



The Sermon

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Colossians 1:1-2

"Blessings from a Roman Prison"

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TRANSCRIPT

So, we're in Colossians chapter 1; and if you're trying to find the book of Colossians, think of it this way: General Electric Power Company, okay. Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, okay; it's the easiest way to remember it.

Colossians 1, beginning in verse 1, "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father." This is what's known as a salutation, the beginning of an ancient epistle or letter. And we're going to limit ourself to just these first two verses, but there's a lot for us to extract from this text. So, let's go to the Lord in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, You have spread the table, You have prepared the meal, and it's our desire now to plunge into this passage and to absorb it into the very fabric of our soul and life. I pray that You would renew our minds and reignite our hearts and redirect our steps as we look at even just these first two verses today. And, Lord, I pray that for my brothers and sisters in Christ here today that there would be immense spiritual blessing that would accrue to them as a result of our time in Your Word today. So, God, do what only You can do now. Be the teacher, the primary teacher; cause our hearts to soar to the heights of heaven. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.  
[End]

The title of this message is "Blessings from a Roman Prison." In these two verses the apostle Paul begins his letter to the church at Colossae. The year is 60 to 62 AD, and Paul is in Rome. Paul has always wanted to come to Rome. I mean Rome, after all, is the capital city of the entire empire. It's the nerve center of the known world. It's the seat of power. Rome is where Caesar is. Rome is where the senate is. Rome is where the marching armies of Rome are. And Paul knows something, that to reach Rome with the gospel of Jesus Christ will send a ripple effect throughout the entire empire. It was said that all roads lead to Rome. Well, all roads also lead from Rome. And if you could establish a beachhead in Rome for the gospel of Jesus Christ, then there is an excellent chance that there will be an exponential multiplying of that influence throughout the entire empire.

But as Paul finds himself in Rome, he had no idea this is how it was going to work out. Paul had envisioned himself coming to Rome and going into the public areas of Rome into the marketplace, the Agora; maybe even into the Colosseum and preaching the gospel to hundreds or thousands of people that would gather. But Paul now finds himself in Rome under circumstances that he had no idea that it would work out this way. Paul is imprisoned. Paul is under house arrest, but he is in chains 24 hours a day, seven days a week, as the Praetorian guard, the elite soldiers of the Roman Army that served in Caesar's household and guarded Caesar's palace are assigned to Paul, and there's not one moment of one day that he is not in chains in this confined area. He's isolated, Paul is isolated. He's cut off from public ministry, and he is here for two long years. This is like an eternity for Paul to be cooped up like a caged animal in just one little, tiny place. And he's unable to travel, and he's unable to preach, and plant churches, and appoint elders.

Here he is finally in Rome, but as a prisoner of Rome. He's awaiting his trial. He will stand before Caesar, if things continue to go the way that they are headed. And Caesar has the power of life and death, and Paul at this point does not know whether he will live or whether he will die. It is in the midst of this situation that a man arrives from the city of Colossae and finds his way to Paul's house. He's the founding pastor of the church at Colossae, and he's traveled over a thousand miles to seek the counsel of the

apostle Paul, because there's trouble brewing in the church at Colossae. And there's false teachers. There is false teaching that has begun to encroach into the life of the church, and it will come to be known as the Colossian heresy. And what's interesting about virtually every epistle in the New Testament, it is written in order to correct something in the church. And so it is with the letter to the Colossians. And the Colossian heresy, we need to know this background before we even dive into this book, because it's the historical backdrop.

The Colossian heresy was a very complex and multifaceted heresy. It was really four different strands of heresy merged together to form one colossal false religion. And these four strands were really like four polluted streams that flow together to form one polluted river that's flowing now through the church. It combines these four elements, the Colossian heresy. Jewish legalism, to put the church back under the ceremonial Law. And then there is dualistic Gnosticism, which makes a separation of the body, which they said is evil, and the spirit, which they said is good. And there was also Eastern mysticism, as well as, fourth, a strict asceticism of not eating and not drinking and not touching certain things; and it's all rolled in together to form one syncretistic fusing of – now listen to this – dietary laws, angel worship, Sabbath observances, circumcision practiced, mystical experiences, this dualistic Greek philosophy of Gnosticism, revelatory messages from God through dreams and visions and supposed voices, ceremonial rights, and a study of the movement of the stars. There's a lot in that omelet. I mean, there's a lot of just erroneous, false teaching that's all compacted together; but it still uses Christian vocabulary.

