

## Change Has Come

Series: Jesus ...Changes Everything (Colossians)

Brad Bailey – April 16, 2023

Intro

I want to begin by asking each of us to personally consider a question.

**Who is your god? What is your god?**

While I know that we gather here around the living God revealed in the Scriptures... and in His presence... it is the living God who wants us to realize that...

**Our “god” is whoever or whatever has the greatest authority over our lives.**

The answer is reflected in what governs and guides us....

And **God knows, quite literally, that there is a lot of competition.**

God knows that there are “**powers and principalities**” ... that **humankind has allowed** to rule life as we know it.

**And this is why Jesus came announcing that the Kingdom of God was at hand.** A kingdom is a **sphere of authority**...and it is **the sphere of God which Christ was bringing back into our world.**

**Last week we commemorated the events** which declared something no one had grasped. God defeated death and opened up new life.

And this changes everything. And now ...like those who were the first to discover the risen Christ... they know that change has come...but they wonder how.

That is what we engage as we begin a **new series today... allowing God to speak to us from the Biblical Book of Colossians.**

**A quick background to what this Biblical Book represents...**

After the resurrection of Christ... the scope of what was at hand filled those first lives... they couldn't be contained...and hundreds were accepting the news...and claiming him as their Lord.

**And then comes a remarkable conversion...that of a religious leader named “Saul, who was also called Paul.” [1]**

Paul was the one **God chose to send into the wider world**... particularly the Roman ruled world that had come to rule over a vast portion of the known world. Rome had **extended it's reign into Asia**... it what is now **modern day Turkey**...and the major city of **Ephesus was now it's major center.**

Paul had **gone to Ephesus**...where he had mentored a man named Epaphras (Ep-af-RAS)...who had **gone to Colossae** and shared about Christ...and from which this local **gathering of lives had begun. [2]**

So Paul had never directly met those in Colossae... but as something of the spiritual father in the Gospel message ... he takes this opportunity to write to them.

It is believed to have been written in **about 60 AD**... which is about **30 years after the death and resurrection of Christ**... and the **news has been spreading** about Christ...and **more are claiming him as their Lord**.

In fact, most believe that Paul is now in Rome itself...and in prison... and he took this opportunity to speak directly by way of this letter.

Colossians 1:1-2

This letter is from **Paul**, chosen by the will of God to be an **apostle of Christ Jesus**, and from our brother **Timothy**. <sup>2</sup>We are writing to God's holy people in the city of Colosse, who are faithful brothers and sisters in Christ.

May God our Father give you grace and peace.

With these words... Paul introduces himself... and his apprentice Timothy

**Paul is clear on what he represents... 'an apostle of Christ Jesus.'**

Paul has been called to go spread the news of the risen Christ. [2b]

He is **not the apostle of a new religion**...but of **that which fulfilled** what no religion can settle.

He is an **apostle of Christ**...the one **who proved more powerful** than all the false powers of this world... **more than hate and violence** and more than the **self righteous** can ever provide.

**Greets them with a blessing of grace and peace.** (vs.2 - 'May God our Father give you grace and peace.')

These are precisely **what neither Rome** nor the **religious establishment had brought** to the lives they ruled.

**Grace - freedom that is bestowed from beyond ourselves**

**Peace – true restoration of relationship... not simply personal inner feelings but true peace between all (shalom)**

We do well to stop...and realize these are what God has to bless us with...and to receive these... grace...and peace. And to realize that these are what we are to bear y<sup>p</sup> share with others.

He continues ....affirming all that he has heard about them.

Colossians 1:3-8

<sup>3</sup>We always pray for you, and we give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup>For **we have heard of your faith** in Christ Jesus and **your love for all** of God's people, <sup>5</sup>which come from **your confident hope** of what God has reserved for you in heaven. You have had this expectation ever since you first heard the truth of the Good News.

<sup>6</sup>This same Good News that came to you is **going out all over the world**. It is **bearing fruit everywhere by changing lives**, just as it **changed your lives** from the day you first heard and understood the truth about God's wonderful grace.

