



**BELIEVERS CHAPEL**

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Colossians 1: 1-8

Lesson 1 of 15

2018

"Greetings from Jail"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you, Seth, and good morning. We have finished the Gospel of Mark and we did a Psalm last week; and now we're beginning a new series in the book of Colossians. We're looking this morning at verses 1-8 where Paul gives his greeting to them and then gives thanks for them; for all the things that he's heard about them and the grace that God has done in their lives. So we begin in Chapter 1, verse 1:

<sup>1</sup>Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, <sup>2</sup>To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ *who are* at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father. <sup>3</sup>We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, <sup>4</sup>since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints; <sup>5</sup>because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel <sup>6</sup>which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as *it has been doing* in you also since the day you heard *of it* and understood the grace of God in truth; <sup>7</sup>just as you learned *it* from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf, <sup>8</sup>and he also informed us of your love in the Spirit.

Colossians 1: 1-8

May the Lord bless this reading of His Word and bless our time of studying it together. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

Father, we thank you for this time together on this Sunday morning and this great privilege to gather together with the saints; singing hymns of praise to You, reading the scriptures (as we've done), —Your revelation and Your inerrant Word which Paul refers to as 'Truth'—That's what we have in our possession. We have Truth; something that the world debates in our age and raises questions about what the truth is—It's all so relative in their eyes. And yet, here is the Absolute Truth. And You have opened our eyes to see it; and we can read it and we can contemplate it. And as we do that this morning, as we consider this text at the beginning of Colossians, we pray that You bless us. Paul prayed for the Ephesians that God would open "...the eyes of their heart..." (Eph 1:18): And I pray that for ourselves; that You open the eyes of our heart; that we would see the truth of this text—what Paul has written to the Colossians and how it applies to us; and that You would make the applications to us where we need it; convict us where we need conviction and encourage us where we need that. In all of this, may You be glorified; may You be magnified in our minds and in our hearts. And we pray that You would do all of this and draw us close to Yourself, sanctify us, make us more and more like Your Son.

And this is how it happens: It's through the reading and the teaching and the study and the meditation upon Your Word—all 66 books which is Your revelation to us. We thank you for it and pray that You would give us each a hunger for it; a desire to know Your Word in order to know You. And in knowing You may we love You—For that will be the result of it. If we truly seek to know You through your Word, in doing that, we will grow in our love for You, and we'll grow in our love for one another.

So I pray for this—that that will be the experience of each one of us here and in this church. We pray this throughout this city and throughout the world where Your people are meeting: Where the Word of God is opened and being taught we pray that it will be taught with effectiveness with the power of the Spirit—and that He would communicate it to, and open hearts, to receive that message...that 'truth.'

We pray for it in the places where we have the privilege of ministering. We think of Cuba and the work that has been done there, and we pray for those saints this

morning as they meet, and as they're teaching—and that you would strengthen them and build them up in the faith, and provide for them—provide for protection, and for their needs. What a privilege You have given us to have some hand in those ministries, and we pray You bless those saints wherever they meet. We pray for your church and pray that You would build it up. We pray that for ourselves in this hour and we pray it also for the hour to come, the Sunday School hour, that the teaching would be clear and in the power of the Spirit.

Lord, bless us now as we continue with our worship, as we continue with our next hymn, and then as we look into Your Word and we study it together. Bless us: Build us up in the faith, and may we bring honor to You in all that we do in this hour and throughout the day. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

The book of Colossians proves the saying that 'big things come in small packages.' It's only four chapters long but contains some of the most majestic images of Christ in the Bible. It was written to a church in the town of Colossae, located in the Lycus river valley; about 100 miles east of the Mediterranean Sea and the city of Ephesus—so in the western region of modern Turkey. It was on an important trade route and had a prosperous past. But when Paul wrote his letter, Colossae was just a shadow of its former self. It was a poor town. Other cities nearby were prospering; Laodicea and Hierapolis were wealthy. They prospered materially, but not spiritually. John would later call the church of Laodicea "lukewarm" (Rev 3:16). In contrast to that, the poor church of Colossae was warm and vibrant. It was a growing church, spiritually. Paul writes of the saints there of their faith in Christ, and their love for the brethren.

