

# Coming in First Place – the preeminence of Jesus Christ

“... so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything”(Colossians 1:18).

## **Coming in First Place – The Book of Colossians**

### **Colossians 1:28-29**

#### **What Are You Talking About?**

**28 We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. 29 For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.**

Believe it or not, we have actually made it to the end of Colossians chapter one. I know it has been a bit of a long journey. We have concentrated and focused our attention on two important matters, matters that ought to be impacting our lives daily. The most recent of those matters is that of the church. In verses 24-25 we looked at Paul's passion and commitment to the church, the body of Christ, to people like you and me who are simply wanting to know more about Christ and how to live for Christ. To that end we noted that Paul's passion is not to be isolated or thought of as belonging only to him or to the pastors or to some elite group of Christians. Paul's passion, love and commitment to the church is to be the passion of every true believer and to that end we rabbit-trailed into 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12 seeing that each and every one of us who is in Christ has also been gifted by God to contribute to the well-being of the congregation.

In addition to this matter of the church, we have noted the emphasis of Paul upon the Gospel. Over the past several weeks I have sought to give you multiple definitions and descriptions of the gospel even as we have seen Paul do so in this opening chapter. Ultimately, the gospel is the good news of the greatness, glory and grace of our God, who by His will and through our Lord Jesus Christ's death on the cross for our sins and by His life being made our life by faith, has qualified us (1:12) to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light (that is we look forward to heaven rather than hell); and He has rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom (the reign and rule) of His beloved Son. I have sought to both remind you and encourage you that this good news is not that God makes us neutral by the cross of Christ. God does not simply cancel our sin and then set us on a right path whereby we now try to make it on our own. Rather, the good news is that we who have no means to meriting or making it to heaven on our own; we who have no means of making ourselves fit or ready for heaven, have been given everything necessary by Jesus Christ who not only died for us, but also determined to live in us; Christ in us the hope of glory! This is the gospel; the word of truth (v. 5); the grace of God in truth (v. 6); the word of God (v. 25); and a former mystery to those who believe (v. 26-27).

Because of this gospel we have faith in Christ, love for all the saints, and the hope of heaven. Because of this gospel, this good news of the work of Christ, we have been qualified for a glorious inheritance (v. 12); rescued from the domain of darkness; and transferred to the kingdom of His beloved Son (v. 13). The work of the gospel has brought us redemption – which is the forgiveness of sin (v. 14). As we realize all this good news accomplished by Jesus for us, we are to make it our ambition that He would come to have first place in everything in our lives (v. 18) for he has taken each of us who has believed, each of us who was formerly alienated, hostile in mind and engaged in evil deeds, deserving the full wrath or punishment of God and by submitting and substituting Himself in our place, has secured our peace with God (v. 21-22).

This is a chapter about the gospel. Paul is emphasizing, pushing, reiterating over and over the glorious gospel of Christ. And all this got me thinking as we come to the end of the chapter; what is it that we are talking about? Paul is consumed with the gospel. And lest you think that he had nothing better to do, remember that Paul, this Hebrew of Hebrews who was on the fast track to a rather

# Coming in First Place ~ the preeminence of Jesus Christ

“... so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything”(Colossians 1:18).

glorious position as the teacher of Israel, gave up that security to become a traveling tent-making missionary. But whether making tents, or traveling cross country, or worshipping in a synagogue, there was one subject, constantly on his lips, the subject of the Gospel and most specifically the person who Himself is the Gospel, the Lord Jesus Christ.

As we come to the conclusion of chapter one, I find Paul making some remarkable statements that instantly pull his readers into his own ministry. The statements of Colossians 1:28-29 are designed to draw us in to having the same passion as Paul for both the gospel and the church. This is what we ought to be talking about. What we are about to see is the very “heart” of the believer who is following after Christ. We must ask ourselves, are these things true of me? These are the things we are called to, so let us pray to God and make every effort to see these things be true of us.

