

Sunday 2nd January 2022
Colossians 1:1-8
Mr.Brent Haywood
Brightons Parish Church

PART 1

So, let me assure you this is not a power kick. I'm not running up to get into the pulpit as quick as possible but I just know that having sat upstairs recently it is really difficult to see the speaker when the speaker's down there, so that's why I'm here at the moment.

Now, today we're going to break the sermon into two parts - sorry Andy, I'm mucking up your Bible arrangement here I need more space - we're gonna, we're gonna split the sermon into two parts so, when I stop speaking, I haven't finished.

So, this is part one and then we'll move on to further parts of the service.

We've already said that today we're looking at a new book. New book, new year, the book of Colossians. So, I thought I would start to see what the brain fog is like at this time of year by asking a few questions. Now, I know what it's like I sit there with you when someone says that they're going to ask questions you're thinking 'Don't ask me!' You don't need to answer anything. Think about these in your own mind.

Before Advent, what was the name of the book of the Bible that we were studying? Okay, probably easy enough.

Next question - What was, what was the main thing that you felt that you learned from our study in the book of Malachi?

next question - If you met me out the front in the fresh air later on and I said 'Give me a summary of the book of Malachi' How do you think you would go?

I put some of those questions to myself this week as I was getting ready to look at the book of Colossians and I thought it was a bit of a challenge to be honest, but new year, new book, new series, I want to throw that challenge back at you, and I want to, I want you, in your mind's eye, to think a month ahead, or two months ahead, once we're well through the study of the book of Colossians, and I want you to picture being able to talk to me and summarize the book of Colossians. You think you could do that? Do I think I could do that?

I take great inspiration from listening to other people talking about their spiritual disciplines. For example, taking our Minister Scott. Last year Scott got us all or offered a Bible reading plan, he followed it himself, he built it into the rhythm of the church, he allowed us to make questions, he put on some sessions about it, and he lived it through himself.

Think of what else Scott's been doing while he's been here. He got us into a series on prayer and he tried to get us to pray, to practice prayer, to think about different ways of praying, he even videoed himself walking around the streets praying. Wonderful, wonderful, spiritual discipline. Disciplines for us to learn.

Could you bring up the screen please, yeah next, next slide.

This is my friend Sundeep. Judith I think you've been to Sundeep's place with me. Sundeep, like me, is an adopted son of Scotland. Sundeep's from India and there's something kind of mystical about Sundeep. He tells me that he flips a coin every new year and decides whether to grow a beard or not and then when he grows it for that year he doesn't cut it and I've seen it in about October, it's quite impressive, it has to be said, but Sundeep has a spiritual discipline that I just love.

He saturates himself in the Bible. He saturates himself in the Bible. Now, I'm sure you've got a picture of someone who's just reading and reading and reading and reading and reading, and not doing anything else. Sundeep doesn't do that. Sundeep from India believes that the scriptures were written to be heard and so Sundeep saturates himself in listening to the Bible and he puts the Bible on around the house. He's got one of those audios, a good one is Youvision for example, and he plays it and he plays it and he plays it. So, he plays the Bible in the kitchen. He plays the Bible when he's in the car. Apparently puts his

headphones on and he plays the Bible when he goes to sleep at night. He saturates himself in the Bible. I wonder what that would look like if we did something similar?

Next picture please.

I wonder if anybody can tell me who these two chaps are? The guy on the left, not too difficult, I don't think, Any ideas? Justin Welby. Does anybody know who the guy on the right is?

That man's name is Dick Lucas. Dick Lucas is a retired minister in London. He's 96 years old and Dick Lucas has a practice, every year he picks out one book of the Bible and he studies it for the whole year. That's a Bible study.

Next slide.

I've been preparing for today. I've looked at one of Dick Lucas's commentaries on Colossians because he's actually, you'd miss him in the street, this is what someone has said of him 'Lucas is the author of a number of evangelical books and commentaries with John Stott, J.J. Packer and others. Lucas was a key figure in shaping the conservative evangelical movement in the United Kingdom during the 20th century.' That man was a key mover in our church in the 20th century the great thing is he's still going and he's still producing work and he's still studying the Bible. I love, that I love that spiritual discipline. What would it look like if we, as a church, really got serious with the Bible and started studying it at that depth? What would it look like?

Sundeep saturates himself in the Bible. Lucas saturates himself in the Bible. As we'll see when we go on to look further in Colossians, Paul also saturated the Colossians with the truth of the Gospel.

Right my voice is starting to tire so I think we should break.