In addition to that, they have reduced Christ to be a created being, not the eternal Son of the living God, but a created being who is less than fully God, who is unapproachable by man and can only be accessed through angel mediation to reach Christ, who is lower than God the Father. And all of this is the Colossian heresy. And in these four chapters, as we will go through this book, we will come to understand why Paul says what he does, because he's having to address these various issues.

So, the man who has brought this message to Paul, his name is Epaphras; he's the founding pastor of the church here in Colossae. Paul writes this letter in response and gives it to another man to say, "Take it back to the church at Colossae and have this read publicly. And this book will sort out all of your erroneous beliefs about what true Christianity is, and specifically, who Jesus Christ is."

And so, the central theme of this book, just to boil it down to a couple of words, is the sufficiency of Christ; that if you have Christ, you have everything; that if you have Christ, you don't need all this other stuff that the Colossian heresy was providing. You don't need angel worship if you have Christ. The angels are worshiping Christ. Why would you be hung up with angels when they're hung up with Christ? And one by one, by one, by one, all of these issues evaporate and go away when you have Christ correct. If you understand the person and work of Christ, everything else is exposed for what it is as false teaching, and the church is made strong when they understand who Jesus Christ is.

He is the head of the church. He is the preeminent One. He is the Savior, the Redeemer, the Reconciler. And He is fully God. And all of the fullness of deity Paul will write in this book dwells in Christ. And so to have Christ, you have everything in your Christian life. That's a message we need to hear today, because the church today is looking for what they think they need in order to be productive as believers in all of these other areas. And so we need to understand this book today to unravel the charismatic chaos, and to unravel suffocating legalism, and to unravel hyperemotional mysticism. What you need is the living Word made known to you through the written Word, and that's all you need.

So, I want us to look at these first two verses, which as I said, really constitute what is the salutation. It's just like an opening greeting. And we'll confine ourselves today just through these first two verses. But there are four things that I want you to note from this, and we're going to dig down into this.

The first thing I want you to note is "the author." This begins, "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God." It was the custom of the day when you wrote an epistle or a letter, rather than like we do, waiting and putting your name at the end, they were smart enough to put the name at the beginning. If someone calls me on the phone, I don't want to talk to you until you tell me who you are. I mean, you don't want to wait till the end of the phone conversation to identify yourself; that doesn't help me. I want to know on the front end who is this. And it's the same with a letter.

Today we stick our name at the end; but no, in the first century they put it first, because you actually need to know who is speaking to you in this letter. So it begins, "Paul." This is the last name in the world that the early church would expect to see first in this letter, because Paul was originally Saul of Tarsus, and he was originally public enemy number one of the Christians and of the church. I mean, Saul of Tarsus was the chief prosecutor and persecutor of the early church. I mean, he was the man who had letters in hand, was in route to Damascus to literally apprehend the Christians, arrest them, drag them back to Jerusalem to stand trial; and he's already stood there and watched Stephen be stoned to death. I mean, Saul of Tarsus would literally go into the houses of Christians and drag them out of their homes and take them off to be persecuted and oppressed and harassed.

But as you recall he was on the Damascus Road that day in Acts chapter 9, and suddenly the Lord Jesus Christ appeared to him and knocked him off his high horse; and in that moment, he was sovereignly regenerated by the Spirit of God, and he says, "What would You have me do, Lord? Who are You, Lord?" And from that moment the apostle Paul was a tour de force for Christianity, arguably the greatest Christian who ever lived. He was a one-man SWAT team with the gospel of Jesus Christ. He became a preacher, a missionary, an interim pastor, an evangelist, a church planner, a discipler, a teacher, a theologian, and he also in his spare time wrote 13 letters that are in the New Testament. I mean, there's never been a Christian like the apostle Paul.

And so here he is, and to see his name, the first word of this epistle, he stands out like a bright star on a dark night. He is a trophy of God's grace.

And let us remember that no one is beyond the long arm of God to save. God can save anyone in a heartbeat. And no one is unsavable when the power of God and the power of the gospel explode in that person's life.

