

ROMANCING THE SAINTS AT COLOSSAE

Studies in the Book of Colossians

*“If Ephesians can be labeled the epistle portraying the ‘church of Christ,’
then Colossians must surely be labeled ‘the Christ of the church’”
unknown*

Text

Colossians 1:1-2

Topic

Paul challenges the church at Colossae to rediscover some basic truths about *who* they are and *whose* they are as believers in Jesus Christ

Title

“Identity Neglect”

Introduction

In the movie *The Lion King*, Simba, heir to the throne of his father King Mufasa, flees from the Pridelands when his father is murdered by Scar, Mufasa’s brother and Simba’s uncle.

Deep in the safety of the jungle Simba joins up with two characters, Timon and Pumba, whose philosophy of life is *Hakuna Matata* - "no worries." Simba buys into this for many years enjoying a life not only with no worries but also no responsibilities.

Meanwhile under the dictatorship of Scar the Pridelands fall into ruin, famine and despair.

One day Rafiki the wise baboon tracks Simba down and offers to lead him to a place where he will meet his dead father. Intrigued, the young lion follows Rafiki through the twisted roots of ancient trees until he reaches a clearing. There, in the clear night sky, Simba remembers his own roots. He

has a moving vision of his father, who laments, "You have forgotten who you are, and therefore, you have forgotten me."

Simba rediscovers who he is: He is Mufasa's boy, the son of the king.

Christians sometimes forget who they are. Or at least we act as if we have forgotten. We lose our joy; we're not at peace; we try to live by rules rather than empowered by grace.

The mostly Gentile believers in the first century city of Colossae were forgetting who they were and, for that matter, *whose* they were. A number of false teachings were challenging the supremacy of Jesus Christ in their lives and weakening their walks with the Lord. They needed to rediscover they were "in Christ" Who is preeminent and supreme over all creation and is the head of the church.

So do we from time to time. I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Rediscover Who You Are, & #2 Rediscover Whose You Are.

#1 Rediscover Who You Are

(v1-2a)

Identity theft is a reality in today's world. If you're not vigilant you'll find yourself victimized.

There is a kind of spiritual identity theft that assaults Christians. False teachings about Jesus Christ undermine your identity as a believer and pretty soon you are struggling when you should be overcoming.

The believers in Colossae were being victimized. In chapter two the apostle Paul will urge them "let no one judge you" (v16) and "let no one cheat you of your reward" (v18).

We'll discuss the particulars of the heresies when we get to chapter two. But whether it is the first or the twenty-first century, no matter the particulars, every false teaching takes away from the supremacy of Jesus Christ and the simplicity of your relationship with Him.

Maybe this will make sense. False teachings always accuse you of missing something in your walk.

- The health and wealth heresy that has been prevalent for many years accuses you of missing out on perfect health and unlimited blessing because you haven't got the faith.
- The emergent church movement that is afoot today accuses you of being too narrow in your understanding of God if you trust the Bible as the inspired, inerrant, authoritative Word of God to the exclusion of other paths to spiritual awareness.

The only thing we are ever missing is our own identity as believers! This opening greeting from Paul to the Colossians contains everything you need to rediscover who you are and eliminate the nagging doubts that you are incomplete.

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

One of the things I like about e-mail is you see immediately in your in-box who the message is from. In their case the Colossians would hear immediately that this letter was from "Paul."

Paul had never been to Colossae but he had a lot to do with their being saved. While in Ephesus for three years we're told in the Book of Acts that the Gospel Paul was preaching spread to all of Asia (19:10). It's believed by scholars that one of Paul's converts, either Tychicus or Epaphras (Ephaproditus) took the good news about salvation by grace through faith in Christ to Colossae and thus the church was founded. Paul was like their spiritual grandfather.

I always like to hear why and how a church was founded. A church ought to be the supernatural working of the Lord. Most are. Occasionally something gets started from a split or a disagreement and that, to me, is a sad foundation to build upon. For the most part churches have a story to tell in their founding of the wonderful love of God for His people.