But there was a problem. It's not surprising. Whenever there is spiritual growth and vitality, the Devil will visit the place and try to change that. And he visited the saints of Colossae. Strange ideas had entered the church from the east, brought there probably by merchants or travelers on the trade route. So men from the church visited Paul, and asked him to write a letter to the church and refute the new cult that had

come to town. Its ideas are sketchy, but from what Paul says, we gather that it was a combination of Greek philosophy, Jewish law, and oriental mysticism.

There was then, at that time, a variation of Judaism that was preoccupied with visions and talked that self-denial and strict law keeping enabled a devotee to enter paradise through visions. This cult was like that, with a mix of Christian ideas—But it was not Christian. It's emphasis on law keeping, diet, dreams, and even on angelic beings detracted from the Person and work of Christ. Evidently the false teachers taught that He was only a beginning. In order to go on to maturity, to become spiritually elite, it was necessary to follow their philosophy and rules. So, Paul answers their devaluation of Christ by highlighting His greatness; stressing the supremacy of Christ, the sufficiency of Christ, the deity of Christ, and the redemption that is in Christ, and in Christ alone.

The preacher of Ecclesiastes wrote, "There is nothing new under the sun." Nothing is being said today that hasn't been said yesterday. And we see that here. Many ideas of the present are largely retreads of the past. Some time ago, Warren Wiersbe, who was, for a number of years, the pastor teacher of Moody Church in Chicago, wrote on the manifestation of this old heresy today. "I hear too many voices," he wrote, "telling me that I need something more than Jesus Christ, some exciting experience, some new doctrine, some addition to my Christian experience. But Paul affirms that what I need is appropriation of what I already have in Christ." That's true. That's what Paul told the Colossian saints. In chapter two he'll say, "...in Him you have been made complete..." (vs10). You're already complete.

Paul had never been to Colossae or met the Colossians, but he could say this of them, (because it's true of every believer in Jesus Christ), 'We are complete *in Him*.' And complete at the moment of regeneration in faith. We don't need laws like circumcision to finish our justification. We don't need laws for diet or dress (Old Testament laws), to complete our sanctification or insure our glorification. We are complete in Christ and have all that we need. Born again whole, like a newborn child, with all of its parts. Everything's there.

We need to grow, of course, just as an infant needs to grow. But we don't do that by following a lot of man-made rules or mystical experiences. Christians are so easily drawn into all of that; so easily drawn into legalistic ways of life and forget their daily walk with God.

Is that too simple? This is how growth happens—It's by knowing Christ. That's really what He desires of us—more than He desires you to do the things that you're commanded to do (and certainly He desires that). But first and foremost, what He longs for is a relationship with you—with His people: To know you. And that's really how He defines eternal life in John, chapter 17, in verse 3. It's knowing God, and Jesus Christ whom He had sent. That's what He desires.

So that's how we grow. It's not through all the mystical things or the formulas that these teachers were proposing in Colossae—or are proposed today. It's not too simple to simply say, 'This is how we grow: It's through walking with the Lord. It's knowing His Word. It's living by faith.' That's what Paul will really say in the next chapter; in chapter two, verse three, "...in whom, (*speaking of Christ*), are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." Where are you going to find wisdom and knowledge? In Jesus Christ, and in Him alone. That's what Paul will advocate.

