

Colossians 1

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[0 : 0 0] Well, good morning. It's still morning time, just before lunch. I just want to thank you again for inviting me to share God's Word with you this morning. I'm always very conscious of the tremendous privilege it is to share from God's Word, to have your attention to this time, but also the tremendous responsibility it is well to be up here and to be sharing from God's Word. I've had the opportunity over the years to travel different parts of the world. For 15 years we lived in South America, and I had the opportunity way up in the Andes mountains, and also way down the jungle, to be standing in front of people and sharing from God's Word. I recently had the opportunity also in Tanzania. Before I went, they warned me that I would be taking part in the service. I tried to struggle for a while to tell them that I would be too busy and things like that, but they finally twisted my arm and told me that I should take part in the three-hour-long morning service. I wasn't too sure what I was going to fit in in that three hours or how long they wanted me to preach for, but I went prepared. The day before I was preaching, they took me out to the islands on Lake Victoria as part of my job. We have a medical ship out there in Lake Victoria. I was going to visit the islands that the ship was to visit. And being the white man, the mzungu as they call them there, I splashed on all the sun cream. I had a hat on, and we headed off to the islands for about six hours. And when we came back, I went back to my hotel room, and I looked in the mirror, and to my horror, I had slapped. Well, I often get that feeling looking in the mirror anyway, to my horror, but even more so, I had slapped on sun cream everywhere apart from a patch on my face like this. And it was bright red, and it was shiny. And I can tell you, not only did I not sleep very well the next day thinking I was going to have to preach in front of this congregation, but I was also worried, what are they going to think when they see this preacher with a ginormous red patch glowing in front of them on the Sunday morning service. And as I stood there waiting to be picked up to take him to church in the morning, Samuel, my Tanzanian host, he said to me, what happened to your face, Kenny? And

I said, yeah, Samuel, sun cream didn't work. I forgot to put it on. And he says, now don't you worry. He says, we're going to a church. They've never seen a white person before. They'll think it's completely normal. And so that kind of eased my tension a little bit that I was going to be able to share something, and they weren't going to be distracted by what was already a strange looking face, but even worse, with his bed red patch. But I was able to share with them from God's word. That's why I want to share with you this morning too, to encourage you, as we were saying in the beginning, it really is a passage which is a tremendous passage of encouragement and also challenge there this morning. We're going to read from Colossians chapter 1, and what I want to do is just work our way through some of the verses there, starting in verse 1, and we're going to work our way through to verse 14 this morning. And I want to bring out some things which God has spoken to me through this, his word, and my prayer has been, as I've been getting ready for it this morning, is that God will really speak to your hearts too through his word.

So Colossians chapter 1, and verses 1 and 2, we'll start off with the first two verses. It says, Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God and Timothy, our brother, to God's holy people in Colossae, the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ, grace and peace to you from God our Father.

In Paul's letters to many different churches, this is a typical kind of introduction, but some of the things that really, I just want to point out a few things to start off with, the way he introduces himself in his letter, which kind of ties in to the themes he's going to bring in for the rest of the letter. Look how he describes himself in verse 1. He says, Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus.

That's his role that God has given him to us, because it says, I'm an apostle of Jesus Christ. How did you become an apostle? By the will of God. Right from the beginning, Paul is introducing the theme that we have a purpose in life, and that God is God's will that guides us in what that purpose is. That's what I want to talk about promptly this morning, is about God's will for our lives and how we can know that there. Paul knew what his life purpose was, and he knew that God had called them into that.

[4 : 19] In verse 3, it says, we always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people.

The faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard and the true message of the gospel that has come to you. In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world, just as been doing amongst you since the day you heard it and truly understood God's grace. You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, and who has also told us of your love in the Spirit. Paul is what I would describe as the master pastor. He has this tremendous ability to encourage people, and what a tremendous start to this letter, I'm sure the people, they picked up this letter and started reading, they must have felt so encouraged by the first words they read here. He says that I am praying for you. I don't know how you feel when people write to you and tell you that they are praying for you, but it should be something which really encourages us to know that there are people behind us who are thinking of us and bringing us before God to pray for us. He's not just praying for them because things are maybe going bad. He says, I give God thanks for you because I am encouraged by what I hear of you. He's heard about their faith in Christ Jesus and how that faith is working in their lives and how that is being shown by giving God's love to other people. He has this ability, Paul, to really encourage them in what is a difficult and challenging circumstance. I have a friend, you may have met him in the past, Steve Connor. He was in Scotland for many years working for Sports Outreach

Scotland. He's an ex-American football player. He used to play for the Chicago Bears. He's about, I'll bet we're careful what I'm saying, he's being recorded. He's six foot two tall and he's a big guy as well. I was going to say six foot two wide, but I'll get in trouble. He's a big guy. He's a ginormous person, personality as well, and a tremendous heart for God. And I had the privilege of having him as my friend. He would come and visit us in Bolivia because we were involved in sports ministry there.

And he had this tremendous ability and he has this. And he can give you a kick up the rear end, but it feels like a pat on the back. That's what Steve Connor could do. He could really show me areas of my life where I was not doing things correctly, but I would come out of that meeting at a time with him feeling so encouraged. And that's a gift like Paul has here. He has a ability to correct people. See this in other Paul's letters too. He would really have to put them in their place. He'd have to call their attention to things that were wrong in their lives, but he had this tremendous ability to pick them up too and to encourage them to carry on, to encourage them, to strengthen them, to guide them. And here Paul is a letter. He says, I've heard that you are going on so well.

And it's almost like he's saying, I don't want you to fall by the wayside or to grow cold. I want you to see you to grow even more and even further in your walk with the Lord. And that is something I think is a challenge to all of us in our lives, no matter what role we have in life, well, in the church here as well. This ability to challenge people and to help them to grow, but also to do it in a loving and encouraging way. And in verse 9, Paul says this. He says, I've heard about you. I've been encouraged about you. I'm praying for you, but I want you to grow more. He says, for this reason, because I have heard, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you.

[7 : 54] We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives. For this reason, because we have heard how you are going on in your life for God, because we have heard of your faith and your love, we have not stopped praying for you. And that's great. He's not just praying for them and because they're going through difficult circumstances. He's praying because they're doing well. He wants to see them to grow even more. He wants them to keep moving forward in their faith. And he prays that God would fill them with the knowledge of his will. That way they would have an understanding, a filling of understanding of the purpose that God has for their lives. See, that's something which, when I came to understand this as I was growing up in my own Christian faith, to understand the importance of knowing what God's will is for my life. What he wants and not what I want for my life. That as Christians, we have no right to demand control of our own lives. Paul, in another letter he wrote to the church in Corinth, he says, you are not your own. You were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your bodies.

Now, that concept of body to the people at that time would be more than just the physical flesh and blood. It would be something more than that. The whole concept of body to the Roman and Greek cultures was that it encompassed your whole life. That it would encompass your dreams and your plans, your desires and your thoughts. Everything that you had was wrapped in this concept of body. They weren't two separable things. What you desired and what your body was. Physical body too. So Paul is praying. He says, I've heard about you. I've heard about your love, about your faith. I've heard about how you're growing. I want you to grow even more. I want God to fill you with a knowledge of his will for your lives. But he also understood that this knowledge did not come through because they were smart or clever people. But it had to be revealed to them by God himself. That's why it says here that it would come to them through all wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives. Through all wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives. You see, it's vital that we know and understand that in this life, our salvation comes from God and from God alone. That our purpose in life is found in God and in God alone. And a knowledge of this purpose is given to us from God and from him alone. You see, we can do nothing under our own power to save ourselves from sin and there's nothing we can do under our own power to know or understand God's will. We have to come to him and wait for him to reveal it to us. We have to ask and desire that he would reveal that will to us. Now the name Andrew Murray is a very popular moment because of the tennis. He is not the only Andrew Murray who's been famous over the years. Andrew Murray of, you know, your Scottish history and the Battle of Stirling Bridge. There's also Andrew Murray, a very good, strong and wonderful, powerful Christian man who wrote wonderful books including Waiting on God.

