

Colossians 1:1-14

Date: Sunday, 6 February 2022

Scripture: Colossians 1:1-14

Sermon: The Difference that Jesus Makes

Preacher: Justin Ang

Passage

Colossians 1:1-14 (ESV)

Col. 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,

Col. 1:2 To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

Col. 1:3 We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, 4 since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, 5 because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, 6 which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth, 7 just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf 8 and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

Col. 1:9 And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; 11 being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in

the inheritance of the saints in light. 13 He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Transcript

Introduction

There's this story of a Christian man and his wife who would run a seasonal tax business each year. The man tells the story of coming into work one morning, and being absent minded, he decided to try delete an old program from his computer. And instead of deleting the old program from his computer, he accidentally deleted all the share files. Oh no! When he realised, he saw that the first appointment he had was at 11:30 in the morning. A couple of hours before he had to help this lady with her tax return.

So he goes home to get the backup disks. And then comes into the office, he walks by the lady who has arrived for her 11:30am appointment. He works on recovering the files that he needs, and by the time he gets to see the woman for her appointment, it was 3pm. 3 and a half hours. I wonder, how would you react if you had to wait for that long for an appointment?

I remember, when Rachel had to be admitted into emergency. And we waited almost 12 hours before we got to see the surgeon. I was not a happy Chappy. But the lady in the story, happy as Larry. The author asks the woman after finishing the appointment, he's depressed and frustrated, because this woman didn't have a single complaint or question, and he asks "Does Jesus make a difference to your life?" The woman replied, "Jesus is everything to me. I talk to him all the time."

Wow, I wonder whether any of us are like that, after waiting ages for an appointment. Or sitting in traffic. Or through terrible adversity. I wonder whether any of us could say, "Jesus is everything to me."

But that's the question isn't it? What the man asked this woman, Does Jesus make a difference to your life? How much of a difference is your life because Jesus is in it?

One of the challenges, I believe that we face here at church in today's world is not to be Sunday Christians. Christian who just turn up to church on Sundays. And then during the week, we are no different to everyone else. They believe that anymore than Sunday means that we are 'religious.' Just give me a spoonful of Jesus, and no more. Just give me Jesus so I can get to heaven, but don't give me anymore. Thank you very much! So often we dumb down following Jesus to going to church, praying and reading the bible.

The problem with that is when we get to know Jesus, when we listen to what he says. Following Jesus isn't just for Sundays. That's not the deal, when we follow him. It's 24/7. It's all in with Jesus. The answer to the question, Does Jesus make a difference to your life should be, "yes, completely. And that's what we'll see as we read through Colossians. Jesus makes all the difference when we truly understand who he is."

And this is why we'll be going through Colossians right up to Easter this year. We'll get to know the people at Colossae a little bit. We'll get to know a little more about Paul the Apostle as we look at this book together. But I want to talk very briefly about a couple of ways that Jesus makes a difference to our lives. Here, we've heard Paul talk to the Colossians, and it's really a prayer, these 14 verses. But we're going to see that Jesus makes a big difference to their lives, and our lives.

He makes a change in our identity, he makes a change in our perspective on life, and he makes a change in our purpose.

Let's look at his prayer.

The Change in Our Identity

Jesus makes a change to our identity. Have a look at what Paul says,

Col. 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,

Col. 1:2 To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

Do you know how Paul addresses the people in Colossae? He calls them saints and faithful brothers in the ESV. In some versions, it might say the Holy and faithful

brothers. What we should notice is that saints and faithful brothers are not two separate types of people, like you've got holy people, and just faithful people on the other hand. They are two different ways of describing the same group of people. It's like if I said, Rachel is kind and loving. Two ways to describe Rachel.

Here Paul is addressing the Christians at Colossae as both holy and faithful. And this is something that is really big, it's not something that we should take lightly when we hear it. Because the way that Paul is addressing the church in Colossae, is the way that we should see ourselves. Saints and faithful brothers and sisters in Christ at Caringbah.

Maybe you find that a little weird. Maybe because you grew up in a tradition, where for someone to be called a saint, they had to perform a couple of verified miracles. This is where we need to be really careful, because sometimes, tradition can get in the way of God's truth. The truth is that if you put your trust in Christ, then in God's eyes, you are a saint. You are a holy one. It's like God sees you in the same way that he sees his son.

How does he see his son? What happens when Jesus is in the river Jordan being baptised by John the Baptist? We're told the spirit of God descends from heaven, like a dove, and a voice comes from heaven, saying you are my son with you I am well pleased. When God sees you, he is well pleased. Do you find that hard to believe?

As followers of Christ, it's really important to understand our identity. Paul later on tells us how important our identity is.

12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. 13 He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Colossians 1:12-14 (ESV)

Being a saint is not something that you earn. You are a saint because God himself has qualified you. It's not because you have qualified yourself, it is not because you have done something you to have earned it. It is because he has delivered you. He is the one who has redeemed you.

Let's talk about one implication of this. If we are holy in the sight of God, then it means that we need to be different from the people around us. It means that we are distinct. I wonder whether we live out our identity?

I want to try give you an example of the identity that we have, and the struggle that we might have. We're coming around to a federal election, and whichever party wins, the party leader becomes prime minister. And when they become prime minister, they take an oath, or an affirmation. It goes something like this,

I, Justin Ang, do swear that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Victoria, Her heirs and successors according to law. So Help Me God!