Paul summarizes his entire spiritual career when he says he is "an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God." The "apostles" were the guys Jesus tapped to establish the foundation of His church on the earth in the first

century. They were men who had seen the risen Christ and had been directly commissioned by Him. Their ministries were authenticated by miracles, signs, and wonders following their preaching of the Word.

We can make too much or too little of credentials in the church. The credentials we look for here are first and foremost a servant's heart. Then faithfulness. Then gifting by God. Prove yourself a faithful servant in small things first and then God will raise you up.

Paul was an apostle "of Christ Jesus by the will of God." Paul, who went by his Jewish name Saul at the time, was on his way to Damascus to arrest and otherwise assault Christians. Jesus appeared to him, knocked him down and blinded him. Saul was saved in that amazing encounter. Led by the hand into the city, he was prayed for by Ananias and received his sight as well as the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

Paul knew exactly who he was. He was Jesus Christ's apostle chosen to take the Gospel to the Jew first and then the Gentiles. No identity crisis, no identity theft, was troubling him.

We can and should be confident as we serve the Lord. Not arrogant, but confident. I mean, are we only 99% sure that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life? There's a lot of wiggle room in 1% of uncertainty!

Paul mentioned "Timothy, our brother." He was another convert of Paul's but one that also often traveled with him. His missionary career started when Paul asked him, as an adult, to undergo the pain of physical circumcision. Paul wanted to take Timothy with him to evangelize but since Timothy was part Jewish the Jews would be offended if he wasn't circumcised.

What an amazing support Timothy was to Paul throughout his ministry! It's a great thing to be a support to the ministry. Every small thing contributes to the larger work.

Paul calls Timothy "our brother." It is the beginning of his exhortation that they rediscover who they were. All of them - Paul, Timothy, the Colossians - were "brothers" in the Lord. The word means *from the same womb*. They were all born of the Spirit of God when they received Jesus Christ.

You were born into the world, but then you were born again, born spiritually. Something amazing happened and you were transferred from death to life.

Who are you in this new birth? Who you are, your identity, is in verse two:

Colossians 1:2 To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are in Colosse...

You are a “saint.” Think of the word “saint” as a synonym for the word “Christian.” Certain churches and certain beliefs have hijacked the word to apply to only super-spiritual folk. Too bad - **because that is not true at all!**

Every believer in Jesus Christ, from the moment of his or her spiritual birth, is a saint. It comes from a word that means “sanctify.” You are called by God through the Gospel and you call upon the name of Jesus to save you and you are thus sanctified. It means you have an acceptable spiritual position before God. It has nothing to do with achieving a level of holiness.

Yes, you need to grow and mature in your Christian walk. But here we are talking about your *standing*, not your *state*. Your standing:

- Is the result of the work of Jesus on the Cross.
- Is perfect; it cannot improve or get any better.
- Is the same as every other believer.
- Is totally based upon the grace of God.

Are you seeing how important this is when you are faced with false teaching? Yes, you can and should grow toward maturity as a believer. But your standing is never in any doubt. You therefore has just as much access to God as every other believer. You don't need superior intellect or ability. You don't need any secret words or methods. You stand in a perfect relationship to God through Jesus.

Next Paul says “and faithful brethren.” He isn't talking about two separate groups in their church. They are first and foremost “saints,” and they are also “faithful brethren.”

We already talked about Timothy being their “brother,” so what is being added here?

Since Paul is talking about their identity, their standing, I don't think he means to suddenly suggest they must 'do' something. He's talking about who they are, not what they do. What to do comes later in the book, in chapters three and four. Chapters one and two are doctrinal in nature.

Well, he says they are "faithful." It's an interesting word. One of its possible meanings, according to Thayer's Greek Definitions, is *one who trusts in God's promises*. The Greek scholar goes on to refine his statement by saying,

... one who has been convinced that Jesus has been raised from the dead [and] has become convinced that Jesus is the Messiah and author of salvation.