Now if Paul had never been to Colossae, how did this church begin there? Two men played an important part in that. Epaphras and Philemon. We know Philemon from the book of Philemon—The church met in his house. Epaphras is mentioned in the book of Colossians twice, and Philemon once. Epaphras was likely a convert of Paul's during his ministry in Ephesus. In Acts chapter 19, in verse 10, Paul wrote that during Paul's two year ministry there, all who lived in Asia heard the Word of the Lord. 'All of Asia' is the province of Asia in the western part of the continent of Asia Minor; modern Turkey. The gospel spread widely from the city of Ephesus to surrounding cities in that province when new converts and men sent by Paul went out to the cities in the region. And that included Colossae, a hundred miles away, when Epaphras went to the Lycus valley to evangelize the region. Years had passed. The church had grown. Paul, in the meantime,

had moved on. He had traveled to Jerusalem, where he was arrested. Spent two years in jail in Cesarea, before being sent to Rome, where he was imprisoned while waiting for his trial before Caesar. It was there that he was visited by Epaphras, who told him about the situation in Colossae.

And so from there in Rome, Paul wrote his letter to the Colossians. It's one of a group of letters known as his prison epistles. The others are Ephesians, Philippians, and Philemon. And here in this fourth prison epistle Paul wasted no time getting to the heart of the matter: **The Supremacy Of Christ.**

Early in this first chapter he describes Him, describes Christ, as the redeemer and the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 'He is God the Son, God's eternal Son, coequal with the Father in essence and power and glory. And He is the heir of all things. The universe is His. He is the revelation of the invisible God, and creator of everything. He is the sustainer of all things. He is 'before all things', Paul wrote. And in Him all things hold together. He made everything: Time and space, material and immaterial, physical and spiritual. He upholds it. He maintains it. He saves sinners by His infinite and eternal sacrifice—And they stay saved. That's the greatness of Christ. Do we really need anything more than Him? Anything more than The Almighty? I think Paul couldn't wait to make known all of that to these Colossians.

But first Paul had to say hello. And so he begins his letter with a greeting. It's a formal greeting in that it is one typical of the apostle. But it's no mere formality. It is genuine. It is warm. It's also necessary. He states the authority for all that he has written in this letter: He is 'an apostle of Jesus Christ'. Timothy was with him; maybe Timothy was serving as his secretary, writing down the things that Paul was dictating. But Timothy was not an apostle. Only Paul was that. He was Christ's representative and messenger on Earth. He hadn't become an apostle by a church-wide election. There was no college of cardinals that elected him to that office. He was sovereignly chosen by God. He was snatched up by Christ on the Damascus road and made a special messenger to the Gentiles. 'He was', he said, 'an apostle by the will of God.'

Paul didn't seek out the Lord. In fact, if you want to see an example of sovereign grace of a sinner being snatched 'as a brand from the burning', then read Acts chapter nine, and Paul's conversion. He's on his way to Damascus. His jaw was clenched—He was ready and determined to go kill Christians and snuff out the name of Jesus Christ when the light shone and blinded him with it. And the next thing Paul knew, he was calling Christ "Lord." No, he was an apostle, not by his own will or by the will of the church or anyone else. He was an 'apostle by the will of God.' Therefore, what he wrote is as if Christ had written it. Therefore, it's to be believed and followed. The cult he would counter was built on nothing but speculation: Human ideas, false ideas. Paul's response was divine revelation. It is Truth.

That, by the way, is where we begin when we read the Bible. It is Truth—That is our presupposition. And what that simply means is 'that's the starting point.' That is where we begin in our thinking. We begin recognizing that this book, all 66 books of this book, is Truth. We have to think about it; we have to study it. And sometimes we get it wrong when we interpret a passage. But nevertheless, it, in itself, is true. It's not opinion. It's Truth. And Paul emphasizes that in this introduction.

Now, if that seems to be 'begging the question,' meaning if that seems to be assuming the truth of the statement without first proving it, the answer to that is the self-revelation of the Bible. It purports to be God's Word. It claims to be that. From the very beginning. "In the beginning God ...", God said. He 'spoke' and all things came into being. And all through this book we read of God speaking. And it's God's Word, and it's His revelation. That's what it purports to be. That's what it claims to be.