PART 2

Almighty God, now, as we open up Your Word and see what you have to say, may You breathe upon it, May anything that comes from me that's not of You be just cast away like chaff but may Your truths go deep down inside as we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Right, time to do some scene setting. The book of Colossians, well, in fact, I should stop just there, it's not a book, it's a letter. It's a letter from Paul and Timothy. Paul is in prison. We know that because he says as much at the very end of the letter but if you go through the book of Acts you can trace through just exactly where Paul went and what he did.

Paul's story is in the second half of the book of Acts and you'll see that he winds up in prison quite often and there's one reason for that; Paul consistently preaches the resurrection, he preaches the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. He consistently gets into trouble with his own ethnic group, the Jews. He consistently gets in trouble with every other ethnic group in the Roman empire, the Gentiles. And, basically, well he just offends people.

Actually, that's not quite true. The message that he brings is what offends people. You'll see it again and again as you read through, he starts riots in Ephesus - not himself, but a riot flows from it - there's death, there's a plot to kill him when he's in Jerusalem. He eventually, he was probably executed in Rome. He's just a troublemaker. He offends people. His message offends people. And in a Scotland of 2022, we have to realize that the message of the Gospel is offensive.

So, what's this letter about? Paul, writing in prison, dispatches a letter to this little group of Christians in Colossae. Now, at the time, it's probably maybe 30 years after Jesus has been killed and the resurrection of Jesus, so the Lord Jesus Christ is in everybody's living memory, and although Paul's never been to Colossae, he writes this letter to encourage people, as Billy read to us, he writes and he says 'Look you're doing great.' Massive encouragement, massive encouragement to the small group of Christians in

Colossae but it's not just some random letter of encouragement. You see, Paul's been told that there's something going on in this church that is not good and he wants to nip it in the bud.

You see, they've got muddled like my duck on a bike. They've got muddled by all sorts of things. Now, in this letter it's not explicit what it is that they've got themselves confused about, and I think it's actually very interesting that Paul, on this occasion, does not explicitly set out what the problem is. You see, anybody who's read anything about Saint Paul and about his letters, will know that he was really, really good at calling things out. He was really good at calling things out. I mean, let me put it this way, he was a little bit more Glasgow than Edinburgh, and plenty of the letters in the Bible, Paul does exactly that. At one stage Peter really cops it. If you ever read the book of Galatians or the end of Romans and you'll read of the accounts where Paul, well, let's just say he had a real nose for sniffing out heresy. So, although something really serious is going on in this little church, Paul's decided not to confront it up front. Instead, he's tried a different strategy, Saturation, saturation. I talked about Sundeeep and how he's saturated in the Bible, well, Paul decides that he would saturate the Colossians with Jesus, he'd saturate them with Jesus' supremacy, His sovereignty, His sacrifice.

It's as if he's decided that whatever it was that was undermining these Christians, they just needed more Jesus. Jesus front and center. And you know, to be honest, initially it's all a bit over the top. You have a look go home during the week and read the first two chapters of Colossians. I hesitate to say it but, Paul's a bit of a fanatic. But there's a reason for it. You see, they were getting conned, they were getting distracted, and they were getting confused by conflicting messages. You see, on the one hand there are all sorts of pressures to conform to tradition, probably Jewish traditions, and then, on the other hand, there were all sorts of weird philosophies coming on. They had nothing whatsoever to do with the Gospel.

Now, you might find this odd, but when I was a brand-new university student about 100 years ago I put this verse up from Colossians 2 on my bedroom wall. Colossians 2:8 'See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of the world rather than Christ.' You see, one of the papers I was studying was philosophy and I knew that that could be a real danger, that the things of the world could really take me over. How on earth at that age I'd grip that I don't know, but I must have found that verse in the Bible and put it up there. And that was Paul was trying to point out to these guys because they were like my crazy duck on the bike, they were all over the place, and people were throwing in all sorts of things that were extra to the Bible, extra to the truth, extra to the truth of the Gospel. And you know, I think we get that today, I think we get that.

There's a wee phrase I've heard more and more it goes something like this:

'Well, I don't know what to think anymore' 'I don't know what to think anymore' Just look around us. There's moves afoot again to change the law to permit assisted dying. Now, there's some in the church that's saying that's okay, and there's others in the church that, it's not this church I'm talking, the church nationally, but there's others in the church that are calling it out as a great evil. Or, and I hesitate, but there's this business in our own denomination, an allowance for ministers to solemnize what the law of the land is calling same-sex marriage. Or there's this whole question of gender recognition and the massive confusion that that is causing our children, and all of us, as to what a man and a woman is. Political confusion but it's also dividing the church.

'Well, I just don't know what to think anymore. It's all a bit befuddling.'

Paul's solution at least with these new Christians in Colossae, is to help them get their thinking right to center the church on Jesus Christ, and the truth of the Gospel, and so he writes to impress upon them something that's become, frankly, unfashionable or at least it's a word that's become unfashionable these days.

