

Colossians

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Preacher: Delves, Stanley (1897-1978)

[0 : 00] The first chapter of the epistle to the Colossians, verse 15, who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature.

It is very noticeable that each of the epistles seems to have some outstanding theme, some subject that the writer was more especially led to set for.

And in this epistle to the Colossians is no question as to what it was.

It was the person of Jesus Christ. That is the chief theme of this epistle.

And now we have come to it. The apostle, after opening the epistle with those various expressions that we have considered, now comes to deal with that which was especially upon his mind.

[1 : 16] And to all who are spiritually minded and can appreciate these things, the teaching concerning the person of Jesus Christ is of the greatest importance to us and profit to us as we are enabled to receive it.

My friends, we want to know more about Jesus Christ. And we want to know Jesus Christ himself more.

I believe that many of us have sufficient knowledge of Jesus Christ as that our hearts have been directed to believe in his precious name.

We believe he is the Son of God. We believe he is the Savior of sinners. We believe that he has accomplished a righteousness.

We believe that he has offered a sacrifice for sin. We believe that he died for our sins according to the scriptures. That he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.

[2 : 41] That he ascended into heaven. That he is now at the right hand of the throne of God. Now, I hope that this we have been brought to believe.

That there is a great deal more that it were profitable for us to understand and appreciate and feel concerning the Lord Jesus Christ.

And there are two ways whereby we may, if we are so favored, come to know more of Jesus Christ.

And if we neglect these ways, we never shall come to know more of Jesus Christ. And what we do know of him will get more dim in our view and our feelings.

For, remember, we must either grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, or decline in grace or decline in grace or decline in grace or decline in grace and lose almost what little we do already know.

[3 : 56] Now, I was saying, how then, must we, if we are so favored, grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ?

Well, these two ways may be. First, by a careful and prayerful and thoughtful consideration of those scriptures that set him forth to us.

For, these scriptures are not just given to us to read over in a formal way, but to instruct us concerning Jesus Christ.

And secondly, we do need essentially that the Holy Spirit should take of those things of Jesus Christ that are set before us in the Word, and enlighten their understandings in them, and convey their truth into our hearts.

Now, that's the way to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To neglect the scriptures is to lose what we have and gain nothing.

[5 : 25] Now, here is a scripture expressed to the point concerning Jesus Christ. It is written that he is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature.

The apostle had already written something concerning him, that he has delivered us from the power of darkness, translated us into his blessed kingdom, that he has redeemed us with his blood, and that through him we have the forgiveness of sins.

These are blessings that come to us through Jesus Christ. Now the apostle comes to speak more of Jesus Christ himself.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature. Now, you will very likely have it in your minds that this is a very profound text.

And so it is. And I don't think I've ever ventured to speak on it before, and I've never heard anyone else venture upon it. But then, as I've said before, my way of going through a chapter means that these texts just can't be slipped over.

[6 : 59] Possibly, if I were looking through the scripture for the text, I used to say, well, I must leave that. I don't think I can venture on that. But you see, I don't feel I can leave it.

I have to pray, and pray, and seek the Lord to guide me into its meaning. You may think then, quite reasonably, that to speak on this text, I must needs preach a very profound discourse.

Now, actually, I'm hoping to preach a very simple one. So much so, that it might possibly seem to some that what I'm setting forth this morning is comparatively elementary.

But I have in my mind, especially this morning, the consideration of those of our young people who might have thoughts and feelings about spiritual truths, and would appreciate a word especially directed to their state of mind.

And I'm considering myself, even though I'm preaching, on a very profound text, speaking more particularly to younger minds.

[8 : 43] And coming at once to the subject, I will only take the first part of the verse of this morning, who is the image of the invisible God, I want to speak first about the invisible God himself.

And then to endeavor to show you how Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God. God. Now, it becomes me to speak, and it becomes you to listen with the greatest reverence with regard to the name and nature and being of God.

That is the most holy and the most sublime subject that we could speak about or hear about. God. And God forbid that I should speak of him in any other spirit than reverence and humility of mind and soberness of thought and expression.

I would not be in haste this morning either to utter anything before God or to utter anything about God. Now, first, I would ask you to consider this, that everything in religion depends upon this one truth that there is a God.

See, if there's no God, there's nothing in religion. It's just a superstition. If there is a God, then religion, real religion, is the most real thing there is.

[10 : 45] If there's no God, why do we worship? If there's no God to worship, why do we pray? If there's no God to pray to.

And what is there to believe if there's no God to believe? But on the other hand, if there is a God, then religion is a real thing.