Paul is affirming what has begin in them... faith, hope, and love... and in verse 6...it has "**changed your lives** from the day you first heard and understood the truth about God's wonderful grace.it is changing lives."

It is this change which Paul affirms... and is now serving with this letter.

**When Christ becomes the Lord of our lives... everything changes.** (And Paul will expound upon this to them...and to us...as we continue in this series.)

And he explains that "This same Good News that came to you is **going out all over the world**. It is **bearing fruit everywhere by changing lives.**"

**This change is for all people... from every culture. It is the hope that can liberate every soul.**

It's spread of changing lives was just beginning. For the **Roman Empire would fall...** and **countless others rise and fall...** while **this movement changed lives now on every continent and every country.**

### **Colossians 1:7-8**

<sup>7</sup> You learned about the Good News from **Epaphras**, our beloved co-worker. He is Christ's faithful servant, and he is helping us on your behalf. <sup>8</sup> He has told us about the love for others that the Holy Spirit has given you.

And to these lives... it all began with one person sharing hope with another. Epaphras

A remarkable person? Probably not. But the **RIGHT** person at the **RIGHT** time. That is what each of us can be as we help others know about the liberating news.

And then he speaks of **what is ultimately at hand... jumping to verses 13-16**

### **Colossians 1:13-16**

<sup>13</sup> For he has **rescued us from the kingdom of darkness** and **transferred us into the Kingdom of his dear Son**, <sup>14</sup> who **purchased our freedom** and forgave our sins.

<sup>15</sup> Christ is the visible image of the invisible God.

He existed before anything was created and is **supreme over all creation**,

<sup>16</sup> for through him God created everything  
in the heavenly realms and on earth.

### **What brings change?**

It is the **power of being rescued from a kingdom of darkness**. This world is ruled in darkness. Darkness represents **that which is outside of God**...outside of the source of everlasting life and love.

In such darkness...**we cannot see who we really are**... and we live in a world in which **every vain claim to power and authority will rule over us**.

But through the death and resurrection of Christ... **God has rescued us**.

**When Jesus gave his life** as a sacrifice... he **bore the consequence** of our separation from God...and **acceptance of his sacrifice for us** becomes a means by which we can be reconciled to God. **And when he rose from death**... he **declared that God still rules over created life**.

Jesus brought nothing less than **that which offers liberation**... a **release to all who have been held captive** by the powers that rule this world... with a **call to now "enter"...**to become a part of... the eternal Kingdom under God.

The Kingdom of God... the rule of God...was not simply coming in judgment to destroy any particular earthly rule... but rather declaring the ultimate rule of God over all that seeks to rule over created life...and calling those who were created as unique partners with God... to be reunited in the eternal Kingdom of God.

Now God has **"transferred us into the Kingdom of his dear Son."**

He is **"supreme over all creation"** ... representing the rightful rule of God.

There has been a transition of authority in their lives.

**They live amidst the kingdom of this world... but are now members of another kingdom.  
It is a subversive movement.**

**Subversion:** the overthrow of a current ruling system by people working from within; transforming the established order and its structures of power, authority, hierarchy, and social norms, with allegiance to a new order.

**Christianity is not simply a “religion” ...it is a subversive change in authority.**

**1. Christ brings a subversive change in authority.**

The Scriptures are a living testimony... a living word that the Creator of all sees this as a condition by which we have given ourselves to what now enslaves us. This world is ruled by powers and forces... empires and false systems of thought.

**The whole ministry of Jesus was a threat to the powers that be.** Who does Jesus seem to threaten most?

**Religious leaders... and Roman ruling leaders** (beginning with King Herod.)

**What is dangerous** to the powers that have **gained control...** is when **someone defies and renounces them.** That is what Jesus did. [3]

**That is what Paul now represents** in following Jesus and teaching others.

**Paul becomes subversive** as he declares that **neither the Roman empire...nor the religious leaders...are the true rulers of life.**

And here is something not to miss... unlike any others...

