, "The gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world." The gospel grows throughout the world. Rodney Stark wrote a brilliant work called *The Rise of Christianity*. The subtitle is "How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries." He details how Christianity grew from about 120 people after Jesus died, roughly the year 30 AD, to about 5,000 people by 36 AD. Then, even under state sponsored persecution, when Christians were fired from their jobs, excommunicated from their families, covered in animal skins and consumed by lions and wild dogs in the Colosseum, dipped in oil and lit on fire in Caesar's palace—while that was happening, Christianity grew to over 33 million by the year 350 AD. In 1910 the number was 600 million. Today, the number is 2.18 billion. The gospel grows. Some people say Christianity is shrinking, people are leaving the faith. Well, that is true in a few countries where watered down, cultural Christianity is common. People are leaving a surface-level Christian faith. But today, there are more people converting to Christianity than are converting to any other religion on the planet. In the last two generations, the number of Christians in China has grown from 4 million to over 70 million. That growth in China represents less than 1/2 of all the growth of the church in Asia. This is not just growth from having children; there are millions and millions of people every year to who convert to Christianity from other religions. Sociologists predict that by 2050, the number of Christians will not decline or stay the same, but grow to 2.9 billion. Seven hundred 700 million in 27 years. That's 26 million new Christians per year, 71,000 per day, 3,000 per hour, 123 per minute—every 2 seconds someone will be placing their faith in Jesus!!

Every once in a while someone will ask me, "With all the pain and injustice in the world, why doesn't Jesus just come back now and make everything right." I understand the sentiment: when you hear a story about gun violence or a child dying or cancer, or when you see images such as of the war in Ukraine, the

instinct is to want God to come back and go ahead and fix it all. But after connecting pastorally with the person I usually say, “Don’t you think people in the throes of the Civil War or WWI wanted Jesus to come back and make everything right in their generation? If he did, you wouldn’t exist. Because God waited, you were given life, you’ve heard the gospel, you will be with Jesus forever, and his family hasn’t just grown by one, it’s grown by 1.5 billion people since then, within ethnic groups all over the world! At this point, every generation God waits allows nearly a billion more people to be with God forever! Because the gospel grows!

The gospel not only grows globally, it grows personally. Yes, it grows around the world, but it also grows in us! Paul not only says the gospel is bearing fruit and growing around the planet, he says, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing in your own life. About four years ago a person joined the Creek and made a fresh commitment to Jesus. Less than a year ago she joined a life group and that’s when the gospel started really transforming her life. So many people have spoken to me about the transformation they’ve seen in her. I reached out and asked to her reflect on the change the gospel has made. Here’s what she said:

The gospel of Jesus has brought about a paradigm shift to the way I see nearly every area of my life. Instead of seeing my emotional eating, poor financial choices, and need for human validation as problems to fix, I came to recognize them as sin, began the process of submitting them to God’s authority, and surrendered them to the Lord as an act of worship. In the last nine months I’ve lost over sixty pounds, I’m both living on a budget and giving more money to the Lord, and have even been able to forgive a close family member for my difficult childhood—forgiveness that was years overdue. Decades old strongholds are being broken. I know I have so far to go and so very much more to learn, but the gospel has already transformed my life like absolutely nothing else ever has.

How about that for a testimony! The gospel changes lives! That’s what God designed it to do—to get in and take over!

The last aspect we are going to study is **the messenger of the gospel**. When Paul mentions the messenger, he is specifically referring to the messenger who took the gospel to the city of Colossae and helped them become believers. He says, “You learned (the gospel) from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, and who also told us of your love in the Spirit” (Colossians 1:7-8). Here’s the really cool thing about Paul’s letter to the Colossians: he wrote to a church he did not plant and that he had never visited personally. What we know about Paul’s ministry history is that he spent a little more than two years in the city of Ephesus. While he was there, he taught and preached almost every day, and as a result everyone who lived throughout the entire province of Asia heard the word of the Lord (Acts 19:10). This is one of those examples. Paul was in Ephesus. While there he met a man named Epaphras; he either helped him to become a Christian or helped him grow in his Christian faith. Then, after having been discipled by Paul, he went back to his hometown of Colossae and was the very first person to tell them about Jesus. He planted the church in this town, he helped them mature in their faith, and then he got to report back to Paul all the growth and life transformation that was taking place!

Paul sent Epaphras out, and Epaphras made a huge impact. A few years ago, as a church we sent out some young missionaries named Paul and Catherine. We sent them to a part of the world where Christianity is illegal and Christians are persecuted. They moved there, learned the language, got jobs, and started looking for opportunities to tell others the gospel. They’ve worked so hard the last few years, and just a few days ago they reached out to say that they are beginning to see waves of people leaving the Muslim faith and becoming Christians. They shared about Ahmed, a young man they met who was open to spiritual conversations. After he heard about a friend becoming a Christian, he wanted to learn more. His

friend told him about the persecution he had experienced for being a follower of Jesus, but that it was worth it all to have a relationship with the living God. Prompted by the Holy Spirit, they asked Ahmed if he, too, wanted to become a Christian, too. He said yes. (Watch the online sermon to see a photo of his baptism.) Four people were baptized in just the last month! You sent out this young couple. You fund their work. Because of what you are doing and how you give, lives all over the world are being changed!

That's not something that only happens on the mission field—we all get to do that work! I hope you have had the joy of helping someone in your life, a family member or friend, come to know Jesus and see them baptized. That joy is hard to describe. It gets even greater when you get to see the person you pointed to faith in Jesus point others to faith in Jesus. Every once in a while, I'll get a text from someone who I led through a Bible study, and it'll be a picture of them with their coworker, going over the same material. Or a picture of a person I baptized who is now baptizing their daughter. Incomparable joy. That's the joy Paul had when he watched the work of Epaphras.

(Watch the online sermon to hear Dan's story about his last morning with his mother.) It was amazing to see the joy she had in watching me dance with Addie. Her whole life she lavished love on me, and her heart was brimming with joy in watching the child she had lavished love on, lavish love on his own child. We should be lavishing God's love on everyone he puts in our life. As we do, some of them will grow in their faith; they will thrive and flourish. Then our hearts will brim over with joy and we will get to see those we have lavished God's love on lavish God's love on others. That's the way God designed his family to work.

This is going to be a great series. It's all about Jesus. Today—how the gospel of Jesus came to the Colossian church, the impact it made, the growth they saw, the messenger that delivered the gospel. Hopefully we'll be thinking about the impact the gospel has made on our lives, how we are growing in the gospel, how we can share the gospel with others!

In two weeks, I am going to preach a message that is all about Jesus, his majesty, splendor, identity, and inestimable worth. I am going to challenge everyone who has not yet made the decision to follow Jesus to make a decision that day. So if that is you, be praying, be reflecting, be preparing for that day.