So here he is: "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ." The word "apostle" signifies that he has an official position in the church, that he is one who receives revelation from God until the New Testament is completed, and speaks with authority to the church, and presides over the church. The word "apostle" literally means a sent one, one who is sent on a mission, one who has been dispatched with a message and represents the Lord Jesus Christ wherever he goes. That was his whole life was Christ, and to preach Christ. And he speaks with the authority of Christ.

And you'll note it says he says, "by the will of God." He wants us to know he did not volunteer for this. He wants us to know he didn't go to a sign-up sheet and said, "You know, I'd like to be an apostle." It was nothing he sought, Christ sought him. He's not self-appointed, he's not commissioned by men, really, not even by a church or a group of elders. Ultimately, he has been commissioned from the courts of heaven above and has been set apart and sent to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ by the will of God, by the sovereign will of God from before the foundation of the world. In Galatians 1:15-16 he says that he was set apart from his mother's womb to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And Paul stresses this elsewhere as he begins the book of Galatians. Galatians 1:1, listen to this: "Paul, an apostle (not sent from men nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ)." He wants the church to know he is serving in this capacity by divine appointment. In Ephesians 1:1, "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God." First Corinthians 1:1, "Paul, called as an apostle of Jesus Christ" - here it is - "by the will of God." In 2 Timothy 1:1, "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God."

You see, Paul has to know this in his life, because there are hard times marked out for Paul. He will suffer for the gospel, and he needs to know

that what he is doing, he is doing by the will of God, because if he didn't know that, he would bail out. No one's going to go through all that he went through if he didn't know it was by the will of God. And, beloved, the same is true for you and me. Wherever it is you serve the Lord, you need to know you're doing this by the will of God, because when difficulty arises and opposition pushes back, you need to have an anchor for your soul and know that, "I am here by the will of God."

I once pastored a church in Alabama, and one day my secretary said, "There are two men who want to talk to you." I said, "Well, send them in." I knew exactly who they were; one had been on the pulpit committee that brought me there. And they came slithering into my office, belly down, and they sat down. I said, "How may I help you?" and they said, "We have our checkbook with us, and we are prepared right now to write you a check for an entire year's salary. The condition is you must resign right now." They didn't like Bible preaching.

And I said, "Well, we have a problem, because I'm here by the will of God; not by the will of man, but by the will of God. And so you're actually stuck with me until God moves me someplace else." And it was the beginning of all hell breaking loose. But the fact of the matter is we serve God by the will of God where He places us, and we're not allowed to leave and go elsewhere until God moves us, not men moves us.

And so, Paul wants the church at Colossae to know that everything that he will write in this letter, he writes as an apostle with divine authority that's been given to him, and he does what he does in this letter writing by the will of God. You need to know what the will of God is for your life and find your place of service, and be there knowing, "I'm here by the will of God."

Now before we move on, I want to make two points. One is theological, the other is practical. The theological point that I want to bring to your attention right now is, as Paul writes this, this is a divinely-inspired book. And there are two authors for every book in the Bible. There are two

authors for every verse in the Bible; it's what we call the dual authorship of Scripture. And so for every passage, there is a primary author and there is a secondary author. And the primary author is God the Holy Spirit.

Second Timothy 3:16 says, "All Scripture is inspired by God." It is breathed out of the mouth of God. It's not actually the doctrine of inspiration, it's the doctrine of exploration; it has been breathed out of the mouth of God.

Deuteronomy 8:3, Jesus quotes in Matthew 4:4, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God."

So, every book, every chapter, every verse, every word, every letter in this Book has been breathed out of the mouth of God. And because God is holy, everything that is written in this Book is holy, it is flawless, it is without error; there are no contradictions in this Book. God is the primary author of this Book.

And yet, here we see the name Paul at the beginning; and here we see that God works through secondary agents. God works through human authors to record what God desires to have recorded; however, God did not dictate this book. God didn't say, "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, now write that. Paul an apostle of Christ Jesus," and then God goes, "by the will of God. Paul, write that down now, by the will of God." It's not a mechanical dictation. And it's the mystery of divine inspiration of Scripture, that just as the Holy Spirit impregnated Mary and there is the humanity of Christ that is created without sin, flawless, the only perfect Man; even so, the same Holy Spirit works through human authors who were sinful in themselves to produce that which is without error. It's the doctrine of divine inspiration.