**Paul was a member of both.**

Paul was a **Citizen of Rome [4].**

**He was a Jewish Roman citizen...born in the city of Tarsus... and he understood the Empire well.  
It offered peace at a price.**

The Roman Empire was a sophisticated pagan system... with various gods being worshipped... but which also came to view the **glory of the state** and the **emperor as having a divine status.**

In the Roman Empire... these Christians began as a strange group... they didn't have any interest in overthrowing the actual empire...in fact they were good citizens... but many pagans feared that the gods would become angry and punish the Roman people since Christians refused to participate in the old religious rituals... and the claim that Jesus was Lord... was easily used against them.

**And it's generally believed that he wrote this letter during one of his times under house arrest in Rome.**

**> A subversive voice of liberation**

Paul was also **Religious leader**

**> He speaking to the reality of religious control... that which seeks to rule over others based on a sense of personal superiority... based on rules and regulations... and a false sense of who was blessed.**

To the religious leaders... Paul was denouncing the law with his message of grace...and now he was going out to include Gentiles. In other words...he threatened everything that they could identify as being special and superior for.

It's really important to note...this was **not a Jewish issue...it's a religious issue.**

God had called a people to himself... by his mercy...but the faith had become the source of cultural pride and outward righteousness... because that is our human nature.

This religious nature that arises within Christian culture as well.

### > **A subversive voice of liberation**

And such subversive change involves understanding that we are **distinct but not disconnected** from the world and lives around us. As Jesus said..."we are to be in this world...but not of it."

**Jesus said..."The kingdom of heaven is like what happens when a woman mixes a little yeast into three big batches of flour. Finally, all the dough rises." – Matthew 13:33**

The change we bear is **not** that of **anarchy**... in which we simply denounce all order in the world.

- **God had created human governance to contain evil.**
- **Jesus said...give to Caesar what is Caesars...but to God what is God's.**
- **Paul didn't see human governance as the enemy itself.**

And Paul actually identifies his Roman citizenship because it demanded forms of justice that were being denied.

**But equally**...such **change cannot be** met by **mere accommodation.**

We are **not simply the chaplains** of the culture... who provide some type of additional religious dimension to the way things are.

Whenever the church has identified with the powers of this world... particularly **when the church** has become **bound with the power** of governing control... it has **lost it's subversive identity.**

Jesus called us out to be different... definitively different.

Jesus said we **must not lose our distinction**... the **saltiness of being salt.**

When Jesus said things like, many who are first will be last, and the last first, the Pharisees and Sadducees certainly understood this as undermining their power structure.

And when those who accepted Christ to be their Lord... actually began to live out life without distinctions between classes of people... and with care for the least... they became dangerous to the Roman Empire and religious leaders alike.

As Jesus said... it not a matter of what we say... apart from what we do.

The change that has begun... begins with allowing Christ to be our Lord... and choosing to be subject to his kingdom.

Living in **a subversive way is not easy.** We are **surrounded by this dimension** constantly **telling us** what we **should trust**... what we **need to serve.**

Such a **subversive movement requires** that **staying connected** to the true authority. And that is what Paul understands for these lives... and that is what he grasps about prayer.

Colossians 1:3-5, 9,11

<sup>3</sup>We **always pray for you**, and we give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup>For we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and your love for all of God's people, <sup>5</sup>which come from your confident hope of **what God has reserved for you in heaven**.

...<sup>9</sup>So we have **not stopped praying for you** since we first heard about you.

...<sup>11</sup>**We also pray** that you will be strengthened with all his glorious power so you will have all the endurance and patience you need. May you be filled with joy, <sup>12</sup>always thanking the Father. He has enabled you to share in the inheritance that belongs to his people, who live in the light.

He describes their hope as that which is ***“reserved for them in heaven.”***

It is not simply about the future... but **what already exists in eternity**. Eternal life already exists...it's a **parallel dimension**.