And that is the inborn, natural understanding of Paul's readers. In verse two he calls them saints. That doesn't mean that they are an elite group of believers, a special group within the church. All believers, all Christians, are saints. It's a way of describing the believer, the Christian, as '*holy*'—as one chosen out of the world by God and set apart for Himself. That's really, essentially, what the word 'Holy' means. And the word 'saint' is built off the word for 'Holy'. It means one that is 'set apart' by God for Himself, for special use. The saint is a 'set apart one'.

So, being 'set apart', being changed, being different—they 'know'. They have spiritual eyes to see, and ears to hear. They are equipped with a new mind to understand, and the Holy Spirit within to teach them to enlighten their minds. They 'know' this is God's revelation. All of that comes with the new birth. It comes with regeneration: The Spirit of God, a new heart, a new mind, a new understanding— Suddenly things are understood and make sense.

And Paul expresses great confidence that these Colossians will respond well to what he has written to them, because he calls them 'faithful brethren in Christ.' They believe the gospel and obey the Lord. This was not a rich church, as I have said, like the church in Laodicea. But it was a faithful church and that's what the apostle valued. And that's what Christ values: Faithfulness. For all that the Laodicean Christians had, and they had a lot, they had a lot of material riches. They had, I'm sure, gold chandeliers, or whatever in their assembly. They had all the nice things. But for all of that, they lacked the best. They lacked the true zeal. They lacked love for the Lord and His Word. They were lukewarm to all of it—just indifferent to all of it. They were worldly and self-satisfied. So in Revelation chapter 3, verse 16, Jesus threatened to spit them out.

Material things are a blessing; and we are to be thankful for them. But they can distract from what is most important. They can dull a person's faith. The Colossians weren't rich, but they were faithful. And Paul had every reason to believe that they would respond to his brief epistle and receive the blessings he hoped for them.

And what he hoped for them is stated at the end of verse two—and it is '*grace*' and '*peace*'. That was a typical Jewish greeting: 'Peace'. 'Shalom'. More fully: 'Mercy and Peace'. But again, this is more than a formality. Paul meant it for these Colossian saints. The two go together. Peace (or shalom), is not simply a negative. It's not the absence of conflict, the absence of war. It's something positive as well. It is 'well-being'—which ultimately is the result of grace—God's undeserved, unconditional love.

But how much more likely is peace to be the Christian's experience when he or she is faithful and is believing God's Word and obedient to it? Peace is certainly to be

their experience when they are living in obedience to God's Word. And Paul's confidence in these Colossian saints to receive that, to receive His Word, to receive the revelation that He would give them is stated more clearly in the next verses, verses three and four, where Paul speaks of his thankfulness for them.

He didn't know them personally, having never traveled there. But he knew them. He knew them by reputation and had known them by reputation for some time. And he had prayed for them routinely. He says that in verse three. He and Timothy 'gave thanks to God' for them; having heard of their faith in Christ and love for all the saints. Not just some of the saints, not just those saints that they knew well or that they really liked; but all of the saints. Love for God's people is one of the great evidences of genuine faith. Faith in Christ joins us to Christ, which joins us to His body, His church, to His elect—And we love them. They are the body of Christ. And we care for them.

Now the faith Paul speaks of here is not only saving faith, that is faith into Christ. But it's also, and mainly here, faith that occurs 'in Him.' One of the commentators, I think it was F. F. Bruce, describes this as faith 'in the environment' of Christ. Let me illustrate the difference. There are two prepositions in Greek for the word 'in'. There's the word 'eis'—epsilon, iota, sigma. We would transliterate 'eis.' And the word 'en'—epsilon, nu—this is our word for 'in'. So, there's a difference between the two. When you came to Believer's Chapel this morning, you got out of your car, and you walked 'eis', into the building. And having walked into the building, you were then 'en', in the building, **in it**. And that's the difference. This is that second use of the word: Their faith **in** Christ, **in** the environment of Christ. In Him they are rooted and grounded. In Him, 'in the environment' of Christ, in the spiritual life of Christ, they receive His life. They're like a tree planted in good soil, and they are nourished by His life. And in Him their faith flourished. It was growing. And so having believed the gospel, having entered into Christ, they were in Christ, and living by believing His Word daily and acting upon it. And the great evidence of that, and the great act of that, is they were acting in love—That characterized them. They had a living, vital faith and the reason for it is they're grounded in Christ.