And as long as we're talking about it, or at least I'm talking about it, this involves in this mystery that each biblical author wrote with their own intellect, with their own temperament, with their own personality, with their own vocabulary, with their own manners of expression, with their own literary genre, with their own knowledge of the Old Testament, such that when we read Paul, it's a totally different style from Peter, which is a totally different style from Matthew and Mark and Luke, and certainly



different from John, such that God worked through the human author, that they wrote what they wrote, used drawing upon their own intellect and knowledge; yet the Holy Spirit superintended the entire process such that the product is exactly what God wanted to be written, without any mistakes, without any error. And everything that you and I need to know is found in the Word of God.

If you needed to know anything else, God would have put it in the Bible. We have an all-sufficient record of divine revelation. Everything you need to know is in this Book. So therefore, you do not need external books other than books that help you understand this Book, in order to live your Christian life, in order to be saved and in order to be sanctified. Everything you need to know is in this Book. It's known as the sufficiency of Scripture. So that's the first point I want to make, the theological point, the dual authorship of Scripture. Paul is in Rome, Paul is imprisoned, Paul writes this, yet it is the Word of God.

the second point that I want to make in passing is a practical point, and this may help some of you here today, that we often do our best work for the Lord when we are under the most distress, that when we find ourselves in difficulty and adversity, that is often when God does His greatest work in us and through us. Paul is not sitting in Starbucks writing this. He's not adjusting the thermostat. He's not ordering one more latte to help him get the rest of this book written. He is chained to Roman soldiers. He's actually having to dictate this and a secretary is taking this down. And it was in these most difficult of circumstances that Paul does some of his best work, if not his best work.

During this Roman imprisonment, he would suffer two Roman imprisonments; there'll be a second one after this, this is the first Roman imprisonment. He writes Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. That's pretty good, especially given the circumstances in which he is living. And the point of application is this, is that you will often do your greatest work for God during those times when you are most afflicted, whether it be a physical affliction, whether it be a relational vocational affliction, whether it be a financial affliction. It is in the midst of those circumstances.

It's almost like God is squeezing a tube of toothpaste, and what's coming out of you is the very best work for God that you will probably ever do. So if you find yourself in a difficult place today, just know you're in a great place, because that's where God most often chooses to work.

Now let's continue. We've seen the author, "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God," – notice the associate; he adds – "and Timothy our brother." This is a mark of great humility by Paul to include his understudy in the very first verse. It shows us again how Paul is always trying to lift people up around him. And he says, "Timothy our brother." The fact that he's a brother means that he's truly saved, that he is a genuine believer in Jesus Christ.

And when he says Timothy, we need to be reminded that Timothy was Paul's constant companion through most of his missionary journeys. It was really almost 15 years that Timothy invested with Paul and Paul with Timothy. He's probably converted when Paul's first missionary journey comes through Lystra, preaches the gospel, and so Timothy probably came to faith in Christ under the preaching of the apostle Paul. And to begin the second missionary journey after John Mark has really abandoned Paul, Paul grabs Timothy and puts him into this place of someone to travel with him to be a part of his support system. But it's also a part of discipleship as well, and preparing and training the next generation to step into ministry after Paul is gone.

So Paul refers to Timothy as his young son in the faith; he's his protégé. And Timothy started traveling with Paul when Timothy was probably in his later teenage years, maybe early 20 years. But Paul saw something in Timothy of just raw ability and devotion, that he now snags Timothy to travel with him. And Timothy will be with Paul when Paul writes – listen to this – when Paul writes Romans, 2 Corinthians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, and Philemon. I mean, Timothy's right there at his side; and it's a part of the process of preparing Timothy for the future to take over the reigns of ministry after Paul is gone. And Paul will commission Timothy to go to various churches to represent him. Paul sent Timothy to Corinth to be his representative, sent him to Thessalonica, sent

him to Ephesus. And so Timothy is even with Paul right now as Paul is in Rome. This speaks volumes of Timothy, that Timothy is willing to stick his neck out and to share in the persecution with Paul because of Paul's preaching.

And this is exactly how John Knox got into the ministry, the great Scottish Reformer. He actually was the bodyguard for a man named George Wishart who was the Reformed preacher who was going around Scotland preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. He was a marked man. And John Knox literally had a broad sword, and would escort George Wishart into churches and get him out of churches without his life being taken, until one day they finally did martyr George Wishart. And I've stood right there in Saint Andrews. There's a G and W right in front of the castle to mark the spot where they martyred him. But John Knox then just assumed the ministry of George Wishart and became the most pivotal figure in all of Scottish history, as he was the leader of the Reformation there.