You know that word is? Doctrine, doctrine. What we really believe. So, Paul sets out in the letter to say 'Here is what the Gospel is. This is what you believe. This is the work of the cross. Not only that, Epaphras got it right when he told you what it was.'

Now, I hope that as we get into this series we'll see that being explained more and more from the pulpit, as we see just what these intense words in the first two chapters of this book really, really are. It's hard to digest. You've got to take it slow. Paul is a fanatic but in those two chapters, like I said earlier on, if we really study God's word, if we really get to know those two chapters, it'll be a bit like when Ewan was balancing that broom; we'll be looking up and we won't be looking down.

Here's what Colossians 3:1 says - I was tempted to bring the broom up but I couldn't trust myself it would drop from here, but imagine I've got the broom – 'Since then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above not on earthly things for you died and your life is now hidden with Christ and God when Christ who, is your life, appears then you will also appear with him in glory.' I think that's marvelous!

Time's running out for me and I haven't actually got to the part in the Bible reading that Billy gave to us, so, I've probably got seven or eight minutes maybe. Let's bring up Colossians 3:1-4 if we could Neil. Thank you very much.

This is perhaps, the broom and the duck are silly, silly illustrations but Paul's letter is a massive encouragement to look, to look up, but here in verses 3 and 4 he's giving them a massive encouragement and he's saying 'I've heard about you, I've heard about you, we've all heard about you, we've heard about you even though we don't know you, and we're praying for you. We thank God for you because we've heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints.'

Now, sometimes it's hard to pray but I found this verse really, really encouraging. Sometimes it's hard to know how to start to pray. Sometimes we can feel dry and aren't in the mood to pray, or we're just not motivated. Go to this verse. Paul just starts by saying thank-you, thank-you God, thank-you God for the Colossians. Thank-you God for the people at Brightons, thank-you God for the people in Falkirk, thank-you God for the people we know and such and such. That's a really, really easy way to get into prayer.

But what is Paul giving thanks for? Verse 5 - it's the faith and the love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven, and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the Gospel that has come to you. God's grace in all its truth faith and love from hope. Now, faith, hope, faith, love and hope are big themes throughout the New Testament and we'll get into that further as we're doing this study. But I wonder, I wonder about this for a moment? Are there reports from Brightons about their faith and their love so that other Christians are praying for them and thanking God for their faith and love? I wonder, I wonder if people think upon us and pray and thank God for that? It's a question for us to ponder isn't it? Now, I'm putting that challenge down. I want to make sure that there's not something that's lost from this part of the passage and this is what I will finish on. Their faith and their love is founded on something. The Word says that it springs up from something. It springs up from hope. Well, that's not true. It springs up from the hope, the hope and again hope is a massive theme in this book a massive theme of Paul's.

I hope that others preaching this service, this series will go back and get into that some more but let me just let me just touch on hope for a moment. Hope is one of those words that you actually hear a lot at new year.

'Well, I hope 2022 is a bit better than 2021.'

'Well, I hope we can, I hope it snows so that we can go sledging.' I think this is not forecast.

'I hope Falkirk win the league.'

Can I say that that's hopeless?

Setting your sights on the unknown like Covid 19, I mean we do hope that the vaccine program, the vaccine program is going to put paid to the pandemic and we do hope that it's going to go away, but that

is not a Christian hope, that's just wishful thinking. It's like taking a lottery ticket. Christian hope is something so much different and so much deeper and again that's what Paul is trying to teach these young Christians in Colossae. Your hope is in something which is certain. If we had time I would take you into Romans 8 where Paul unfolds what hope means. That hope is a certainty. Hope is seeing something that is certain, that we do not see now but that we know Christian hope is certain.

It's not like the hopelessness of today. It's not like my crazy duck that seems to be a metaphor of the world that we're in, where we're going around in circles and our heads are spinning and our eyes are turning, and it's just hope less. There's a bumper sticker that you see on the back of cars in New Zealand. It only came to mind this morning when I was thinking about this and the bumper sticker says 'He who dies with the most toys, wins.'

How wrong is that! How wrong is that.

Think of the broom, think of the magnificent Ewan Norton and his broom trick, and think of my crazy duck. We don't want to be like these Colossians. We want to learn from this. We want to learn from this book. We want to balance the broom.

May that be so as we go forward into this year. May that be so.

Isaac Watts wrote a magnificent, magnificent hymn Amazing Grace. I might have that wrong, it might be John Newton. Actually it was John Newton the slave owner. Amazing Grace. And that's the amazing grace that Paul talks about and that's the amazing grace that we're going to sing now. Amazing, Amazing Grace.