

98-08-24a Colossians

Let's begin our study this evening by going to the Lord in prayer. Father, we thank you once again for the privilege of studying your word together. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will shed light on these truths as we study them and as we analyze the parallel passages in your word.

We pray that these things will be meaningful to us and make a difference in our thinking so that they accomplish the purpose for which you have given them to us. We pray these things in Jesus' name, amen. I'd like to read the section of Colossians that we have now arrived at.

We, I think, did justice to the greeting and to the Thanksgiving section that Paul wrote in verses 3 through 8. We are now in the section verses 9 through 23. We are well along in that section. But I'd like to read this one more time just so that as we resume tonight in the section that deals with Christ and His standing, we have it in a context.

So Paul begins in verse 9, And for this reason, and the reason is that he has heard of their faith, their hope and their love and their response to the truth as Epaphras has taught it. For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, so that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God, strengthened with all might according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy, giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.

He, Christ, is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.

And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.

And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death to present you holy and blameless and above reproach in His sight. If, indeed, you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister. We saw last time the interesting structural arrangement in the central section of this part of Colossians, verses 14 through 20, where there

are two large portions here, a first section and a second section.

The first part, talking about the Son of God's love, who is the image of the invisible God, who is the firstborn of all creation. We saw that in Him, or by Him, all things were created, all things are created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, all things in Him cohere, have their holding together.

And He is the head of the body of the church, and so forth. So we have these two views of Christ. He is viewed from a heavenly perspective, looking toward creation.

Then in the second portion, after you have the statement that He is the head of the body, or the head of the church, then we have Him set in an earthly context, looking back in the direction of heaven. We see that He has a foot, as it were, on each side of that great gulf fixed between God and man. He is, in fact, the mediator, or the bridge.

It is through Christ, and through Christ alone, that we have any access, any standing, or any future with God. And Paul is giving us this in some detail. We saw that His very title, the Son of God, implies the union, and in this case actually the reunion, of God and man in Christ, because the Son is the material evidence and expression of intimate love between two persons.

And the fact that Jesus Christ partakes fully and equally from the divine and the human nature is the extraordinary event and the extraordinary fact of the universe, and it is a constant reminder to us. We often think of Jesus Christ as our Savior and as our benefactor. We think a lot of things about Him.

We don't always remember that He, just by His existence, represents God's strong desire to be related to us. Any time we think about Christ and we remember that He is God-man, God has extended Himself in a unique way to the human race, has participated or involved Himself. None of these words really do justice to what has happened in Jesus Christ.

He has partaken of our humanity eternally. There will never be a time when Jesus Christ is not the God-man. It happened at a point in time with results that go on forever.

And it culminated in the fulfillment of the Father's plan in Christ at the cross. This is why we have the blood of Jesus Christ, the blood of His cross, mentioned in this passage, because this is the point at which this plan and purpose in God comes to fulfillment. It's fascinating to me, it's fascinating to remember that it wasn't the night that the angels sang and that the shepherds quaked and the glory shone all around and the babe lay in the manger that God's plan was perfected in Christ.

It began at that point. The union of God and man happened at the point of the birth of Jesus Christ. This, of course, we've mentioned before, has implications for your view with regard to when life begins.

Did the angels sing when Jesus was conceived or did they sing when He was born? When did the celebration take place? When did the angels declare that God had come to earth in the form of His Son, Jesus Christ? It was at His birth, not at His conception. When Gabriel came and spoke to Mary, He didn't say, His name is now thus and so because what is conceived in you is of the Holy Ghost and so forth. Everything is in the future tense.

He will be called Jesus for He will save His people from their sins. Everything is said in the future tense, even though there is a living embryo or fetus, whatever stage it was when Gabriel came and spoke to Mary. This is not a pro-choice argument by any means.

I'm simply stating the facts. God treats the arrival of Jesus Christ on the earth as taking place at His birth, not at His conception. There may be lots of other good arguments to be pro-life and to be against abortion and so forth.

All I'm saying is you can't argue from Scripture that human life begins at the point of conception because it isn't treated that way. You look at the law, you look at the Old Testament, you look at the New. Everything happens out from the mother's womb.

It's not to say that there are not plenty of other good, substantial arguments for not interfering in the creative work of God in the womb. But that particular argument, in my mind, doesn't hold a lot of weight. The angels sing when Christ is born.

But it's just like we noted in our study of the life of David. There is a process that takes place. It seems that God spaces things out and lets His plan unfold.

