

Church in the Valley: No Other Source
a message based on
Colossians 2:6-23

Followers of Jesus:

Before we read these verses, a reminder of where we've been. Paul (and Timothy) were writing this letter to the church in the valley: destined for the cities of Colosse, Laodicea, and Hierapolis. They'd heard about the church there and were thrilled at their progress in the faith. From Epaphras, the man who planted the churches in this valley, they'd heard that they had heard the gospel and *understood God's grace in all its truth* (chapter 1, verse 6). What does that mean, though, "God's grace in all its truth"? It means that when they heard the good news, God opened their hearts to receive the message. Something of a miracle takes place when such a reception occurs in those who would follow Jesus. Christ comes and lives in their hearts through faith. The definition of a true believer is *Christ in you, the hope of glory* (chapter 1, verse 27).

Now we've come to a very practical question, a question that has been bothering Paul particularly about something else he'd heard about these followers of Jesus in the valley. They were being misinformed with what Paul describes as *fine-sounding arguments*. They were being fed a wisdom that depended not on God's grace and all its truth, but based on man-made rules, on certain religious practices, and on a pretend-humility mentality. This is what we're getting into this morning as we continue our summer study of this book. We haven't done this for a while, but please let's stand in honor of God's word, as a way to show that we are ready to take our stand on it, and live out of the message of the gospel.

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Followers of Jesus:

As you know, a few of us completed this week the hike from Bamfield to Port Renfrew, a 75 kilometre trek. It was very hard work! One of the constant themes of that trip was life. The trail was bursting with life! Whether it was in the first section where trees were blown over by that wind storm a few years back (even there, there was life); or life found in the tiny and not so tiny tidal pools where color in plant life was combined with bursting life in fish and crabs, life could be witnessed everywhere. The thing that struck me the most, though, through all the twists and turns of the trail,

were the roots. Roots were everywhere growing and thriving and bursting seeking for water and nourishment to grow. Roots like this:



Without roots there is no possibility of life, no source for living.

This is one of the descriptions Paul uses when he wants to describe life in Christ Jesus.

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness (2:6-7).

Being rooted in Christ is one of the ways to let you know that you are living out the gospel. He is the source of our life.

When we were hiking the West Coast Trail, one of the essential elements for

doing it was -- breathing. We could breathe because of all the green we saw, all the leaves which produced for us oxygen. The same is true for living out the gospel. Christ Jesus as Lord is the air that we breathe. He is our oxygen. If we do not breathe him in, it'll be like swallowing a fly like I did at one point on the trail. All we'll be doing is coughing and choking and gagging and not really living.

Paul likes to use a verb – which is an action word – and then use other words to describe what that might look like. He's done it already in chapter 1; here in chapter 2 the action word he uses is "*live*."

... **continue to live in him**...

He uses four words to describe what that looks like.

... **rooted**...

The word is in the passive voice, which means that it does not depend on our actions. Murray J. Harris points out that a previous rooting is implied, while a present rooting is stressed.

The second word to describe the life of the gospel is:

... **built up**...

This involves an ongoing process that is again in the passive voice. There is a discipline involved in this. Every day when we wake up, we need to remind ourselves that our life is found only in the action of Christ living in us, not our own action.

The third word to describe life in Christ:

... **strengthened**...

This word, too, is in the passive voice, which means we must turn to Christ to receive the strength we need to live every day. God's action is required if we are to grow as a follower of Jesus. The thought here is that every day we are "growing ever stronger" in the faith (New American Standard translation).

The fourth word is:

... **overflowing with thankfulness**...

Thankfulness for what? For what God has done for us in Christ! What has he done? It's not just that he has forgiven all of our sins; that is significant, isn't it? Are we thankful that God has forgiven us every sin we've ever committed? It's also that God has made

us right with himself. Because we believe in Jesus and what he's done on the cross, God has no basis any more to accuse us! If we were to die today, we would be presented to God in heaven, *holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation* (1:22). It's also that, by faith in Jesus' blood, God has done a marvelous thing.

... having canceled the written code (*read: Ten Commandments*), with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross (Col 2:14).

Aren't those good reasons to be thankful to God, to overflow with thankfulness? There is nothing we can do to add to what Christ has done! We are complete in Christ! We don't need anything but Christ alone.

The year was 1970. It is known in Canadian history as "The October Crisis." It was so severe, that the Prime Minister of Canada at the time, invoked the War Measures Act. The army was called out, first to guard Ottawa, then to restore order in the Province of Quebec. One of the significant events that got the crisis going was the kidnapping of two prominent people. One of them was British Trade Commissioner James Cross, the other was a popular Quebec politician, Pierre Laporte who was kidnapped on October 10, 1970. Seven days later his body was found stuffed in the trunk of a car. Kidnapping is a serious crime. It is the stealing of a person. It is a violation of freedom.

Kidnapping is the reason why Paul is taking so much time in these verses to tell why being "in Christ" is the only source for living.

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ (Col 2:8).

The phrase "*takes you captive*" can be translated "kidnapped." The literal translation is, "Take care lest there will be anyone who carries you off as spoil." Do we see what Paul is expressing here? There were times when we were hiking that I became aware of the dangers of the trail. A little loss of balance, a missed step, a looking up and then tripping over the roots could send you cascading to the ground! The hike required being constantly alert to the perils around us. This kind of peril is what Paul is concerned about in these verses. It's what Jon Foreman of the group Switchfoot writes about in a song. "We've got information in the information age, but do we know what life is outside of our convenient Lexus cages?"

What is the peril? What is so dangerous? Two things. The one is man-made

rules, rules “handed down by humans.” Jesus speaks out against rules like that. He quotes from the prophet Isaiah.

**“These people honor me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me.
They worship me in vain;
their teachings are but rules taught by men.”**

(Mark 7:6-7, quoting Isaiah 29:13).

The question we have to ask when people start imposing man-made rules is: do they inspire love to God, and love to one another? Man-made rules will always ruin the gospel of God's grace. It is a peril this church in the valley must watch for.

The second peril is a big issue in a church, one that if we're not careful will consume us. Paul calls it *“the basic principles of this world.”* The word is rooted in another that means, “row, line, series.” For example, the alphabet: “a,b,c” is found in a row. What are the basic principles, what A. J. Bandstra calls “the elemental forces operating in the world”? They are demons. What is the aim of these demons? It is “to enslave the human race” (according to Murray J. Harris). It's the notion that we, in our human strength and ability, can be good and proper and be the orderly kind of people that are respected. These demons deceive. Do we know what it's like to be deceived? It's thinking that one thing is right, when in fact it is not. These demons want to entice us away from counting on Christ and Christ alone to be the source of our every-day living, the very air that we breathe.