But you might be asking, “what things are you talking about, Pastor?” What are these things that we are called to? May I submit to you that in verses 28-29 we see the mission to which we are called, the means by which to accomplish the mission and the motivation with which to do the mission. These three insights from Paul are to be our own as well. So let us look at these three insights.

## I. What is our mission? (1:28a)

*We proclaim Him...*

Don't you like it when things are simple? There is nothing easier than getting simple, straight-forward directions and following them. There is nothing more frustration than having difficult, hard to understand directions. I remember once being on the cell phone with a friend who had given me directions to his home. I knew I was in trouble as he gave landmarks rather than street names and said things like, “You will be heading kinda north and around for a while...” Sure enough, I got myself lost and started to back track, calling my friend once again, who gave some more directions. After a while, I finally made it, but there was nothing simple about it.

But our text is not complex. Paul, after extolling the virtues of passionately serving the church and living out the gospel, this mystery he calls it, begins verse 28 with three simple words. . . **“we proclaim Him...”** Beloved these are simple and profound words. Remember that we just learned how God has revealed to His saints the mystery of the gospel, that is the very presence of God living within us; a total transformation of life from the inside out. When Paul used the word mystery, he was using a word that many of the false religions around these Colossians also used to describe hidden truth that could only be learn as you went through certain rites or initiations, delving deeper and deeper into the religions. There were in these “mystery” religions truths that only those who had proven themselves worthy were able to hear and to know. We have mystery religions around us today. Free-masonry with all of its levels and rites and even Mormonism with its rituals at their temple meant only for the most committed.

But for Paul, there was no mystery for any of the saints. God has willed to make known His truth to each of His holy ones, regardless of age, gender, social upbringing or the like. And now, very skillfully, Paul makes this statement... “we proclaim Him”. We do not hide Christ, nor in the knowledge of Christ to be reserved for a select few. We proclaim Him. Let us notice a few things about this statement.

First, notice that Paul shifts from himself, using the first person singular in verses 24 and 25 to using the first person plural. He does not say, “I proclaim Him...” but “we – corporately, as the body, proclaim Him.”

Second, notice the mission itself; the very activity we are to be engaged in. The mission is that of proclamation. The word “proclaim” means to herald or announce. In its varied uses in the New

## Coming in First Place – the preeminence of Jesus Christ

“... so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything”(Colossians 1:18).

Testament it can mean to preach, teach, declare, show forth, show off, make known, reveal, and explain. It is a very encompassing word. Those who know the mystery of Christ in you the hope of glory are not to hide it, but make it known. This word “proclaim” is used throughout the book of Acts to speak of making known Jesus Christ and salvation. In Acts 4:1-2 we read,

**1 As they [Peter and John] were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to them, 2 being greatly disturbed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.**

A part of the true proclamation of Jesus is to include His death and resurrection. We see this again in Acts 17:2-3;

**2 And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, 3 explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ."**

A part of the true proclamation of Jesus is to include the person and will of God. While Paul was in Athens, on Mars Hill speaking to the philosophers, he said in Acts 17:22-23

**22 So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects. 23 "For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you.**

Paul was announcing to them, teaching them, revealing to them the true God. There are many examples that to proclaim means to announce truths about God and the work of Christ. And now, our mission, our call, our duty as presented by Paul is that we proclaim Him. And so I ask you, what are you talking about? What do you regularly announce, make known and reveal to others. Paul says we are to proclaim Him; that is Jesus; His life, His death, His resurrection and faith in Him. Is Jesus truly the subject of your song as you drive to work, as you wash the dishes, as you do your homework or as you run your errands? Let me ask you this way, has Jesus so come to have first place in everything in your life that He is the chief subject of your thoughts and conversations?