Everything doesn't happen at once. We wish that it would. I remember being exceedingly frustrated when I was told in my early days of learning and growing as a believer that it was going to take a long time before I would reach quote, unquote, spiritual maturity.

I didn't want to wait a long time. I wanted it to happen right now. I thought, you know, if I just listened to a lot of the teaching of the Word of God, if I paid really close attention, worked really hard, well now I can just absorb it all and be right up there with the great gray heads of theological thought in a few weeks or a few months or a year or two at most.

For somebody to tell me that it would be five or ten years, I thought, well, that's just terrible. I don't want to wait that long. But God has built things into our lives, and particularly our spiritual lives, that unfold in a process.

One thing builds on another. This is the pattern everywhere you look in Scripture. Men are prepared in the Old Testament for years for a specific thing that God will use them for, whether you look at Joseph, Moses, David, Abraham, Jacob, anyone you want to look at that is prominent in the forward progress of God's plan in the Old Testament, you find that there is a period of preparation, often in isolation, often over a period of years, and patience is required, and patience

is developed in those individuals often under stress, out in the wilds or in prison or in the desert, wherever it may be.

The same thing is true of Jesus Christ. It wasn't just Jesus Christ or God the Son going to God the Father shortly before the Incarnation and saying, Father, I am here to do your will, let's do it, and he goes down and he's born and everything is over with. In one fell swoop with the Incarnation and the arrival of Christ, it's a fait accompli, everything is done.

Jesus Christ lives for 30-plus years on the earth as a man, undergoes a variety of experiences, trials, the three-something years of his public ministry, the crucifixion, burial, resurrection, many appearances between his resurrection and his ascension. These things are all spaced out in time, and we need to remember that in our lives. Even though we may be very desirous and very ambitious of living a life that pleases God and wanting to make progress, conquer all of our sins, eradicate all of our vices, have all wisdom and all knowledge, it's a process.

We saw this in the earlier part of this chapter where in Paul's prayer he says that he prays that they will have wisdom and understanding to walk worthy of the Lord, being strengthened with patience in long-suffering and increasing in the knowledge of God. It is designed to be a process, and we should have patience in that process. There's a lot of psychological mumbo-jumbo where people, psychologists and counselors say, well, be gentle with yourself and this, and I'm not necessarily trying to go down that path, but it is a fact of the Word of God that these things take time, and we need to let God do His work and be patient because things take time.

There are things we don't understand, and we have to be patient with our lack of understanding. We have to be patient with the limitations of time and the corruption of our nature and so forth. So Jesus Christ, when He becomes the God-man at the point of His birth, that's not the fulfillment of everything that God has in His plan for Jesus Christ to accomplish.

It in fact takes place over several decades. It is continuing to take place. The fulfillment of God's plan in Christ is still underway and won't be complete until the Kingdom of the Father comes in well over 1,000 years in the future.

So Jesus Christ Himself is patiently, if you will, pursuing the plan of God as it pertains to Him just as we are. And if He can be patient, if He can be tested in all points like as we are, if He, for the joy that is set before Him, can endure, that's our pattern as well. And we focus on the joy that's set before us.

There may be setbacks. There may be disappointments. There may be discouragements, many of most of our own making perhaps.

But just like when we were out on Mike's boat last weekend, when you're sitting there with the rudder, you've got different little indications of what direction you're headed. You've got the little swingy thing at the top of the... You know, being a Naval Academy graduate, I don't know the

name of it. I don't.

Little tell-tale or little wind vane looking thing at the top of the mast that tells you the direction of the wind relative to the orientation of your craft. But for me, the easiest thing, if you have a relatively steady wind, is to pick a point on the horizon and steer toward it. That keeps you on a pretty straight tack.

And you encounter periods where there's not much wind. You have other periods where there's a lot of wind. You get wakes from other boats and rude motorboat people swinging by and chopping up your environment there.

But you keep your eye on the horizon so that you can steer a straight course and don't get flustered or disoriented by things in the immediate periphery. And we just have to be patient. And there's a lesson in looking at Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ, even now, what is He doing? He's sitting at the right hand of the Father, waiting. He's been waiting for close to 2,000 years now for the forward progress of the plan of God. He is seated at the right hand of the Father, waiting until God the Father makes His enemies a footstool for His feet.

So we have an attitude of diligence. We have an attitude of energetic pursuit of the things of God. But at the same time, we have a measured amount of patience recognizing that things take place in time because that's God's design.