There's something to know, to believe, and to experience, and to possess. For if there is a God, to live and die without the knowledge of that, God is a deplorable thing.

And especially when you consider that the reason why men do not know God is because of their sin. It is not because there is nothing available to us to teach us about God.

It's because men just do not want to know about God. God. And therefore their ignorance of God is sin.

[12 : 00] It is sinful ignorance. They are willingly ignorant because they could know if they wanted to know. God. Now, I know you will say, probably, that there are very many people who don't believe there is a God.

Well, that's nothing fresh. There always have been. Back in the scriptural, back in the Selmist days, we read the fool has said in his heart, there is no God.

But, I think it's a question whether when people say they don't believe there is a God, whether they don't believe there is, or whether they don't want to believe there is.

You know, there's a great deal in the saying that the wish is father to the poor. and if people wish there wasn't a God, that's father to the thought that there isn't.

But all this is folly, isn't it? This is folly. Not to believe what one doesn't want to believe, irrespective of whether it's true or not.

[13 : 25] Now, if that isn't folly, what is? is. And, I'm disposed to feel that that is the explanation, very often, of people's unbelief in God, that they don't want to believe.

You say, why? Well, now you think, how many people who say they don't believe there is a God, have ever really, soberly, considered the evidence, and proof of his divine being?

Have they ever considered it? Have they ever thought that there have been thousands of people in every generation, and not ignorant people either, intelligent, highly intelligent, intellectual, discerning, and yet they believe there is a God?

Now, they must have had some reason to believe it, and what is even more to the point, there have been many who in a considerable part of their lives haven't believed there is a God, and yet have come most solemnly to believe there is.

Now, what's made the change in them? is because something has come upon their hearts and minds that has convinced them that that is true, that they haven't believed to be true, or professed not to have believed it.

[15 : 05] You consider how many people who say they don't believe there is a God have ever really considered whether there is or not. So what I feel is that they really don't want to believe it.

And the fact that they don't want to believe it is sufficient of itself to blind their minds to the proofs of it. You know, it's very, very hard for anyone to come to believe what they don't want to believe.

Very hard. And one of the effects of sin is that it turns people's hearts and minds against God.

That is the root evil of it. It turns men's hearts and minds against God. And when their heart and mind is turned against God, it's easy enough for them to say they don't believe there is a God.

And now another thing I would mention to you young people that have convinced me that people believe what they say they don't believe.

[16 : 19] Now, some people show, don't they, sometimes considerable irritation and anger about God if you mention that holy name to them.

It provokes their anger. But now think, why should people be angry? about a being that they don't believe exists? Why should they be angry?

If they don't believe that God exists? People are not angry about someone they don't believe exists? If you get to the bottom of it, I verily believe it will be found that people will believe more than they profess they do with regard to this matter.

But now we will leave that. For I want to speak about the invisible God. But let me first set before you from the other point of view the reasons why we and many, many more believe that there is an invisible God.

Now, one reason is and it is set before us in the scripture, the invisible things of him, that is of God, from the foundation of the world are seen by the things which are made, even his eternal power and Godhead.

[17 : 59] Now, to us, creation plainly proves a creator. And if anyone will rather believe that creation came into existence of itself, that such a wonderful, exceedingly wonderful creation, using that term, as it is, came into being of itself, without any higher mind, intelligence, and power, well, let them think so.

To me, it seems more reasonable to believe, that if you see a house, there was a builder, and an architect, than to believe that house came into existence by the law of gravitation, that drew so many bricks and stones together, and built them up into a house, you'll say, that's folly.

Of course, the law of gravitation couldn't do that. There must be a mastermind, a plan, an architect, a builder. Well, then, my friends, to me, it's just as foolish to suppose that some, some mysterious power like the law of gravitation brought all worlds into being, and brought us into being, and every living thing into being, without a mastermind behind it.

I would have soon believed a house was built without an architect, as a world made without a God. For the scripture says, every house is built by some man.

Well, of course it is. But he that built all things is God. And another thing, if you consider impartially how full of wonders creation is, how vast, how intricate, you may rightly draw the conclusion that the mind and power that brought all this into being is infinitely above all that was brought into being.

[20 : 34] It doesn't worry me if people say, well, the creation is so vast, the universe is so vast, it takes, I know not how many light years for the light of the stars to reach this world and so on, but all I see is very good, then God is greater than that.

Represent it all as being as great, as vast as you can. You're representing to me how great, how infinite God is that created it all.

more. And, if it is made so very wonderful how all these things operate and act together, all the more proof that the mind that controls is more wonderful still.

The invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen. Well, now, we believe then there is a God on that ground.

then secondly, we believe that there is a God because of the plain teaching of the Bible.

[21 : 50] Now, how does the Bible begin? In the beginning, God. And that's the theme of the Bible. Now, to us, the scriptures of the Bible, they are such a stamp and impression of truth, that what the scriptures teach we believe.

There's nothing fabulous about the scriptures. They're the stamp of truth. It's very difficult to just clarify that, but if you compare the scriptures with uninspired writings, if you can compare the scriptures of the Old and the New Testament, we'll say with the Apocrypha, it would be like comparing an article of gold with a piece of brass.

brass. Or, as I once had occasion to take some articles to a silversmith or a goldsmith or whatnot, to examine them, and he said, well, that's not gold, and that is, and I said, well, it all looks the same to me.

Well, he said, you can see it's different. You can see it's different. Well, now, when I compare uninspired writings with the scriptures, all I can say is I can see it's different.

I can see it's different. There's something about the scriptures that bears the unmistakable stamp of truth, and besides that, we must remember that the Lord Jesus Christ always referred to the scriptures as being an authority where the truth of God is concerned, and Jesus Christ, we believe, knew the very truth of God.

[24 : 10] He knew whether there was a God, because he was God in human nature. He taught that there was a God always, and he knew.

And if you say, well, how do we know that? We know that because he rose again from the dead. And my friends, I can believe any, I could believe anybody who rose again from the dead, and Jesus Christ rose again from the dead.

And there's another reason, and I won't stay longer on this, there is with many, many of us, an inward conviction in our hearts that God is, that there is a God.

It is just something we arrive at by a process of reasoning, although it's perfectly reasonable to believe that there's a God.

But it isn't that we come to it just like that. We feel, we have an inward conviction, a persuasion in our hearts that there is a God.

[25 : 32] And what is more, we believe that that very persuasion comes from God himself. We feel sure it does.

A real belief, a conviction in the heart, that there is a God, comes from God.

And, if God gives to anyone that inward conviction and persuasion and feelings, they'll believe that there's a God, if no one else did, they would.

Well, now, I won't stay longer on that this morning. You'll say, well, who then is God? God, my friends, young and old, God is the supreme being of all beings.

There are many beings, existences, living creatures of many grades and types and characters, from animals upwards to angels.

[26 : 51] beings. But God is the supreme being of all beings. We must always think of God as being the supreme being.

The supreme being that has given life and existence to everything that has a being at all. God is a supreme being, infinite, boundless, unlimited, holy and glorious.

He is God over all, superior to all. He is God over all, blessed forevermore.

and as God is blessed forevermore, so he is the only giver of that which can make us blessed forevermore.

Now, my text speaks of the invisible God. Now, God is invisible. As Jesus said, no man has ever seen God at any time.

[28 : 17] There are occasional appearances of God, but even so, those who saw those appearances never really saw God.

Only an appearance. For God is essentially invisible. invisible. Now, because God is invisible, that's no proof that he doesn't exist, because who is to say that nothing exists but what is visible?

For instance, let me put it to you in this very simple way. Now, can you see air? Can you see air?

You cannot see air, and yet we're surrounded with it, we're breathing it, this chapel is filled with it, but no one can see it.

Air is an invisible substance, yet it surrounds us. If anyone were to say, if they were foolish enough to say, they don't believe there is such a substance as air.

[29 : 33] We believe it's just a vacuum, everywhere is a vacuum, an empty vacuum. You'll say foolish, of course it isn't, it's filled with air, we're breathing it, we're continually breathing it.

Now, now my friends, God is as invisible as the air around us, as invisible as that. And that reminds me of what we read just now, and this is rather starting when you come to think about it.

The Apostle Paul said to those wise men, or would-be wise men at Athens, of God, that in him we live, and move, and have our being.

Well now, I was speaking about the air. Now, in the air we live, in the air we move, and in the air we have our being. And God surrounds us, in him we live, as creatures, and have our being like we live, and have our being in the atmosphere that we breathe.

God is invisible, and yet he's everywhere present. He fills heaven and earth, and yet he's invisible.

[31 : 12] We can no more see him than we can see the air we breathe, but he surrounds us as much as the air surrounds us. But it is in heaven, of course, that his glory is manifested.

He fills heaven and earth with his presence, but he fills heaven with his glory. God must be invisible, because he is a spirit.

As Jesus said to the woman at Samaria, God is a spirit. Now you cannot see a spirit. A spirit hath not flesh and bones like a body has.

There's nothing about a spirit that our eyes can discern. man, and God is a spirit. He is no body as we have.

