

23T17a Reflections Colossians

Hello everyone. My name is Kip. Welcome to the PUNLA Coffee Table. Today, we are going to do something a little different. I recently read several of the letters from the Apostle Paul from start to finish in a single setting. These are not long letters, maybe 15 minutes to read each. Today, I want to look at the letter to the Colossians.

Let's pray.

Colossians Summary and Reflection Context

The author is thought to be the Apostle Paul with Timothy. The audience is the church in the city of Colossae or possibly the churches in the tri-city area. Colossae was one of the tri-cities of Colossae, Hierapolis, and Laodicea. It appears that Paul had never been to Colossae. It is believed that the letter to Philemon is probably the host of the house church in Colossae. It is likely that Paul had meant both Philemon and Epaphras while in Ephesus. N.T. Wright believes Paul most likely wrote this letter while in prison in Ephesus. Although others believe the letter was written between AD61-63¹ while Paul was in prison in Rome. The specific content seems to point to young church in Colossae regardless of when it was written.

Summary

The reason Paul is writing was to address concerns about dangerous teaching which was threatening the church in Colossae. The theme of Colossians is Jesus Christ is ruler of everything and everyone. This includes both the visible or mortal world, and the invisible or spiritual realm. Jesus has redeemed His people through His sacrifice on the cross. Follower of Jesus should live a life that honors God.

General outline,

- Exalted Messiah (Col. 1:1-23)
- Suffering Apostle Paul (Col. 1:24-2:7)
- Cultural Pressures & False Teaching (Col. 2:6-23)
- Resurrection Life (Col. 3:1-4:18)

After Paul's customary greeting, thanksgiving and prayer. Paul's focus for the first part of this letter was to make clear Jesus is supreme above all. In a beautiful Messiah poem, Paul stresses the authority of Jesus. All things have been by and for Jesus. Jesus is the image of the invisible God. Jesus is the head of the body of Christ, the Church. We have been reconciled to God by the blood of Jesus on the cross and through the sacrifice of his blood we are redeemed. This redemption has delivered us from darkness into a new life and our past sins are forgiven.

Paul's focus for the second part of this letter was to highlight how his suffering is actually participation with the suffering of Christ begun on the cross. Despite his circumstances, Paul trust God and his hope is in Jesus. Paul's focus for the third part

¹ BlueLetterBible.org (n.d.), "Introduction to Colossians," (accessed 7/14/2023) <https://www.blueletterbible.org/study/eo/Col/Col000.cfm>

of this letter was to encourage the Christians to resist the cultural pressures to turn away from the way of Christ. The people in Colossae were being challenged and influenced by two groups: the Greek/Roman Mystical Polytheism and the Jewish insistence on following all of the law of Moses. Paul addresses both of these with Jesus. Jesus is supreme over any and all unseen spiritual powers. In fact, Jesus is the only God, the creator of everything. Jesus is the fulfillment of the Mosaic law. Jesus is the reality that the law had only pointed toward. Jesus is greater and supreme over the law of Moses.

In the last part of the letter, Paul's focus is on the resurrection life and what it should look like. We are a new humanity which acknowledges Jesus is the ruler of everything. This of course comes as a contrast to the old way of life. Paul is encouraging the Christians to reshape the Roman household into a household centered on Jesus. Paul also announces Onesimus as a brother in the Lord. We know from the letter to Philemon that Onesimus was a runaway slave belonging to Philemon. Paul states that this letter should be read in Laodicea and Hierapolis, and the letter he sent to Laodicea should also be shared in Colossae.

Reflections

The first thing that struck me was the Messiah Poem. Paul reinforces that Jesus is supreme and in fact we have but one ruler and leader which is Jesus. Verse 23 from the NLT, *"But you must continue to believe this truth and stand firmly in it. Don't drift away from the assurance you received when you heard the Good News"* I can see how Paul was establishing a foundation for the rest of the letter first with the poem and secondly by reminding us *"continue to believe this truth and stand firmly in it."* Too often we are told we are safe and secure in our salvation in Christ, but Paul is reminding us it is about direction. We have to continue to believe. We have to stand firm in our belief in Jesus. Without saying so specifically, Paul is setting the stage to address the problems the church in Colossae is experiencing, but Paul is also clearly stating the consequences of not continuing.

Secondly, I was impacted by Col 2:8 (NLT), *"Don't let anyone capture you with empty philosophies and high-sounding nonsense that come from human thinking and from the spiritual powers of this world, rather than from Christ."* For me this was a great reminder to test every spirit just as John said in 1 John 4. We have to continually be on guard from teachings that might sound good but do not fully align with Jesus. Partial truth is still not truth. As Christians we need to resist these high-sounding nonsense even when it comes from Christian teachers or Church fathers of the past. We have to own our faith by verifying things we are told with the entire Bible story, not just select proof texts.

Lastly, I spent a good bit of time thinking about the tone of this letter. Paul has a very distinct focus on thankfulness. Col. 4:2 (NLT), *"Devote yourselves to prayer with an alert mind and a thankful heart."* We do not do a good job of encouraging thankfulness. We grip and complain, ask for rescue, but we do not focus on thanking the Lord from whom all things come. Taking time to intentionally focus on the things we are thankful for can change our perspective on our situation. Our situation does not change but our

attitude will. I found that starting and ending the day with a prayer focused on thanking God, sets me in the right direction to see what God wants me to do. If I can see what God wants me to do, then I trust God will provide solutions or endurance for whatever else is in my path.

Let's Pray.

Let me leave you with this today. If you have never read Colossians in one setting please do and see if you can see what I was reflecting on. I'm sure you will see other things as well. Reading large sections and full books of the Bible in one setting is an amazing way to immerse yourself in the story. These letters would have been read to a church. Remember to do your homework and understand the context before you begin. The extra work will be worth it.

Thank you for joining me today @ the PUNLA CoffeeTable. If you liked the message, please share a link with a friend. You can contact me at kip@punla.org if you have comments or questions. So, until next time @ the PUNLA CoffeeTable. God bless.