> **And prayer is that connection**. When I pray...I am connecting to the way things ultimately are. So Paul says he is praying for them to have eternal knowledge... and understanding and strength.

## **2. Christ brings a change connected to heaven... by prayer.**

The connection to our true kingdom is vital.

Like those movies where an agent is sent undercover... and they begin to lose communication... and in due time... they become too embossed ...and lose their sense of true identity.

Interesting...but **Paul emphasized his prayers** for these communities **most when in prison**... it suggests that prayer can be served by our limits... by the space that we find in our lack of power and control. It could be the commute... or any time of waiting. It will usually mean choosing to have some time disconnecting from the connections to the message this world has... to connect with the reality of the eternal reign of God's Kingdom.

And one more point that is made about the change that has begin...

**Colossians 1:10**

<sup>10</sup>**Then the way you live will always honor and please the Lord, and your lives will produce every kind of good fruit.**

**This is describing an inner change in our heart's desire. The new king has our allegiance. [5]**

**Romans 6:22 (GNT)**

**But now you have been set free from sin and are the slaves of God. Your gain is a life fully dedicated to him, and the result is eternal life.**

Like the **scenes when a knight vows** their honor to the king... you have my sword...my life... my loyalty.

From such an inner allegiance.... <sup>10</sup>Then the way you live will **always** honor and please the Lord, and your lives will produce **every kind of good fruit**.

### 3. Christ brings a pervasive change – a new allegiance.

Not merely some religious sphere.

It is that which pervades every aspect of our lives.

#### **Closing:**

One thing that has been said... is that 'living in God's will is the safest place to be.' As Paul sits in prison... he may agree as long as we qualify safe. It may be the most dangerous place to live. That is why he knows what to pray for... power and strength within.

That is still the choice before humankind. It is a choice of kingdoms... a choice in whose sovereignty we come under.

**The reality is that we are all under a king... The choice is not 'if' but 'who'.... and it is the most defining and definitive choice that lies within each of us.**

**The greatest deception we live under... may be that of thinking that we are merely free people who don't serve anyone... we may even believe that if we choose to acknowledge any god... they are lucky to have us join their religion.**

**If we could see clearly... we are at best more like prisoners of war... who willingly chose our captor.**

**Depicted well in the Chronicles of Narnia – Edmund... warned of the white witch... but so drawn by her sweets... only later to realize what he's done. Now enslaved to her. But then comes the announcement... Aslan the true king is returning to the land... he's on the move.**

**When the king returns** it is the greatest public announcement the world has ever known.

**It is an opportunity to join up in allegiance.**

It is an allegiance to the one true king and God.... **It's this allegiance that calls each of us out of our independence and isolation.**

**I want to conclude by simply asking us again: Who is your god / God?**

**Whose kingdom does your life belong to? Whose will is at the center of your life?**

**The answer to that question cannot be made by anyone else... it lies within your choice.**

#### **Resources:**

Many have expounded on the "subversive" nature of the Gospel and allegiance to Christ.

Trevin Wax - [\*Holy Subversion: Allegiance to Christ in an Age of Rivals\*](#) (Crossway, 2010). It is Ed Stetzer - [\*Subversive Kingdom: Living as Agents of Gospel Transformation\*](#) (B&H, 2012)

Transcendent and Subversive by Brian Zahnd online thoughts [here](#)

#### **Notes:**

1. Acts 13:9 describes the apostle as “Saul, who was also called Paul.” From that verse on, Saul is always referred to in Scripture as “Paul.” Paul was a Jew, born in the Roman city of Tarsus. He was proud of his Jewish heritage, as he describes in Philippians 3:5: “Circumcised on the eighth day, of the race of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrew parentage, in observance of the law a Pharisee.” So zealous and devout was he that persecuting Christians was the natural way for him to show his devotion. He chose to use his Hebrew name, Saul, until sometime after he began to believe in and preach Christ. After that time, as “the apostle to the Gentiles” (Romans 11:13), he used his Roman name, Paul. It would make sense for Paul to use his Roman name as he traveled farther and farther into the Gentile world.