The sense I get from this is that since you already are convinced Jesus rose from the dead and are saved, you easily can believe every other promise God has made you. It is a reminder that your life that began by grace through faith continues by grace through faith. There aren't rules, rites, rituals, or regulations that you must discover then maintain in order to be truly spiritual.

You're not even left to yourself to develop this kind of faithfulness over time. In the Book of Romans Paul says,

Romans 8:11 But if [since] the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

The Holy Spirit indwells you. You can, right now, believe any and every promise in God's Word.

You are a "saint," one of the "faithful brethren," **and** you are "in Christ." Being "in Christ" means that what is true of Jesus is now true of you also.

Jesus died; He was buried; He rose from the dead. Because you are "in Christ," you also died, were buried, and rose from the dead.

These themes take three chapters - Romans six, seven, and eight - to fully develop! But they can be immediately understood to encourage you about who you are. Since you are "in Christ," you are a new creation. You have

salvation, acceptance, redemption, forgiveness of sin, an inheritance in Heaven, and every other thing promised to you by God and revealed in His Word.

Finally, they were physically “in Colossae.” Their identity as believers would be played-out on the streets and in the homes and marketplaces of that city in Asia Minor, or what we now call Turkey.

Colossae was a city in decline. The main road had been re-routed to go through Laodicea. They were still noted for producing a black wool made from the chalk deposits in the area.

Every city, every town, has its own personality and problems. It has its own crises and challenges. Naming their physical location last reminded them that wherever they were, **who** they were was sufficient for them.

Hanford, Lemoore, Armona, Laton, Riverdale... They’re all challenging in different ways to your walk. Your neighborhood, your school, your workplace are all unique in the crises and challenges. But where you are is of no real consequence to who you are. You are a saint, one of the faithful brethren in Christ.

In fact, you should have the attitude that God has sovereignly placed you in your exact location in order to grow you and for you to glow with Him in that dark place. God didn’t put you where you are to beat you down but to build you up!

As you rediscover who you are, you simultaneously...

#2 Rediscover Whose You Are

(v2b)

The last few words of verse two, which contain Paul’s usual greeting, are what belong to you because you belong to God.

Colossians 1:2 ... Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

You are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. God justifies the believing sinner and declares him righteous on the basis of Jesus Christ's sacrifice as our substitute on the Cross.

Paul is not talking about saving grace in this verse but about sustaining grace. By that we mean you have sufficient grace every day for every situation you face.

You also have "peace." The Bible uses the word in two ways:

1. When saved, you have peace with God, or before God.
2. As a saved person, you can experience the peace of God for daily protection from the hostile pressures upon your mind and heart.

Leon Morris says, peace is "not simply the absence of strife, but the presence of positive blessings." Later in this letter Paul will tell them "let the peace of God rule in your hearts" (3:15). We'll see that word "rule" means *to govern* or *to arbitrate*. In every situation you can experience the peace of God as you let it govern your thinking and feelings.

Arbitration occurs when you allow a third party to settle your dispute. When you are tempted to worry, doubt, fret, be frustrated, you can instead experience God's peace by looking to Him as your arbitrator. He'll always tell you to trust and obey.

Whose are you? "God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." The Holy Spirit is intended as well because elsewhere in the Bible you read that grace and peace are administered to you through His indwelling.

You are God's. Can anything separate you from His love? Paul didn't think so:

Romans 8:31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

Romans 8:32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?

Romans 8:33 Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.

Romans 8:34 Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.

Romans 8:35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

Romans 8:36 As it is written: "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE KILLED ALL DAY LONG; WE ARE ACCOUNTED AS SHEEP FOR THE SLAUGHTER."

Romans 8:37 Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

Romans 8:38 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come,

Romans 8:39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Truth is, there are a lot more pressures against you then you even realized! When life at home, at school, at work, and everywhere else seems a crisis and a challenge, don't forget things like "tribulation... distress... persecution... famine... nakedness... peril... sword... death... life... angels... principalities... powers... things present... things to come... height... depth... nor any other created thing."

"What shall we say?" *Hakuna matata!* But in a biblical sense. Not by forgetting who and whose you are - but by rediscovering them.