That's really the role that Timothy is fulfilling here. And I guess just a word of application before we proceed: every Paul needs a Timothy, and every Timothy needs a Paul. And what discipleship is is the influence of a more mature believer being pressed upon a less mature believer, that as "iron sharpens iron, so one man another," Proverbs 27:17. And Paul would write, for example, in 1 Corinthians 4:16, "Follow me as I follow Christ." And in First Corinthians 11:1, "Be imitators of me, as I imitate Christ." And Paul will say the same thing again in Philippians 3 and Philippians 4. That's what we call discipleship.

And so, no matter where you are in your Christian life, you need to either be casting an influence upon those who are younger in the faith than you are, or you need to be under the influence of someone who's more advanced than you are. That's what discipleship is. And it may take place one on one. It may take place in a small group. It may take place in a classroom. It may take place from some distance as you sit under preaching and teaching. But every one of us needs to have this trickle-down influence from someone who is more mature in the faith than we are. It's God's plan for Christian growth and development to have an older brother, an older sister cast the

shadow across your path and help pull you up. That's what Paul is doing with Timothy.

Now this leads to, third, "the assembly." As we come to verse 2, we now transition from the author to those who are being addressed: the addressees. And so he writes at the beginning of verse 2, "To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae." There are several words here that we need to give attention to, and the first is obviously "saints." Notice it's in the plural. Every believer in Colossae is a saint. It's not just Epaphras who's the pastor, it's not just the elders or the deacons, but every true believer in Jesus Christ is a saint. You don't have to have a hospital named after you to be a saint.

Now, what does the word "saint" mean? It means to be set apart, one who's been set apart from the world's pollution to God and to Christ, to be set apart from realms of darkness now to be set apart unto realms of light, to be set apart from your old life in sin to now your new life in the Savior. And this takes place at the moment someone is born again. It's not that someone believes in Christ and then ten years later they become set apart from the world and set apart unto Christ. No, it happens the very moment someone is converted to Christ. You're immediately taken out of this realm and placed in this realm. You are unplugged from this realm and you are now plugged into this new realm, and it happens immediately and instantly the moment you are converted to Jesus Christ.

And so everyone in the church at Colossae who was a true believer, they are a saint. Whether you got saved yesterday or last week, or whether you've been saved for several years, it doesn't matter: if you are in Christ, you are a saint. And it brings about a distinctive difference in one's lifestyle, that you are now headed in a new direction on a new path. You're under new management, you're following a new master. Your life has been radically changed. And if your life has not been radically changed, then you've never met Jesus Christ, because He's too powerful, He's too full of grace to meet Him, the resurrected, glorified Christ through pages of Scripture and for your life not to be altered significantly.

And so, Paul addresses the saints in the church at Colossae, and he also gives a further description of them, that "they are faithful brethren in Christ." Every saint is a faithful brother or sister in Christ, so every one of us here today who are in Christ, we would be described as faithful. What does the word "faithful" mean? It means loyal, devoted, dedicated to Jesus Christ. It means to be reliable and to be trustworthy with what has been entrusted to you from the Lord, that we are faithful, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

When he says, "brethren," he is saying that every saint is in the family of God, has been born again, has been adopted by God; and therefore, we have the same parent, we have the same father, and we bear the same family likeness as we are being conformed into the image of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And then he adds the next two words, which is Paul's favorite prepositional phrase, "in Christ, in Christ." That means that every saint and every faithful brethren is in union with Christ and in communion with Christ. We're plugged into Christ. Christ is in us, but we're also in Christ; and so therefore, all of the resources of Christ come pulsating into our soul and into our life. His wisdom becomes our wisdom. His power and strength becomes our power and strength. His love and patience and kindness now just flows into our lives, and we become like Him, because we are in Christ. There is not one drop of grace, saving grace, outside of Christ; it's all found in Christ. And so that will become the dominant theme of this book, that if you are in Christ, you have everything that you need to live your Christian life in a way that pleases God.