But I can imagine, that whoever has become prime minister takes time to remember that their identity is now prime minister. Yes, they might be a spouse, a parent, a grandparent. But when they take that oath, it means they take on the identity of prime minister. In the same way, we need to remember who we are before God, that we are holy, we are saints before him. Not because of anything that we have done to earn it, but because of God's grace in calling us into his kingdom and his family.

The Change in Our Perspective

But wait, there's more. Paul in his prayer here gives thanks for the Colossians and their changed perspective. Jesus changes our perspective. Have a look at the way that they see life,

Col. 1:3 We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, 4 since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, 5 because of the hope laid up for you in heaven.

Colossians 1:3-5a (ESV)

Paul here talks about three big things, faith, hope and love. But there's an interesting relationship. Maybe we know faith hope and love from another passage, 1 Corinthians 13? The greatest is love.

But here in Colossians, do you see the relationship between faith, hope and love? We're told that the Colossians have faith in Jesus. They also have a love for other

Christians. And here, there's a key word, because. Because of the hope laid up for you in heaven.

Faith in God, love for others, which find their foundation in hope. The foundation for their faith and love is their hope. In other words, because the Colossians have a future hope in heaven they have a faith in Jesus and a love for others.

I find that in our churches today, we don't really talk about hope. I think it's because we are too comfortable. Being in Australia we're far away from wars, conflicts. In fact, there's a joke I hear about the shire. The desire or hope for people is to grow up, get married, find a job, live work and then die in the shire. And the aim is to move West from Menai to East into Cronulla. You know you've arrived when you are living in Cronulla. I talk to immigrants, and you know what's interesting? They think that Australia is the promised land.

Who needs hope when you've arrived in the promised land? That's the danger we have in Australia. We think that we've arrived. Our hope isn't in Australia, it's found in heaven.

C.S. Lewis says, "Aim at heaven and you will get earth thrown in. Aim at earth and you get neither." That's so true. We don't hope for heaven. We hope for the next Apple or Android product. We hope for that next holiday. We hope to get married. Don't get me wrong, those are good things, but do we ultimately hope for heaven?

In some ways, the last two years have reminded us that life on this side of heaven is imperfect, it's frustrating, it's filled with despair. The truth is, there is an amazing inheritance waiting for us in heaven as Paul notes. I don't know about you, but I struggle with the invisible because I can't see it. The here and now, is more material, more concrete, than heaven, the future. So maybe you're wondering, how do we strengthen our hope? How do we build our hope?

I want to show you one way, have a look at the passage,

Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, 6 which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth, 7 just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf 8 and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

Colossians 1:5b-8 (ESV)

I want to point out something that's really important for Paul. And it's the importance of our mind. God has given us each a mind to use. And we can choose to focus our minds on different things. What we dwell upon is so important. And the Scriptures talk about the importance of what we turn our minds to. For example, Psalm 1, blessed is the man who meditates day and night on the law of the LORD. Here Paul says it was important that the Colossians heard the gospel and understood the grace of God in truth. They were to direct their minds to God's truth.

How many of us know Scripture by heart? Knowing Scripture by heart is a great way to let the grace of God in truth to bear down on your heart. To let God's truth change us. To allow us to remember the hope we have. We need to remind ourselves that our citizenship is in heaven, and we await our saviour, we hope for Jesus Christ who will transform our body to become like his glorious body.

What would happen if we really believed Jesus when he said that we were not to store up treasures on earth, but rather treasures in heaven. That our hope wasn't placed in here and now, but it was placed in heaven, where we have an inheritance secure for us? Perhaps, we would place less emphasis on our money, we would place less emphasis on our careers, we would find ourselves more urgently praying for our friends and family who don't know Christ.

Jesus changes our identity, he changes our perspective.

The Change in Our Purpose

Let's talk about the change in our purpose.

Col. 1:9 And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; 11 being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

Colossians 1:9-12 (ESV)

When we encounter Jesus, it will transform our lives. Our purpose changes from, "How can I enjoy myself as much as I can before I die?" Or "How can I make as much money before I die?" To "How can I live to please the LORD?" It means that it's not just about attending Sundays. It's every day, every week, every month, every year for the rest of your life, the question is, "How can I give glory to God in every single area of my life?"

How can I live for Jesus in my work life?

How can I live for Jesus in my retirement?

How can I live for Jesus in my family life?

How can I live for Jesus when I'm around my friends?

How can I live for Jesus with the way I use my money?

How can I live for Jesus with the way that I speak to others?

That's the sort of question we begin to ask. When we walk with Jesus, he changes our whole purpose.

The Summer Olympics were on last year. Rachel and I watched the sport climbing at the Summer Olympics, and one of my favourite climbers, Adam Ondra didn't get gold. And I kept saying to my friends, he's going to get gold, he's going to get gold. But he didn't. It was a very weird scoring system. But I was watching his YouTube channel recently and he's now training for the Paris Olympics. He has like three training sessions a day. It consumes his time, his money, his focus.

Being a Christian is like that. It should consume our time, our money, our focus. It becomes about how can I give Jesus the glory in all areas of my life.

But I want to point out one last thing about change. Do you notice that as we've been looking at this passage, it's actually a prayer of Paul's for the Colossians church? That says a lot. We need God's grace in order to change because honestly, change is hard. We need God's grace in order to grow in knowledge. We need God's grace in order to bear fruit in good work. We need God's grace and his strength.

With that in mind, let's pray.