Tremendous devotional book. If you ever find that book and use it, it's been a real help to me in my life too. There's Andrew Murray, not the tennis player. I would love the tennis player to see things like this. But this is another Andrew Murray. He says that wisdom is knowing the specific will of God according to the measure of grace given to us and to ask in prayer just what God has purposed and made possible for each of us. Read that again. That true wisdom is knowing the specific will of God according to the measure of grace given to us and to ask in prayer just what God has purposed and made possible for each of us. What he's saying is there that to be truly wise is to know what God wants for your life and the only way you're going to know that is because God through his gaze reveals that to you and that's why we have to in prayer come before God and ask him to reveal his will to our lives. It's not because we're clever. It's not because we go and study. It's not because we are intelligent people that we can go and find out and determine this for ourselves. We have to depend upon God to reveal his will to our lives. Paul says I want you to grow in a knowledge of God's will but this will comes or a knowledge of this will comes from God revealing it to you. And he explains then also in verse 10 why he wants us to know or why he wanted these people to know and why we need to today need to know what God's will is for our lives. It's in verse 10 that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way bearing fruit in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God. I think it's a tremendous verse that's something that's been a real challenge and help to me over many years that he wants them to know God's will. He wants God to reveal that will to them so that they may live a life worthy of the Lord and one that pleases him in every way bearing fruit in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God. Often we often, I don't know about yourselves but myself, often I've sought my own path and my own purpose for life. I thought this is what my targets are, these are my desires, these are my aims and I'm going to build my life as trying to achieve these things. We have to understand that God's will is not something we add to our lives.

As Elizabeth Elliot, an amazing woman of faith who was one of five ladies who lost her husbands to or killed by a tribe in Ecuador many years ago now, she wrote this, the will of God is not something you add to your life, it is a course you choose. You either line yourselves up with the Son of God or you capitulate to the principles which govern the rest of the world.

So each day we have to seek to either know God's will and ask him to apply it to our lives or we just give in and follow what the worst of the world says. We start to follow an empty and worthless purpose which the world has to offer to us.

[14 : 28] In Romans chapter 12, Paul talks about God's will again and he talks about the will of God being three things. In Romans 12 verse 2, it says God's will is good, it is pleasing and it is perfect.

He says in Romans 12 verse 2, God's will is good, it is pleasing and it is perfect. That last word there, I find it is a real challenge. Now what it's saying is that God's will is perfect, it cannot be better.

Whatever God plans for our lives cannot be better. So we can't say, well, God, that is your will, but I think I can create a better one. It says that God's will is good, it is pleasing and that it is perfect. So if we choose not to seek God's will and live out God's will for our lives, we are choosing a purpose for our life which is inferior to the one that God has for us. God's will is good, it is pleasing and it is perfect. And we also find out what God's will is for our lives. He said that Paul said, I want you to know God's will and live it out because you will live a life which is pleasing to God and that is worthy of God and it's also a life which bears fruit. So he's wanting him to live a life which will be productive, that will produce something in their lives. Now in Christian circles, we can fall into the trap of thinking that bearing fruit means we need to be busy all the time.

The more activities we're involved in, the better, the more pleased that God will be with us. We're trying to earn God's favor by being busy, busy, busy all the time. That is what bearing fruit. Now I'm not saying being involved in church ministry activities is wrong, but that shouldn't be what we understand about bearing fruit principally. When the Bible talks about bearing fruit, it's not talking about the external things that we are involved in. It's more to do with an internal transformation that God is doing in our lives. That's why in another letter that Paul wrote, he wrote that the fruit of the Spirit, the fruit of the Spirit is love. It is joy. It is peace. It is forbearance. It is kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. So what Paul's saying is that he wants God to reveal his will to our lives. He wants us to live a life where God is transforming us. He is changing us. He's making us more like his Son, Jesus Christ. As he does that, he will take us and use us to be involved in these different activities and ministries as well. But primarily, God wants to work in our lives and transform our lives. So living at God's will is living at a life where God is changing us and transforming us. But the Christian life is so much more than even that.

