**Colossians 1:21-23**  **Scott MALCOLM**

We are in Colossae. A small town in what is now modern Turkey. It has been a significant place, an important trading centre in the Roman Empire, but our glory has long since faded. People from many places have settled and passed through over the years, with their different ideas and beliefs, we are a mixed bunch.

We are a church founded by one of Paul’s fellow workers in the gospel, Epaphras. We have been meeting together for about 10-15 years, we have some established and some new believers, Jewish Christians and Gentile converts.

We have a problem. And it’s been bothering us for a while. There is a lot of dissension in our congregation. People are unhappy with the leadership and where the church is going. But this unhappiness isn’t ordinary. It is not; we don’t like the worship, we don’t sing enough hymns, the preaching is too long. The heating is not working. It’s not dissension about the use of the church buildings or lack of money.

It's quarrelling about the very core of the faith. It’s about the place of Jesus in the church that is being argued over. Some people think Jesus is not who Epaphras preached him to be. He is not the Messiah, the Son of God, the one in whom salvation is to be found. Others think he is.

We have appealed to Epaphras and the group Epaphras belongs too, for help. And we are working our way through their reply.

So far, they have assured us of their prayer, they have told us that they love us, that God loves us, that “we have been rescued from the power of darkness and transferred in to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

And that any ideas that take away from the place of Jesus in the church’s faith are not to be given any space at all.

We have then read one of the highest statements of Christology in the New Testament, as the writer of our reply states very clearly … that nothing and no one is above Jesus, the Lord of all Creation. The image of the invisible God. That in him and for him all things were created. And that in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. It is through him that God reconciled to himself, all things, whether on earth or in heaven by making peace through the blood of his cross.

So, we have been told that we are loved. That we have been rescued. That we are redeemed and forgiven. We have been told that all this has happened in and through the one some have said, is not worthy. Is not who Epaphras preached him to be. Is not who the gospel says he is.

Our reply so far has been very clear. Whatever our issues are, arguments about reducing the place of Jesus are simply not to be listened too.

The next part of the reply moves away from those who are causing trouble, and centres directly on us. Those who have written the letter.

We are reminded of where we came from. That it wasn’t long ago that we weren’t members of the church at all, that we didn’t follow after Jesus, and that our ways were not always in tune with his. That we were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds. These evil deeds are not what we might think, but simply living outside the bounds of God’s people, outside the love shown to us in Jesus, the all in all.

This happens a lot in New Testament letters. Christians are reminded of where they come from, and what Jesus has done for them. There is an appeal and motivation in this, that says, when we have a problem, when there is dissension in the church, when there is an issue, we are struggling with, let’s remember where we came from. Let’s remember what Jesus has done for us, and let’s allow that to influence how we respond. How we treat one another and others.

Let’s respond with gratitude and grace, with openness and warmness, especially to outsiders. Let’s remember all we have been given and give to others. Let’s not be selfish. Let’s put others first.

It is the apostolic gospel that all our actions as Christian people are based in our understanding of who Jesus is, and what has been done in and through him.

…

“This is the hope promised by the gospel, which has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven. I, Paul, became a servant of **THIS** gospel.”

A gospel … for everyone!

A gospel … unashamedly Christ centred.

Amen.