It's one of those supposed Yogi Berra comments that time is the great thing that keeps everything from happening at once. And that's really the case. You don't want everything happening at once.

You need to space it out so you can cope with it one thing at a time. So when we think about Jesus Christ, He represents God's earnest, God's leaning so far forward in His desire to be related to us personally, to have fellowship with us, to have communion with us, to have communication and mutual understanding that He has partaken of our nature permanently and eternally in the person of Jesus Christ. It's a big commitment that God made to us.

Anytime we get discouraged, anytime we start thinking the cause is lost and, well, I've wasted too much time, I'm too far behind, I've made too many mistakes, just think about Jesus Christ. God has committed Himself eternally to us. Jesus Christ bodily represents that commitment.

There is no one that is pulling for us. There is no one that is more anxious for us to succeed than God the Father. But we have to conform to His will.

Things have to happen His way. He can't violate His essence. He can't violate His standards.

He can't make exceptions. There is one way, there is one mediator between God and man, and it is the man, Christ Jesus. Jesus said, I am the way, the truth, and the life.

No man comes to the Father but by Me. There is one way, and that's through Christ. And we literally come to God the Father through Jesus Christ, not only in a salvation sense, but in a daily sense.

As we gradually are conformed to the image of Christ, we are gradually brought closer and closer to the Father. Because, obviously, relationships develop with understanding and with intimacy. So it's something to remember.

And this is why we have this two-fold presentation of Jesus Christ in these verses, 14 through 20. He is the image of the invisible God. He is the firstborn overall creation.

He created it. It's all been for Him. He holds it all together.

And we see His divine side. But it's intermingled, and it's inextricably linked with His humanity. Because He is also the firstborn from the dead.

He is the beginning. And so through Christ, in whom all the fullness dwells, God is reconciling all things to Himself. It reminds me of these things where you see someone throwing a grappling hook across a great expanse.

How do you span the gulf? Well, you swing something across that can hook on and make a way, make a bridge that you can get other things across. And Jesus Christ has come from the heavenly realms, from the invisible realms, to us. Now, Christ is like His Father.

He is His image. We were initially, the human race, was created in the image of God as well. But that image has become corrupted.

It has faded and been distorted by sin. Jesus Christ, as the perfect man, is the restoration of that image. And we, when we are ultimately sanctified, we know that we shall be like Him.

And we will recover, on behalf of our race, that divine image. We recover it daily, spiritually, as we pursue our calling. Christ is also like us.

And this is where we really pick up where we left off last week in verse 18. It says, He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead. Now, if you think about this for a moment, when did the church come into being? The church, when we talk about the church, came into being at Pentecost, 1900 plus years ago.

Sometime very shortly after the death, burial, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, or God the Son, the second person of the Trinity, was not always the head of the church. There was not always a church and He was not always the head.

This is a new thing in human history, relatively speaking. Our age is the latest development in God's plan. And there's a time when He was not.

Now, when Jesus was on earth, what was His mission? We've studied this when we went through the Gospels and we've reviewed it. Why did Jesus come? What was His purpose when He was here the first time? What did He tell the woman who came to Him who was a Gentile and wanted some help for her daughter? He said, I am sent only to whom? The lost sheep of the house of Israel. Nothing there about being the preeminent one or the head of the church, is there? It's something to keep in mind.

It helps us sort things out. It helps us have an accurate perspective when we go to different portions of the Scripture. When you see God the Son manifested in the law of Moses through the sacrifices and through the offerings as the Savior, as the Redeemer, as the suffering servant later on in the prophets, when you see His redemptive, propitiatory work illustrated in the sacrifices, that is a particular aspect of His identity and of His work.

When you see Him in His earthly ministry going to the lost sheep of the house of Israel almost exclusively, that's a particular aspect of His work, of His person. You don't want to mix things that aren't intended to be mixed. We don't mix Israel and the church.

We don't mix the law and grace. We don't mix Christ as the King of the Jews, Christ as the Messiah to Israel, with Christ the head of the church. There is a difference.

There is a functional difference. Once in a while, more frequently here lately, not perceiving that, not understanding it, you will hear people talk about King Jesus. There's a gospel song I was hearing the other day where they say King Jesus did this or He is my King.

Even some of our hymns crown Him with many crowns. You have to be a little bit careful because to the church, Jesus Christ is not the King. If you want to be technically correct, Jesus Christ is not our King.