Okay, I know...you think I am over-reaching? Our lives are busy, we work with unbelievers with whom we must maintain some sort of workable situation. We can't rock the boat, risk our livelihood or ruin our reputations. And, well, Paul had it different; our situations and circumstances are not like Paul's and therefore we conclude that we are exempt from such a mission of proclaiming Christ. Yet I can't get away from the truth that everywhere we are called to be sold out to Christ. Jesus said in Matthew 28:19, "Go therefore [literally, in your going, that is in your doing whatever it is you do] make disciples [learners of Jesus]. You work with unbelievers, fine, pray to God and work in such way as to make learners of Jesus Christ. You are at home with the kids, fine, pray to God and work in such a way as to make them learners of Jesus Christ. You are out talking to people all day long about business, deadlines and projects, fine, pray to God and work in such a way as to make them learners of Jesus Christ. This doesn't mean you don't talk about your business, or take the time to do the laundry or to finish your homework, it just means that you see these not as an end unto

# Coming in First Place – the preeminence of Jesus Christ

“... so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything”(Colossians 1:18).

themselves, but rather as a means by which to proclaim Him. We need to learn to proclaim Jesus in everything we do. Jesus said the same in principle in Matthew 5:13 where we read;

***You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men.***

Matthew Henry, the great Puritan preacher and commentator of the Bible noted of this verse stating,

*“You are the salt of the earth. What great blessings they are to the world. Mankind, lying in ignorance and wickedness, were a vast heap of unsavory stuff, ready to putrefy; but Christ sent forth His disciples, by their lives and doctrines, to season it with knowledge and grace, and so to render it acceptable to God, to the angels and to all that relish divine things. How must they expect to be disposed of. They must not be laid on a heap, must not continue always together at Jerusalem, but must be scattered as salt upon the mean, here a grain and there a grain; as the Levites were dispersed in Israel, that, wherever they live, they may communicate their savor.”*

Beloved, whatever we do, wherever we go, our mission is to proclaim Him. But how should we proclaim Him? Does the Scripture give us any insight into the means by which we are to proclaim Christ? Paul identifies two keys ways.

## II. **What are the means for the mission? (1:28b)**

*...admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom*

Paul gives two means by which we are to proclaim Jesus. These two ways may include other things, but these two ways must not ever be excluded. In a day when so many churches are moving away from these two means in favor of drama or movie clips or a variety of other things, let us remember that God’s way is always the best way.

The first means Paul gives by which we are to proclaim Jesus is by way of “admonishing every man.” Let me comment on this three time repeated phrase of “every man”. I take this emphasis to mean that Paul does not want anyone to think, any believer to think that the knowledge of Christ is to be hidden or veiled in anyway from people. Jesus is to be made know. No one has to prove themselves worthy to hear about Jesus, rather every man with whom we have the opportunity is to hear the proclamation of Christ.

The verb, “admonishing” is a rich word in meaning. It literally means, “to put into mind”; that is to teach, counsel or remind someone of something, particularly by way of caution. Any parent who has teens driving practices his admonishing. We say, “Be careful as you drive; and its not because we are concerned about your driving but because there are a lot of reckless drivers out there.” Come on, I mean yes, there are a lot of reckless drivers out there, but we are also wanting our kids to pay attention, not lose focus and therefore to do something foolish while driving. When we say, “Be careful!” we are putting it into their minds to be cautious.

The word admonishing can speak of reproving, correction or counseling as well. There is a kind of Biblical Counseling called “nouthetic” counseling. The word “nouthetic” is the Greek word we have in our text for admonishing. It means to counsel, directed and lead someone according to God’s principles. Very specifically this verb speaks of *lovingly confronting people out of deep concern in order to help them make those changes that God requires.*

And notice in our text who is to be involved in such a ministry? Each one of us as we proclaim Him. Paul says the same thing to the saints in Rome in Romans 15:14

# Coming in First Place – the preeminence of Jesus Christ

“... so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything”(Colossians 1:18).