2. “Paul never visited Colosse so far as is known. The church had never seen his face and the book of Acts does not record a mission to the area. In Acts 19, we read of Paul coming to Ephesus and teaching for two years. The gospel was being preached to Jews and Gentiles from the entire region. Many people were coming to faith in Jesus Christ and turning from their sins. One of the Gentiles who received Christ during this time was named Ep-ap-RAS (meaning “lovely” being based on the name of the Greek goddess “Aphrodite”). After being discipled by Paul and raised up in the ministry, he went to the town of Colosse and preached the gospel. Many of the Colossians responded to the gospel by receiving Christ. A church in Colosse came about; was formed because Epaphras came and told them about Jesus Christ, and the Colossian Christians were being talked about all over the world for their incredible growth. They say that, he was also the area pastor of Laodicea and Hierapolis. The church met in Philemon’s home, a convert of Paul (Phile.10). The church was primarily Gentile in membership, for they were “aliens from God’s promises.”

3. G.K. Chesterton said: “Christianity, even when watered down, is hot enough to boil all modern society to rags. The mere minimum of the Church would be a deadly ultimatum to the world.” (*Orthodoxy, The Eternal Revolution*)

Drawn from [Brian Zahnd post](#) in which he adds:

Alison Morgan in her brilliant book, *The Wild Gospel*, says:

“We stand, in the church, at the end of a long process of accommodation in which we have unconsciously sought to harmonize the gospel with the assumptions of our culture, a culture which in abandoning the quest for absolute truth has embraced a new set of values — rationalistic, materialistic, technological, and reductionist. The effect has been that we have gradually turned the gospel from something **subversive** and life-changing to something tamed, packaged and institutionalized; from something expressed in words of power to something conveyed, if it is conveyed at all, in words of information.”

The fallen world order of the decadent West is governed by three things:

MONEY, SEX and SELF (to put it positively)

GREED, LUST and PRIDE (to put it negatively)

I am actively at work to undermine these three pillars of Babylon. Not by protest or political means (those are not the methods of a subversive), but by influencing people to transfer their loyalty from Babylon to the New Jerusalem. When a person really does transfer their loyalty to the New Jerusalem, the controlling characteristics of greed, lust and pride lose their hold upon the person and they become a counterculture Kingdom subversive. This is how the world is turned upside down!

And he concludes:

I refuse to be a chaplain to the culture of the fallen world order.

I refuse to be an accomplice in the deception called “the American dream.”

I refuse to be a priest offering peace offerings on the altar of the status quo.

I believe the kingdoms of this world are doomed to destruction.

I believe the kingdoms of this world will be replaced by the Kingdom of Christ.



I believe that Kingdom is already at work, undermining the foundations of Babylon.

4. Paul was born a Roman citizen (Acts 16:37). Paul was a Roman citizen by birth, and Tarsus, where Paul was born, was a free city (see Acts 21:39). The fact of his Roman citizenship is explicitly stated in Scripture and was something that Paul used on occasion to his advantage. The privileges of citizenship explain how Paul escaped flogging in Acts 22:25–27 and was able to appeal for a hearing before Emperor Nero in Acts 25:10–11.

God used Paul's background for His glory, and Paul testified that "God . . . set me apart from my mother's womb and called me by his grace" (Galatians 1:15). With his Jewish upbringing and knowledge of Greek culture and philosophy from his time in Tarsus, Paul was prepared for ministry to both Jews and Gentiles throughout the Roman world. Paul's status as a Roman citizen by birth benefited him greatly as he traveled on his missionary journeys to fulfill Jesus' words that he would be a "chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel" (Acts 9:15). – From Got Questions [here](#)

5. Similarly we read:

Live as free people; do not, however, use your freedom to cover up any evil, but live as God's slaves. - 1 Peter 2:16 (GNT)