To the church, Jesus Christ is the firstborn among many brethren. Romans 8.29 We are all royal family in that sense because He is the King of Israel. He's the Davidic King.

He's the Messiah. He is the political and the spiritual leader that fulfills the covenant promises to the nation of Israel. We are related to Him in a very close way.

It's variously pictured as being His bride, being His body, and being His brethren. None of those He has never referred to in the New Testament as our King. It's a small point.

Don't feel bad if you want to think of Him in that sense. I'm sure it's not a gross error. But it's important to keep in mind that Jesus Christ means different things in the different aspects of His work.

And to fail to distinguish these is to fail to appreciate Christ in those senses. So when He becomes the firstborn from the dead, that takes place at His resurrection. That Easter Sunday

morning, when He appears in the garden resurrected, He is now the firstborn from the dead.

The day before, He wasn't the firstborn from the dead. All through His earthly ministry, He was not the firstborn from the dead. He never was wearing that title until that Sunday.

And from that day forward, He is the firstborn from the dead. And He is the beginning. And that is how He is to the church.

The church is new. He is new. You can think of it in His earthly relationship equivalent to Adam, the way Paul describes Him in Romans.

Everyone is in Adam. Adam was the first man that partook of flesh and went on forward and had offspring. And He is the progenitor of the human race in its physical sense.

Jesus Christ is the progenitor of the human race. He is the last Adam in the new life sense, in the resurrected eternal life related to God sense. And you can see the parallel and the reason why the Bible makes that comparison between the first Adam and the last Adam.

In Adam all die, Romans says. In Christ, all shall be made alive. What are we talking about? Everyone who is in Adam and remains in Adam is going to die.

Everyone who is in Christ and remains in Christ, of course, in that salvation sense, once you're in Christ, you do remain in Christ, is alive and will live. So it is a shift from a material view of man in Adam to the spiritual view of the believer in Christ. So He is our founding Father, if you will.

You remember one of His prophesied titles is the Everlasting Father. I always used to wonder about that. He will be called Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father.

Well, wait a minute. I thought we already had an Everlasting Father. Why are you calling Christ the Everlasting Father? What does that title mean? Well, who is our Father, humanly speaking? It's Adam.

Who is our Father as the last Adam in the perfected man status? It's Jesus Christ. That is why He's called the Everlasting Father. He is our new Adam.

And in regeneration, we partake of His resurrection life. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, and we share that. These are wonderful theological truths, but they are worthwhile to dwell upon even when you're down in the trenches, even when you're grinding through the daily things of life because it reminds us of why these daily life things are here.

Jesus Christ was all of these things, but He still had to walk one foot in front of the other with leather sandals over rocky ground in Israel for 33 years. You can imagine. We know who we are in Christ.

We know many wonderful things about our position and our opportunities and the resources that

we have in the Word of God and in the Holy Spirit, but we tend to kind of get caught up in the details of our lives and not always stop and ponder all of the magnitude of the things that God has done as far as our spiritual identity is concerned. You think about Jesus Christ. What was His position? You think, I'm the preexistent, eternal Son of God.

I'm the second person of the Trinity. I'm the Savior. I'm the prophesied Mashiach.

All of the Old Testament Scriptures point to me, and here I am walking down this road with these people plaguing me and yanking on my clothes, trying to be healed, misconstruing everything I say, accusing me of blasphemous things. He had to deal with these things, and if there was anyone who had a sense of who He was in the eternal plan of God, it's Jesus Christ, and at the same time, He had more to deal with in just the straight physical realm than any of us has ever had to deal with. We've never faced the cross.

We've never faced the kind of intense satanic opposition that He faced, the intense personal opposition that He faced from His peers, from His religious opponents, even from His own family, the scoffing and the mocking and the misconstruing and the frustrating dullness that He faced day after day as He tried to teach and present the tremendous opportunity that He Himself represented and embodied as the shepherd of the sheep, as the fulfillment of all of God's promises to Israel. And so you see that tension between the vast eternal truths that are bound up in Jesus Christ and the necessity for Him to walk through a daily life that's just like ours. We ought to have that same balance of recognizing that we're in the world and we're facing our decisions and our tests and our challenges and our distracting joys and so forth.