But the motivation for living that life is given in the next verse, in verse five—It's their **hope**. That energized them. They lived by faith and acted in love "...because", Paul said, "of the hope laid up for you in heaven..." Hope is about the future. And they knew their future. They knew that it was certain, and they knew that it was glorious.

They didn't have that in paganism. In fact, Paul described the Ephesians before the gospel came to them "...as having no hope and without God in the world." (Eph 2:12). The Colossians, a hundred miles east, were no different. They lived in darkness, they lived in ignorance, they lived in fear. Then they heard the gospel of forgiveness and eternal life. It rang true, and they believed it. The future was now bright. They had the confident expectation of heaven to come, of the resurrection of the body, and the kingdom to come; world without end. And that is our hope. It's not a wish. It's a certainty. And it affects the way we live in the present.

Jesus spoke of this in Matthew, chapter six in verse 20, and of our 'treasures in heaven.' He warned against laboring for and storing up 'treasures on earth that are eaten up by moth and rust, and can be stolen by thieves.' Live and work for what really lasts, for what is eternal. "...store up for yourselves treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal..." —That's what the Colossians were doing. They lived in their hope. When people lack hope, they lack purpose; they despair and they give up; they become uncaring and inactive. Christians alone have hope for we have a glorious future that will soon be ours. That motivated and galvanized the Colossians in their faith and love.

For this reason: Because they all shared the same hope and destiny, they made sacrifices for Christ and for each other. They were running the race of faith together to the heavenly city, and so they helped each other along the way; strengthening the hands that were weak and the knees that were feeble. People do not do that if there's no future—if life is meaningless and hopeless. If one's life is going nowhere, they don't become active and sacrificial for others. The Colossians knew that was not the case. The Colossians knew that life isn't empty and meaningless. They had hope. And so they knew what they did today was of eternal weight and value. They had hope; and had it

from the time Epaphras came to them and gave them the gospel; what Paul calls in verse 5, "...the word of truth..." There it is again—Truth.

Now again, calling the gospel 'Truth' may seem to be begging the question, meaning it may seem to be assuming one's conclusion to be correct before proving it. After all, the cultists who came to Colossae challenged the truth of the gospel. They had something new that promised secrets that opened up the universe and had credibility in the minds of men of philosophy. These men are smart; the things they're saying are deep. But again, the gospel is its own proof. Just as the sun, shining at high noon, is its own proof, the gospel, all of the Word of God—all of the Bible, is its own proof! I think Abraham Kuyper was right; the Dutch theologian who defined the gospel as 'the entire Bible.' The whole Bible is the good news. And the whole Bible, the Word of God, is self-authenticating—It rings true—'for those who have ears to hear'. Paul wrote of "...the eyes of your heart..." in Ephesians 1:18 (as I mentioned in our prayer this morning). This is the spiritual ability to see things, to understand things, to perceive. And our spiritual eyes have been opened. We are not blind. We see what others cannot see and cannot know.

The truth of the gospel proves itself to us just as the sun does on a clear day to a person with eyes to see. You go outside at noon, in August, in Texas, when there's not a cloud in the sky, to debate whether the sun is out...How can we prove that the sun is there? —You know it—You have eyes to see it! That's the Colossians. That's us. We know, by God's grace, that it is true. And we believe it with certainty—because we've been given eyes to see—because we've been given faith. Faith is a gift. It's a work of God. That's indicated in verses three and four where Paul gives thanks to God for their faith. Why would he thank God for their faith? —Because God is the one who gave them the faith. So by His grace we see and we know intuitively, automatically, and certainly: We just know it's true.