It's a tremendous thing to think that God wants to take our lives. He wants to transform us to make us more like Jesus Christ. But it's more than that still. It says here that he wants us to grow in the knowledge of God. To grow in the knowledge of God. Jesus Christ himself said in John chapter 17 verse 3, he says, now this is eternal life, that they may know you, the one true God and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. Eternal life, that they may know you, the one true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. When I was growing up, I kind of understood that eternal life was this, I say that, well, when my life here comes to an end, then I'll go to be with God and it stops me from going to be in hell. So when I have eternal life, it means I go to be in heaven rather than go to be in hell.

[17 : 58] I hadn't understood and grasped until I was older that eternal life is so much more than that you're changing your destination when your life here comes to an end. Eternal life is something which you're given straight from the moment that you receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and it's about entering into a relationship with God, getting to know the one true God and Jesus Christ who he sent here to the world. So God wants to reveal himself to us. He wants to work in us, to transform us and change us, but he wants us to get to know him more and more. And it's not some sort of academic or theoretical knowledge of God. It's not about pulling out all the theology books and sitting reading from cover to cover and trying to fill our minds through with information about God. It's about a personal knowledge. It talks about getting to know God in a personal way. Another famous Christian writer, J.I. Packer, said this, A little knowledge of God is worth more than a great deal of knowledge about God.

A little knowledge of God is worth more than a great deal of knowledge about God. How do we get to know somebody? Not just about them, but to get to know them personally.

It's about spending time with them. And as we go through experiences, we live with them, as we go through the good times and the challenging times and difficult times, that's how we get to know who that person really is. And God wants us to get to know him. How do we get to know God? Through his word. And he speaks to us and his spirit teaches us from his word, but also as we walk with him and live with him every day. As what we read in his word becomes applied to our lives and we see that God, he tells in his word he's a God of love and we see it in our lives he's a God of love. We tell God is a faithful God. We see in our lives that God is a faithful God, that God provides and God provides in our lives too. That is what God wants to do.

He wants it. Paul says, I've heard about your love. I've heard about your faith. I don't want you to stop there. I want you to grow. I want God to reveal his wisdom to you so that you will to you so you may live a life which is pleasing to God. Now, a life which is pleasing to God is one which bears fruit and also one where you get to know him more and more. But he doesn't stop there.

In verse 7 and 11, he says, You see, just as salvation comes from God alone, just as an understanding or knowledge of his will comes from God alone, so too does the power and ability to do his will come from him alone.

[20 : 38] God doesn't just reveal his will to us and then abandon us to get on with it ourselves and say, well, I've showed you what I want you to do, now you go ahead and do it. God provides his power in our lives to do it. It talks about his glorious might, power in our lives. On a recent trip I had to Peru, I had the privilege of traveling with a retired surgeon and professor, extremely intelligent man, and I think he must have been frustrated with me about my level of conversation compared to what he normally has. But he was a gentleman who had tremendous ability as a surgeon, was incredibly knowledgeable and understanding about different things. And as we were walking through the streets of Lima on our way to one of our meetings, we would avoid spending money on taxis. We were a bit cheapskates, we would decide to walk everywhere. And we would talk and discuss things as we were going along. And he said to me, Kenny, this incredibly intelligent and gifted Christian man, he said to me, do you know what? I would often wake up in the morning thinking they're going to find me out. And I would say, what on earth is he talking about? And I would say, what do you mean? He says, I often wake up in the morning thinking people are going to find out I've got no idea what I'm really doing here at all. And this is an incredible man, tremendous gifts, tremendous knowledge, tremendous talent. But he felt that he, you know, he was, he wasn't sure exactly what he was doing with his life or even in his work.