***And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another.***

We are called to be filled with goodness and the knowledge of God so that we might admonish, counsel, direct, one another as well as every man in what is needful to live right before God. It means to come along side of people and share with them such truths as are needed to be right with God. This is your mission and the means by which to accomplish that mission.

The second means by which we proclaim Jesus is by “teaching every man.” I love this word teaching. It is the Greek word “didasko” – meaning to teach. We get the word didactic which means to instruct others by means of verbal teaching. In short, this word means to teach by lecture, by systematically teaching truth. This word is used to describe the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 5:1-2 (Matthew 7:28-29):

***1 When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him. 2 He opened His mouth and began to teach [lecture] them, saying...***

In a time when so many churches are abandoning the public preaching, the systematic teaching of the word of God by lecture, by someone standing up and laying forth truth, let us never forget that this is God’s stated means by which to proclaim Christ. But don’t let this intimidate you. To be sure, not everyone is called to be a preacher, but everyone is to be ready to give a lecture, an account of who Jesus is. Peter said it this way in 1 Peter 3:15:

***...but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;***

As we are giving our account we will be teaching anyone who asks us, every man who wants to know why we believe in and love Jesus Christ. Are you preparing yourself to be such a teacher? Are you being faithful in the word to know so that you can share it? This is the means by which we are to proclaim Jesus. And notice that this is to be done how, “with all wisdom” – The word wisdom means the ability to apply knowledge in a given situation. We are to know how to admonish and to teach every man. We are to know our situation, to know our audience. Obviously I cannot stand up and preach in the middle of a restaurant. I would mostly likely embarrass those whom I am talking to and also thrown out of the place. So I need to apply wisdom to what is the best way to admonish and teach a person or persons in a given situation.

### III. **What is the motivation for the mission? (1:28c-29)**

*so that we may present every man complete in Christ. 29 For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.*

This brings us to our final consideration, what is the motivation for this mission of proclaiming Jesus? I see two motivations, one is corporate, one is broad and far reaching and the second is personal and specific.

The first motivation for proclaiming Jesus is stated clearly enough at the end of verse 28, “**so that we may present every man complete in Christ.**” I love this statement, it is to be our motivation, our desire, and our goal to see every man complete, full, immersed in the knowledge of

## Coming in First Place – the preeminence of Jesus Christ

“... so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything”(Colossians 1:18).

Christ. There is no one to be left out. While we read above that how a person responds to the revealed truth of the gospel is up to God as He wills to make it known, the communication of that truth is not to be selective on our part. We are not to pick and choose who we might admonish, who we might warn and caution with regard to how one is to live before God. We are not to hold back any knowledge, any teaching concerning Christ. We are to lay it out there with the prayer and desire that God would use it in the lives of those who hear it to come to the full and saving knowledge of Christ. We are to proclaim Christ until we are blue in the face, desiring that the people we are speaking to would come to know Him. This is our corporate desire.

And it is not limited to speaking to unbelievers, for our text actually implies more of an admonishing and teaching of the saints. As we come to church Sunday after Sunday, do you desire to be used by God to admonish and teach other believers to come to a greater knowledge and love for Christ? Is it your desire to see everyone in this room complete, full, mature in Christ? Is it? Do you know of any reason why someone in this room might not be moving toward this fullness of Christ? Are you aware of any sins, habits, lack of participation with other believers, any issues that are hindering another believer’s walk – if so, you are called to admonish. If not, you are called to teach, to make known what you know about Christ to others to encourage them and to present them, offer them to God as complete in Christ. That sounds like work, but it sounds like great work. This is our corporate reasonability and motivation; to see this body complete, full, mature in Christ.