Still, having said that, there are external evidences for the truth of the gospel. There are things like fulfilled prophecy. There are things like historical accuracy. There are other things as well. And Paul refers to those other things in verse six—It's the

Colossians themselves, and multitude of others like them across the world. 'The gospel', Paul said, 'came to them, as it has to many others, and is constantly bearing fruit'.

Now that is a proof of the truth of the Word of God. It is not static. It is dynamic. It is "...living and active...", according to Hebrews, chapter 4, in verse 12. It does a work in your soul. It divides things. It analyzes things. It sanctifies, according to Jesus in John 17, verse 17. And it 'bears fruit', Paul says in verse 6. It changes lives and the Colossians were proof of that. They were largely Gentiles, saved out of paganism, and brought into the church with new lives for all of the world to see; for all of those in pagan Colossae to see; and the whole Lycus valley to see. Lives that had been characterized formerly by immorality, idolatry, sorcery, and strife—the deeds of the flesh. Those lives were now characterized by the fruit of the Spirit: By love, joy, peace, goodness, and long suffering, and all of those virtues that are the fruit of the Spirit.

It's hard to argue against that. It's hard to argue against a changed life, especially one so dramatically changed as their lives were. The gospel does that. Philosophy cannot do that. Acts 17 gives an example of the impotence of philosophy with the lazy, arrogant men of Mars Hill. They were talkers; fascinated with some new thought—But they were not new thoughts. They were idle, useless men. The Word of God changes men. The Colossians were bearing fruit, Paul said. And they weren't the only examples of that either. The gospel, he says, was increasing in all the world. Now that's miraculous. That, itself, is a proof of the truth of this book, and this message that we have.

And just think of it. When Christ was crucified (we just studied this a few weeks ago), ten of his disciples ran away and were in hiding, one had betrayed Him, and one was with a small group of women standing off at a distance from the cross. When the Lord's body was placed in the tomb no one who had followed Him had any hope. The Lord died alone with all of His friends in despair. That was the situation. Three days later, the resurrection. 30 years later the church was filling the world and increasing. Some religions spread their new faith by the sword. Christianity spread by the Word.

Less than 150 years after Paul wrote Colossians, the church father Tertullian wrote of the gospel and the changes it had brought peacefully. He spoke his words to the Roman empire and said, "We are but of yesterday, and yet we already fill your cities, islands, camps; your palace, senate and forum. We have left you your temples alone." And it wasn't long before those temples were abandoned. Quite an amazing thing to think about that time, early fourth century. Paganism, which had dominated the world, certainly Europe, for millenia was gone. Over. That was a miracle.

Christ said, "I will build my church" — And against the powers of darkness, He has done that and is doing it today. Again, this is supernatural and proof of the grace of God in truth—the truth of the gospel. Proof that sovereign grace works through faithful men like Epaphras who had brought the gospel to the Lycus valley. Paul calls him a fellow bond- servant and faithful servant of Christ. He was the source of Paul's information about the Colossians: About the problems in the church and their strengths— and what he speaks of in verse eight as their "...love in the Spirit."

This is the only verse in the book of Colossians where the Holy Spirit is explicitly mentioned; for this is a book mainly about Jesus Christ and His sufficiency as God's Son. In fact later, in verse 27, rather than speak of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, Paul speaks of Christ "...in you, the hope of glory." Now it's a distinction without a great difference for Christ is in every believer through the Holy Spirit. Their ministries are distinct from each other but inextricably connected to each other. The life of Christ is given to us through the Holy Spirit. Their faith was nourished and flourishing in Christ through the Holy Spirit.

But all of this brings out the real nature of the Christian life, and the reason for the spread of the Christian faith. And again I say, it's supernatural. It's through the Spirit of God in us and working through Scripture. The dynamic change in these Gentiles was due to the Holy Spirit working through the Word of God to change them and produce in them love for the brethren so that they became selfless servants of others. So, for a pagan, for an unbeliever, or for an unregenerate person to become a selfless person, a selfless servant of others, ready to lay down his life for the Lord...that is a miracle.