I know that in the scriptures he is represented to us as having eyes to see, and ears to hear, and so on, but that's only an expression of God accommodated to our usage of words.

[32 : 38] God has no natural eyes. God's eyes are his omniscient discernment. God has no ears as men have ears.

God's ears are this, that he is so everywhere present, that everything is known to him. God is a spirit.

God is a person, and therefore, is invisible. Yet for all that, my friends, God is a person, a person.

For me to speak correctly, there are three persons who constitute one, glorious, and supreme being, God, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one God.

Now, I hope this has been received this morning, this truth that there is a God, though he is invisible to us.

[33 : 55] for I want to come, before I close, to speak a little of Jesus Christ as being the image of this invisible God.

And, perhaps I might express this in a simple way, by saying, that what is invisible in God is visible in Jesus Christ.

For that is the meaning of the word, the image, the representation, the likeness, something that resembles, very closely, that which is the image of.

Now, Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God, for these two reasons. first, because, of course, he is God himself.

But, Jesus Christ became man. If Jesus Christ had not become a man, he would have been as invisible as God is invisible.

[35 : 15] To become the image of the invisible God, he must become visible. and when Jesus Christ was born into this world, a real man, he became visible.

If we had lived in the time of Jesus Christ, if we had lived at Capernaum, or Tiberias, or Jerusalem, for that matter, where Jesus Christ used to teach and work his miracles, miracles, we should have seen as real and as visible a person as you see when you look at me or I at you.

He was visible. visible. And he is still visible. He is visible in heaven, at the Father's right hand in our nature.

But you will say, yes, but then we've never seen him. We've never seen him. That is true. We haven't.

But still, he is visible as a man. but we have so much set before us concerning Jesus Christ in the scriptures, that all that in which he is the image of the invisible God, we can see in what the scriptures tell us about Jesus Christ.

[36 : 54] Now let me come down to this, as I close this morning. We see Jesus Christ in the scriptures as much as though we had seen him when he was here on earth, because the scriptures tell us so much about Jesus Christ.

now, if we see Jesus Christ in the scriptures, we see the same Jesus Christ as we should have seen if we lived 1960 years ago, and seen him there by the sea of Galilee, talking to the people, gathering the numbers of people around him, and instructing them in the things of God.

Now what should we have seen if we had seen Jesus Christ? And what do we see when we see him in the scriptures? We see the image of the invisible God, for instance, we see a man who was very holy, very, he was very holy.

Now, you think, you cannot see holiness, but you can see a holy person. You can see holiness in their character, their words, their ways, their spirit, you can see holiness in a holy person, but you cannot see holiness apart from seeing a holy person.

Now, Jesus Christ was very holy, very. It is said of him that he was holy, harmless, undefiled.

[38 : 57] Now, what was the holiness of Jesus Christ as a man? it was the image of the invisible holiness of God. And there you have it.

If you see holiness in Jesus, if you're impressed with it, if he appears to you to be as he was, the most holy person that ever lived, or ever will do, then you've seen the image of the invisible God.

For God is holy as it is ascribed to him, holy, holy, holy, Lord God almighty.

Now, in Jesus Christ, you see that holiness. And that's one reason that impresses us so about Jesus Christ, sometimes he is so holy.

In every way, he's undefiled with sin, no sin ever defiled, ever sullied, Jesus Christ, either in his mind, for his words, for his feelings, for his actions, from Bethlehem to Calvary, his life was one life of pure holiness.

[40 : 30] Jesus Christ was so holy that he was the image of the invisible holiness of God.

Now, let me mention another thing, and then I must leave it this morning. If you knew Jesus Christ, if you saw Jesus Christ in the scriptures, and the Holy Spirit revealed him through the scriptures, you would see someone who was wonderfully loving.

You would see perfect love in Jesus Christ. He was very, very loving. In some sense, you know, you can see love in people.

You can see love if they're very tender and affectionate. Their actions show love. Their words show love.

Sometimes their very countenance shows love. Now, if you had seen Jesus Christ, you would have seen the most loving person that ever was.

[42 : 00] And, if you had only seen Jesus Christ to be that loving person, you couldn't help it. You would have felt to love him.

Either you would have loved him or hated him, one of the two. And that's just what it was when he was on earth. some people loved him so much, and some people hated him so much, because he was the image of God's love.

I sometimes wish that I could have seen Jesus Christ, but that's a vain wish. But then I thought again, suppose I had, and I hadn't any spiritual understanding, he would have been to me nothing much, just a man.

There would have been no beauty to desire him if I had seen him. It was just as the prophet Isaiah said it would be when he came.