Now he adds, "who are at Colossae." This is a very specific local church, no doubt, with elders and deacons, a preaching pastor, who are at Colossae. And time doesn't permit us to go into all the details of Colossae; but suffice to say, Colossae is located in modern-day Turkey. It's a hundred miles east of Ephesus, and it's in the Lycus Valley. It is surrounded by towering mountains, one of which ascends upward to 8,000 feet, huge towering mountains; and there are roads that go through, highways that go through these valleys, and the two main ones intersect at Colossae. There's one that

is north to south, and the other is east to west. These are major trade routes and they intersect right here in Colossae.

And the gospel came to Colossae not by Paul, but by the man who's mentioned in verse 7: Epaphras. He came to faith in Christ. Maybe he came to faith in Christ under Paul who's a hundred miles away in Ephesus; Paul was there for three years. And Epaphras is so turned on to the Lord that he comes to Colossae and, really, plants this church and becomes the pastor of this church, though Paul himself had never been to Colossae.

Now there's two things that I want to bring to your attention here before we move on. Number one, as we look at these verses, what strikes me is that the church is not the building, the churches the people. So in the truest sense, you don't go to church, you are the church; you go to the meeting place where the church gathers. And the church is comprised of the saints and the faithful brethren. And so the building is, really, far secondary to the importance of the reality of Christ in the lives of the people who are in the building. You could be in the greatest building in town, but it could still be just a glorified country club. It could still just be a spiritual social club where the gospel is not preached and the Word of God is not expounded. The building is, I don't want to say nothing, but the building is certainly not the church; the church is the people who are in that building.

Think about this. Many times the church has stood the strongest when their building was not exactly what you would want it to be. There in Rome where Paul is, the church often met in catacombs under street level, huddled up out of the watching eye of the Roman officials. The French Huguenots during the French Reformation, they had to meet in caves. And they would put a man up on top of the mountain with a handkerchief, so when the French border guards come looking for them to persecute them and arrest them and even martyr them, he would signal with a handkerchief to someone standing outside the cave that "the officials are coming; we've got to go deeper into the cave." But it was some of the sweetest worship that the church has ever known.

Think about the pilgrims when they crossed the Atlantic Ocean in the hull of the Mayflower. If you've ever gone to Plymouth Rock and seen the Mayflower, I mean it was not exactly the Queen Mary; it was very Spartan. But there they sang the praises of God and the glory of God.

I once was part of planting a church, and we began in a warehouse; and those were glory days in that warehouse. And then a Mardi Gras company bought it and they put a 30-foot tall Buddha statue in there. We told the kids, "Don't go look at it," and they immediately all went and looked at it. So we had to move out of there. So we moved into what had been a Jewish, some kind of meeting place that was converted into a bingo parlor. And I can still remember the people who were converted in that bingo parlor when I began preaching through Hebrews. But then from there, we bought a church that was in a declining area; and we couldn't even move into the worship center, so we had to meet in the gym. Those were some of the greatest days we ever had. God was at work. And I can still remember who was converted in that in that old gym.

So the point is the church is not the building, the church is the people and what God's doing in those people. And I have no idea what our future is going to be. I mean, we're just packed out here right now. We may be meeting at the car wash up on Greenville next time, who knows, have a baptismal service at the car wash. But it doesn't matter. As long as we can all get together, and the Word of God is made known, and we can sing our praises to God, and we can fellowship with one another, the main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing; and the main thing is not the building, the main thing is the saints who are faithful brethren.

Now some of you are familiar with Matthew Henry, the great commentator. Matthew Henry preached for most of his ministry in a barn. He wasn't even allowed to come into town because of Charles II. And the Puritans had to stay five miles outside of town; they couldn't even be buried inside of town. And out of that came one of the greatest commentaries ever to be written by Matthew Henry.

Well, I think you've got the point. And how I thank God for what He's doing in this church. And the reality of God and Christ in this place is so real. And I just trust that God will preserve what He's doing here.

Well, I have one last heading and it's "the affection"; that's at the end of verse 2, Paul's customary: "Grace to you." Now this is not referring to a radio ministry, this is really an intercessory prayer. It's really Paul's request for the favor of God to be upon this church and upon these people. And so almost as an intercessor, he is saying, "Grace to you." And the word "grace" here does not refer to saving grace; they're already saved, right? They're saints; they're faithful brethren; they're in Christ. So he's asking for sanctifying grace, and serving grace, and strengthening grace, and sustaining grace.