And the Holy Spirit makes the gospel message effective when men like Epaphras preach it among the pagans, so that they see the truth and believe. It's through the preaching of the Word, Peter tells us in I Peter, chapter 1, verse 23, that the seed is planted. The imperishable seed of life is planted, and it does its work. It's not that Epaphras, or any evangelist is effective through their own eloquence or skill in debate. All of that is good, and God uses all of that. In fact, God makes people with the abilities that they have so that they can be used in those ways: To be used as men who can debate well or that can explain the Word of God effectively. You have to have a mind to do that; and it's good to have clarity of speech and be able to think clearly and precisely. He uses all of that. But in the end of it all, the bottom line is, it is not our work and our effort. It is the work of the Godhead. It's the work of the Holy Spirit that opens up hearts to receive the truth. That's why lives were changed in Colossae, and "...in all the world..." , as Paul says.

We live in a world very much like the world of the Colossians; maybe more than at any other time in history. It's full of fear and anxiety, uncertainty due to everything from terrorism to super bugs. It's a dangerous world and a world without hope — And a world without God, without any belief in God. It's a very, very secular world in which we live in. I read a book back in 2017, just really a few months ago, which is an introduction to the thought of Martin Luther. (It was the 500th anniversary of the beginning of the Reformation, so I read a few books on Luther, and on his thinking.) This book is by a German writer and in the last chapter he stated, "In our day it is exceedingly difficult to defend any attempt to speak about God." Notice the wording, "It's exceedingly difficult to defend any attempt..." Just 'an attempt' to speak about God! People don't believe in Him. In Luther's day, the existence of God was a general assumption. No one questioned it. The doctrine of the Trinity was almost universally accepted, at least in Europe and in Christendom. The situation today has fundamentally changed. "The idea of God as a whole," the author wrote, "has finally and irrevocably ceased to be accepted."

'Finally and irrevocably.' Now that book was published in 1964. Things have not improved in the past 50 years. They've gotten worse. They've gotten darker. We are

living in the days of the Colossians and the apostles: In a kind of materialistic neo-paganism without hope and without God in the world—And increasingly without morals. It's a frightening world we live in. But the gospel that was recognized to be the 'Word of Truth' in ancient Colossae is the same 'Word of Truth' that we have. And the Holy Spirit is opening hearts to believe in it now, just as He did then. Nothing can prevent that. That hasn't changed. It is supernatural. We have the one true message: The message of salvation for the lost; the message of forgiveness of sin and eternal life; the message of eternal deliverance from judgment to come. So we should tell it.

We have the message of hope. Not just hope in this life but hope for all eternity. So we should live with hope and it should be reflected in our conversation and behavior. We have hope, and we have peace: We have 'shalom' and we have well-being. The world seems on fire all around us—That's reality. But while we are in the world—this dangerous world, this world aflame—more importantly, we are *in Christ* who holds all things together. He is our fortress. The world should see that in our lives and hear it in our voices. We have hope and it's in the Savior—Who is the Savior of the world. Paul could write that confidently and joyfully from jail—He had hope.

So if you're here without Him—you do not believe in Jesus Christ—we invite you to come to Him to trust in Him for salvation. It's real hope. He came to die for sinners. He calls sinners to Himself. If you know that you're guilty, that you're a sinner, flee to Christ. He receives all who do. His sacrifice will cleanse you from sin and guilt and give you everlasting life—give you new life; life with eternal meaning. And may God help you to do that and help all of us to act upon that and to appropriate all that we have in Christ—in Whom are the riches of wisdom and knowledge.

Let's pray.

Father, we do thank you for this text of Scripture, and this great book of Colossians, this small book full of 'Big Things.' And we pray that as we study it in the weeks to come that You bless us: and You change us and transform us—make us a people who love You, love one another, and serve you faithfully. We thank you for Your faithful service to us; our Great, Infinite, Eternal God of the universe: The Triune God who blesses us; serves us through the suffering servant of your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you for Him and for His death for us. And it is in His name we pray.

Amen.

*(End of Audio)*