But notice in verse 29 that Paul slips back into his own personal language. He says, ***For this purpose [this goal] also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.*** Paul’s personal motivation is to be a working vessel in the hands of might God. Why does Paul switch from the corporate to the personal here? I believe its because it is one thing to call a group to proclaim Christ, but Paul cannot make anyone personally commit to that. Such a commitment is a personal commitment made by each one of us as we look to God. So, Paul says, “I labor,” that is - I work and continue to work. The idea behind the word labor is to work to the point of exhaustion. Paul was committed to weary himself with the means and the goal of the mission. Have you ever worked on something to the point of exhaustion? Have you stayed and worked long hours on a project for work? Have you studied all night for a test? Have you worked and worked and worked to keep up with the kids? That’s the labor Paul speaks of here, only it is a continual working to the point of exhaustion for the goal of seeing the church complete in Christ. When was the last time you did that? Wow!

But Paul is not done revealing his own commitment. Not only does he labor, but he tells us how he labors, ***“striving”*** – the word is *agonizomai* in the Greek. If that sounds like agonizing it is because it is from this word that we get our word to agonize. The idea here is that Paul’s labors, which are already to the point of exhaustion, are a constant struggle as if one is competing as an athlete for the prize. Being from San Diego, I watched a lot of Chargers football. I don’t often remember much about great plays and I can’t tell you who won the Superbowl even two years ago, but I remember a playoff game in 1982. The game was against the Miami Dolphins and became known in football circles as “The Epic in Miami”. The standout player was the Chargers Tight end, Kellen Winslow, who caught a playoff record 13 passes for 166 yards and a touchdown; blocked a potential game winning field goal by Miami with just seconds remaining to send the game to overtime. But what made Winslow’s performance all the more memorable was that fact during the game he was treated for a pinched nerve in his shoulder, dehydration, severe cramps, and received three stitches in his lower lip. After the game, a picture of Winslow being helped off the field by his teammates became an enduring image in NFL lore. Winslow labored and agonized in his labor to win that game. What lengths are we going to see every man complete in Christ and to proclaim Jesus?

---

## Coming in First Place – the preeminence of Jesus Christ

*“... so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything”(Colossians 1:18).*

Kellen Winslow gave it everything he had and Paul is saying the same about his own commitment to the church and the gospel. Can you say, “I will give everything I’ve got to the church and the gospel?” Paul is seeking to provide us an inspiring example to follow.

But notice that Paul refuses to take any personal credit for his commitment. He will labor; he will agonize, but it is never enough for a man to work and labor for God in his own strength and abilities. And so Paul reminds his readers to never forget that his own labors, and therefore our labors as well, are to be according to His power; that is God’s energy or working. Paul says it is this power that mightily, that is with all power, with *dunamis*, that is dynamite; with such incredible power doing what; it “works” – it is my source of power, strength and energy, within me. Kellen Winslow did an awful lot in his own power, but even then he needed the stitches, the doctors, the water boy, lots of outside help and encouragement to continue on. Beloved, if we are in Christ, we are to proclaim Him, He is to be what we are talking about to believers and unbelievers. We need to be working towards and willing to admonish and teach every man, desiring for all to be complete in Christ. Will you renew your commitment to labor and strive after such a goal. You’ve been called to the mission to proclaim Him? Will you do it? How will do it? Remember that it begins with being humble before God and saying, “Here I am Lord, send me! Strengthen me for the task Lord! Empower me for your service! And be glorified in my life and in the lives of those You choose to make know the mystery of the gospel, the power and presence of Christ in you, the hope of glory! What are you talking about? I pray it be the proclamation of Christ!

*Soli Deo Gloria*

---

**Copyright © 2009 Edward K. Godfrey.** *This message is the sole property of the copyright holder and may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this message must contain the above copyright notice. This message may not be copied in part (except for small quotations used with citation of source), edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications,*

**Coming in First Place – the preeminence of Jesus Christ – the Book of Colossians**  
**December 6, 2009**

# † Coming in First Place ~ the preeminence of Jesus Christ

"... so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything"(Colossians 1:18).

*recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of the copyright holder. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Edward K. Godfrey, Pastor, Hope Community Bible Church, and 2300 South 13<sup>th</sup> Street, Rogers, AR 72758.*