

Verses 15–23

This week I'd like to backtrack a little in the reading plan to verse 9. The reason has to do with the context in which the letter to the Colossians arrived and how that context might change the way this passage impacts us.

The city of Colossae at the time of Paul's writing was already a few hundred years old and in decline. The trade routes that once made it influential had been redirected through neighboring cities with the construction of new highways. Colossae found itself in a situation somewhat similar to modern-day Detroit—once prosperous and influential, but now diminished. Even so, it still had a population (possibly 10,000–25,000) with a notable Jewish community.

This raises an important question: since Colossae was no longer the regional center, was not the only established church in the area (Laodicea held that position; see Revelation 3:14–22), and Paul explicitly asked that his letter be shared with the church at Laodicea (Col. 4:16), why did Paul write to the Colossians at all?

One possible reason is this: shortly after the letter to the Colossians was written—and perhaps even before the letter arrived—an enormous earthquake struck, with its epicenter at Colossae. The quake was so powerful it redirected the Lycus River, forced part of it underground, and destroyed much of the city. Already in decline, Colossae never recovered to any significant degree. None of this, however, would have been a surprise to God. In His foreknowledge, He directed Paul to write to a people who were about to endure great distress and disaster.

This context gives weight to Paul's words: *"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"* (v. 9) and *"He is before all things, and in him all things hold together"* (v. 17). These words were not written lightly. They were given to people in the midst of calamity, words to cling to in the darkest of storms.

In our youth ministry today, many students are going through their own crises. For some it's a breakup, for others the loss of friends, or perhaps the collapse of family stability. It is vital for them to see that Scripture—especially Colossians—was not written to people who lived perfect, easy lives. It was written to ordinary believers in the middle of real crises, people who felt lost, confused, and overwhelmed.

It's also important to see that God is not waiting for the most influential, impressive, or popular people before He chooses to work. Our goal is not to be great in the world's eyes but to abide in Christ. The church at Colossae was most probably historically small, likely not the largest congregation in the area. After the earthquake, it virtually disappears from the record. It never had bishops at the great councils of the church, and there's little evidence it continued long

after Paul's letter arrived. And yet—despite all of that—because of their love, devotion, and God's grace, they were chosen by God, spoken to by God, and remembered forever in Scripture.

Likewise, God delights to use those who remain close to Him—not necessarily the most skilled or popular—but those who abide in Christ.

Now, getting back to the text. This portion of Colossians is thick with truth—so rich, so weighty, that there is an abundance of paths your group could go down. No matter the emphasis your group wants to focus on today, there are three main truths I want our students to see, whether by their own observation or with some prompting:

- **Jesus is the Lord of creation.**
- **Jesus is the Head of the church.**
- **Jesus is the Savior who paid a great price for our sins on the cross.**

These are not just theological talking points. They are anchors. If our students are going to stand firm through the storms of life —the heartbreaks, the disappointments, the losses, the confusion—they must have these truths rooted deep in their hearts.

Remind them that God moved Paul to write this letter to a people living on the edge of calamity. Wither they had felt the tremors of the earthquake yet or not they were already feeling the spiritual tremors of false teaching and cultural pressure. And what did God give them in that moment? Not empty platitudes, not shallow encouragements, but the reality of Christ's supremacy: *"He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together."*

So it is with us. If our students are to walk through life's trials—whether that's heartbreak in relationships, family struggles, loneliness, or the crushing weight of sin—they need more than vague spirituality. They need to see and savor the preeminence of Christ in all things. They need to know, not just in their heads but in their hearts, that Jesus rules the universe, leads His church, and has ransomed them at the great cost of His own blood. Only then will they endure. Only then will they find hope that cannot be shaken.