

Prayer of Preparation: *My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness; I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name. On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand: all other ground is sinking sand; all other ground is sinking sand. May we, like the Colossians, find our hope in Jesus, the Christ. Amen.*

Paul has a problem with the people of Colossae; a **BIG** problem with the folks over there. And since Paul is over here in prison and the Colossians are over there in Colossae, Paul writes a letter. And to further complicate the matter, Paul doesn't know the Colossians because Epaphras was the missionary who went to Colossae. So, Paul has the task of writing a letter to people he has never met; Paul must write an epistle that's meant to impress upon the people who they were, who they are...and whose they are.

So, who were the Colossians...and who does Paul want them to be? The Colossians were gentiles. This is important because the Colossians didn't have the Jewish background that Paul and the other disciples had; the Colossians didn't have the same theological and traditional understandings which were part of everyday life of other converts. This meant: no “in the beginning God created...and it was good,” no stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Joseph, no Moses and the ten commandments, no dietary restrictions, no 6 days of work and the seventh day we rest...none of that was part of the Colossians everyday understanding.

Paul has the awesome task of explaining to the Colossians who they are **now**. Listen what Paul tells the Colossians with a fresh ear, *In our prayers for you we always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints...* Paul lets the Colossians know that there is a God in heaven and there is a savior, Jesus Christ and that they operate out of love. This is important to note because the Colossians were Gentiles who perhaps worshiped stars as heavenly powers...their understanding of God and of heaven were very different.

First Paul gives the Colossians a place to start understanding this new religion they are practicing. Paul starts with prayer because we **always** start with prayer. Prayer is the beginning, middle, and end of all we are. Our prayers lead us to thankfulness for all that we have. Our prayers lead us to our knowledge of God. And our prayers lead us to the knowledge that God has given us YOU as brothers and sisters of the faith. So Paul starts the Colossians out with a prayer and thanksgiving.

Now that Paul has set the Colossians up to understand that we begin with prayer and thanksgiving we can ask ourselves, *What's next?* What else does the people of Colossae need to know? I'm glad you asked...because Paul says they have PLENTY of faith and they LOVE all the saints. So what are they missing? What's next is where the Colossians place their hope.

Here's the problem. The Colossians had been praying to the stars...their hope was in the power of those same stars. Our prayers? Well, our prayers are to a risen savior; Jesus the Christ.

Listen to Paul once again, ***because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. You have heard of this hope before in the word of the truth, the gospel that has come to you.*** How do you explain to a people who weren't there that their hope lies in someone they haven't seen, indeed, in someone even Paul hasn't seen? Paul tells us in Romans 10:17 that that are three things which are needed: faith, hope, and love. The Colossians have faith. The Colossians have love. The Colossians need to know that their hope lies in the one in whom they place their faith and who shows them how to love.

Sounds complicated? Listen to Jesus again: “***But*** a Samaritan while traveling came upon him, and when he saw him, he was moved with compassion.” We’ve all heard the story of the good Samaritan before. We know about their theological dispute over what are sacred scripture and where the Temple should be. We know the Jews and Samaritans hate each other but Jesus says that true love overcomes hate. This is the Jesus in whom we are to place our hope.

It's the same Jesus who walked, taught, healed, and delivered. It's the same Jesus who teaches love and compassion. It's the same Jesus who teaches healing and restoration. It's the same Jesus who looks upon us with love and compassion and offers us mercy. The stars are beautiful indeed...but they are not to be worshiped. The stars will not walk amongst us, the stars will not have compassion for us, and the stars will not die for us as atonement for our sins. No...the stars won't, but Jesus will.

Paul tells the Colossians to listen to the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ. Listen to the gospel to learn that our hope is in a risen savior. Listen to the gospel to learn that Jesus is God's son. Listen to the gospel to learn that our salvation lies in Jesus the Messiah, the Christ. Listen to the gospel to learn that Jesus is our all and all...listen to the gospel. Listen to the ways in which Jesus has taught us who God wants us to be and whom we should worship.

Paul ends this portion of his letter by saying, *Jesus has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

Response to the Word: *On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand: all other ground is sinking sand; all other ground is sinking sand.* May we, like the Colossians, find our hope in Jesus, the Christ. ***Amen.***