And I need to say that everything that you do in the will of God, you need grace to do it. I need grace to study the Bible. I need grace to write sermons. I need grace to write books. I need grace to preach His Word. I need grace to mingle with you after the service is over. I need grace to be a father, to be a husband. I need grace to be a grandfather. I need grace to witness to people. I need grace in everything in my Christian life. You need grace. You need grace to you to be lavished upon you.

And then he adds, "and peace from God the Father." The order here is very important. You'll never have peace until you first have grace. This peace is not peace with God, this is the peace of God. This is not objective peace, the result of justification by faith alone; this is subjective peace, that there would be an inner calmness within the soul in the midst of the storms of life, that there would be a real and lasting tranquility inside the heart as you are surrounded by the pressures of life. And the only way to have the peace that surpasses all comprehension is for there to be, what 2 Peter 1:1 says, "grace multiplied to you," what John 1, about verse 15, 16, maybe it's 16, "grace upon grace."

You need grace every moment of every day. You need grace every morning. You need grace throughout the day. You need grace every night. And really



grace, grace to you, it's really virtually synonymous with the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. This grace is really the fruit that the Spirit produces in our lives. It is a supernatural gift.

And notice it comes from one source: "from God the Father." You're not going to get peace from the world, I'll just tell you that. I was looking at Instagram and Twitter last night, and I'm just in chronic depression seeing what all's - and that was even my Twitter account, you know - in chronic depression. My goodness, this world is going up in flames. I mean, the Lord surely must be coming back soon.

So the world's not going to give us any peace, the world gives us trouble and anxiety and worry. There's only one source of peace and that is from God our Father. And we can say that this peace comes from God the Father through God the Son and is applied by God the Holy Spirit. It's really a Trinitarian work within us. And you need that peace today, I need this peace, don't we?

We live in a troublesome world; and Jesus promised in John 16:33, "In this world you shall have tribulation." That's just the reality; we're surrounded by it on every side. And we definitely need this grace and this peace. And there are means of grace by which this grace flows into our lives. Let me just tack this on quickly. We call these the means of grace, and they're like pipes through which the grace of God flows into our lives.

And the Puritans spoke of the primary means of grace, which is to sit under the preaching of the Word of God. But there is also your personal Bible study, and there's prayer, and there's worship, and there's the Lord's Table, and there's fellowship, and there is serving the Lord. And these are all means of grace by which this strengthening, supporting, sustaining grace just flows into your life. So you have to make yourself plugged into these means of grace.

Well, I need to conclude. This is our beginning of the book of Colossians. And as I conclude this first message, I need to say to you, I have really good news. If God can save Saul of Tarsus, He can save anyone here today. You may be thinking, "You don't know how sinful my past is and how soiled my past is," and my response is, "You do not know how great the grace of God is. Your sin is but an island surrounded by oceans and oceans of grace and forgiveness that God has for you. Where sin does abound, grace does much more abound. And no matter how far away you have been from the Lord, He will save you, He will wipe the slate clean, He will wash you with His blood, He will make you as pure and clean as a freshly fallen snow. He says to you, 'Come, let us reason,' says the Lord. 'Though your sins be a scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be white as wool.'"

That's the good news. And so as you find yourself here today, if you are not a believer, but there's been some hesitation about, "Could the Lord actually save someone like me?" the answer is a resounding yes, because His grace far surpasses whatever your sin is. And God loves to forgive sinners. God loves to welcome sinners. God loves to take in sinners into His family. There's just one condition, that you believe in Jesus Christ, that you deny yourself, and you take up a cross and you become a follower of Jesus Christ. But Jesus says to you, "Him who comes unto Me I will in no wise cast out." You have a Savior who will receive you with open arms and with an open heart; just come to Him this moment. Well, let's close in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Our Father in heaven, how we praise Your all-glorious name for Your goodness and for Your grace in our lives. Be with us as we go through this book of Colossians. May You use it to build up our lives and to fortify us. We want every drop of truth that You have in this Book to be squeezed out and to be in our soul and in our life. Use this to make us like Christ, in His name we pray. Amen. [End]

I leave you with this closing benediction: "Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory, blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ

our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority before all time and now and forever. Amen. God bless you.