And at the same time, we have these wonderful, magnificent, eternal truths that apply to us. So when we think about this section of Colossians, what I'm aiming for here is for us to get a sense of the fact that when Paul presents Jesus Christ in these two perspectives, heavenly looking toward earth, earthly looking toward heaven, that's where we are. Why is that important to us? Because we are so closely connected with Christ and these two perspectives apply to us as well.

How many times in his writings does Paul say, remember, you're a citizen of the heavenly kingdom. You've been transferred out of the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of the sun. You have an inheritance.

You're an heir. You have all spiritual blessings in heavenly places, he tells them in Ephesians. Just read Ephesians 1, 2, 3. All of these eternal truths.

Paul is not a pie-in-the-sky guy. All of us have been in services where we've heard even the teaching of the Word of God where it all seems to be in the ethereal realms and you say, well, that's all well and good, but what about situation A, B, and C that I'm living in right now? That's all well and good, but that doesn't help me where I live. It really does if we remember that a lot of our life is conditioned by our perspective and this reinforces and paints in the details of where exactly

we are.

We are heavenly. We partake of the new human race, the new life that Jesus Christ as the last Adam represents. He is the beginning and He is the firstborn.

Well, if there's a beginning, that means there's stuff that comes after. If there's a firstborn, that means there are other... You don't talk about an only child as my firstborn. You say, that's my only child.

But if you have a firstborn, that means there are others that were born later. So when it calls Christ in verse 18, the beginning and the firstborn, that tells you there's other stuff coming that is of the same kind, that is generated in the same way. And that's what Jesus Christ means to us.

When you think about Christ, you think about His humanity and His deity as He sits at the right hand of the Father waiting for the forward progress of God's plan. Remember, there are others. He is the firstborn among many brethren, and that's us.

He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, living the resurrected eternal life for humans of which we partake. He's our example. He's the pioneer.

They had this, I didn't see it, but I heard tell of the thing about Lewis and Clark and how they went off, looking for the Northwest Passage or whatever. And they blazed trails. They went literally where no man had gone before, no white man had gone before.

And how much easier it was for people to come behind them who had already figured out which Indians were friendly and which were not, and what trails were safe to take, and which rivers could be forded at what time of the year and so forth. Jesus Christ has done that for us. That's why He's called the first.

He's the beginning and the firstborn from the dead. He has already gone through the death experience for us, and He has been resurrected on the other side. This tells you something else about where the rest of us in the human race stand, including Old Testament saints, because He's the firstborn from the dead.

Who is the first one to enjoy resurrection life as a human being? It's Jesus Christ. It's not Adam or Seth or Abel or Enoch or somebody else. Jesus Christ.

That tells you that everybody that died before Jesus Christ has not been resurrected yet. Otherwise, they would be the firstborn. Jesus Christ is the firstborn from the dead.

He is the first one. He's the archaic. He's the beginning.

He's the pioneer. And thank goodness He is, because He's qualified. He's worthy.

What better point man could you have than the Lord Jesus Christ? What great comfort we can

take from knowing it's like this song that Jake Hess sings, it's like Christ is speaking, and He says, I've been there. I know what it's like when it's lonely. I know what it's like when it's difficult.

I know what it's like when the road seems long and the way seems dark. I've been there, and Jesus Christ has been there. Any place we could possibly go, He's already been.

And He's our comforter. He's our intercessor. He pleads with the Father on our behalf.

He has sent God the Holy Spirit to comfort us and to encourage us with this very knowledge. So it should be a great encouragement to us. It doesn't matter how bad things get.

Jesus Christ is our advocate. And He has sent us God the Holy Spirit who is our advocate. God the Father is our advocate.

That tells us that God is on our side. There is no one more anxious for us to succeed. There is no one more compassionate or long-suffering or patient.

These attributes that are described, we noted in the previous paragraph, patience and long-suffering with joy, those are divine attributes. That's partaking of the divine nature which is by nature long-suffering, forbearing, enduring, patient, with joy. God doesn't stomp His feet when we fail.

God is anxious for us to learn and to grow. So we ought to be encouraged and take heart. We have a wonderful Heavenly Father.

We have a wonderful Savior and advocate and representative in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ sitting there representing by His very existence how anxious God is to be related to us. We're going to pause and take our break here. And when we come back, we want to move forward a little bit and see in the next section beginning, actually we'll start in verse 19, to see what it means for all the fullness to be pleased to dwell in Christ.

Just a little something for you to muse on during the break. Does it seem redundant at all to say all the fullness? If it's fullness, why would you have to say all? Well, you can muse on that and we'll cover it when we come back.