And I said to him, do you know what? I think I'm the captain of that club. I don't know if you feel like that sometimes. That surely people are going to, why not, they're paying me to do something I don't even know what I'm doing. Or I'm about to turn 40 this year. I know my hairstyle tells you I'm a little older than that. But I'm about to turn 40 this year. I always thought when people get to 40, they would be mature. That they would understand what they're doing in their lives. That they'd have everything sorted out. And that they, you know, by the time you got to that age, you, unless things are going to change an awful lot in the next couple of months, or you wake up on your 40th birthday and all of a sudden you're mature and grown up and you know what you're doing, I don't think it's going to happen to me anyway. And I often feel weak and I often feel powerless and I often feel, what on earth am I doing and how on earth am I going to do this? That's why I, when I drive into my car every morning, I park inside my work and I say, Lord, please just give me the power. Give me the strength. Give me the wisdom to do the job that you have prepared for me today because I can't do it on my own. I need you to work in and through me to do this work today. God doesn't just reveal his will to us and then abandon us. He gives us his glorious might to fulfill that in our lives. And Paul brings things to an end in verses 13 and 14 by pointing them back to Jesus. He says,

So we have Paul in the midst of all us encouraging them for what they have, the good they have done, for guiding them in these essentials of what is the Christian life. He brings them back to the foundation of their faith, to the reason for their hope and to the source of their salvation. He brings them back to Jesus Christ. And he shares this contrast, which he does in so many of his other letters. He contrasts before and after. He says, you have been rescued from the dominion of darkness and you have been brought into the kingdom of the sun. He has done this for you. He has rescued from the dominion of darkness. He has brought you into the kingdom of the sun. That's why he wants to transform you. That's why he wants to change you. That's why he wants to work in and through you.

That's why he wants to show you what his will is for your life so you may live a life which is pleasing and glorifies his name. And it says, in whom we have redemption. In whom? In a person that we have our redemption. We have salvation, not through a series of lists and rules and regulations that we have to follow or a box we have to tick. It is through a person. Not through a set of beliefs. Not through a religion.

Not through a ritual. But through a person, Jesus Christ. And Paul is calling them to remain true to the one who saved them. And he's saying that he has to be the Lord of your life. That person is God incarnate.

[24 : 48] The man, Jesus Christ. It was through his death, his sacrifice, his victory and his resurrection that they have this eternal life today. Some of you here this morning maybe never have turned to Jesus Christ and don't even know him personally. Maybe you don't know what your purpose and will is for your life.

God, your creator, the person who gave you life, has a purpose for your life. And he has the power to work in your life so you can live that out for him. And he invites you today to turn to him and accept him as your Lord and Savior to receive that eternal life, that relationship with him. Many of you here this morning won't be Christians. And my prayer has been that, as it has done to me, it will be helpful to you to read through this work, to focus on what the essentials in life truly are. To get back to the basics. I'm like a politician, don't I? Back to basics. To live a life which is according to his will, according to his grace and in his power. There's an old hymn that was written many years ago and it talks about how God wants to work in our lives. I want to just finish with this this morning.

It says, from the center to the circumference, God would saturate every part, feeling, mind, and well-renewing, making home in all our hearts. Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, I thank you this morning for your word. We thank you for your servant, Paul, who you inspired to write these words to this church there. Heavenly Father, that the people in those days back then are just the same as people we are today, Lord. We need to be encouraged. We need to be guided. We need to be helped. We need to be challenged. And I thank you that the words that were written all those many years ago, because they were inspired by you and your Holy Spirit, they are words which have power and meaning in life. And words which guide us in our lives today. I pray, Heavenly Father, for each one of us here this morning, that we would know what it is to live a life in the knowledge of your will. That that would be desire of each of our hearts, to seek what you want for us. Not what we want for our own lives, but what you want for our lives.

And I pray, Heavenly Father, you would reveal that through your Holy Spirit to us, and you would give us the power that you promised to live out that life, so that each of us would live lives which bring glory to your name and your name alone. Lord, I give you thanks. In the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.