



The Greatness of Christ: A Study of Colossians

Week 3 - Chapter 1:12-23

Kingdom and Exodus 1:12-14

- **Inheritance**
 - The **inheritance** (v.12) is not entered into automatically, it is something God had to qualify us for; guarding against presumption and entitlement
 - The 'movement' from the domain of darkness to the kingdom of the Son evokes the language of **exodus**, recalling God's **redemption** of Israel from Pharaoh. The **land of promise**, of which Israel then inherited, was Canaan.
 - In Exodus 7-12 we are given a showdown between cosmic powers, between Pharaoh (and his magicians and their demonic power) and Yahweh. Each of the Ten Plagues occurs within the realm of each of the deities of the Egyptian pantheon. Israel is not just delivered from the physical bondage and oppression of Egypt, but from the spiritual enslavement Egypt and its ruler represent, and are taken to a **land** that had been **promised** by God to **Abraham** and his descendents (Gen. 15:1-20;50:24-26; cf. Ex 13:19).
 - Under the **New Covenant**, the **inheritance** of the kingdom of the Son is not a geographical realm/country, but the **New Heaven & Earth** (see Rev. 21:1-7), of which **Canaan** was a typological foreshadow. "On Jordan's stormy banks I stand, and cast a wishful eye, to Canaan's fair and happy land, where my possessions lie. I am bound, I am bound, I am bound for the Promised Land". Compare with Gandalf's speech in *The Return of the King*.
- **Redemption**
 - In the **Exodus**, just as God caused the **judgment** upon sinful Israel to be passed over on account of the **blood of the Lamb**, under the **New Covenant** God has brought **propitiation** and **redemption** by the blood of the true Lamb, the Lamb of God (cf. John 1:29), who is in fact God himself in the flesh – more on this in verses 15-20.
 - The Already and the Not Yet. The 'not yet' of the kingdom is the New Creation. The 'already' is the coming of Christ, and the proclamation of his saving work, received in faith, and sealed and propagated by Word and Sacrament. The Kingdom is received, not built.

The Glory of Christ 1:15-20

- It is now to the God who brings redemption, who graciously qualifies sinners for an inheritance in his Kingdom that Paul now turns.
 - There is a subtle but noticeable shift in style at v15. Verses 15 through 20 have a rhythm and highly recognizable structure, which has some justice done to it in some English translations, but is much more apparent in the Greek. It originated either with Paul himself or may have been adapted by Paul (compare with Philippians 2:5-11).
- This poem or hymn is rightly considered one of the most important Christological passages in the entire NT. The Jesus who has redeemed the Colossians, brought them from darkness into light, and prepared and qualified them for an inheritance, is in fact the very God who has created the world and entered into it for salvation.
 - What was at the heart of the Christological debates of the fourth and fifth centuries in the Early Church?
 - What is at the heart of the debate over Jesus Christ today?
- The soaring attributes described in the hymn which would very readily and only be ascribed to God (the Father/YHWH) are now used to describe Jesus Christ. Thus Paul is setting Christ apart from and above not only the pagan pantheon, but also indicating that Christ is the true and fullest revelation of YHWH. Note that naming Christ as the "image" (Greek *εικον* [icon]) of God is a violation of the second commandment and would be offensive to Jewish ears, unless true!

Conceptual arrangement of the Christological Hymn (Colossians 1:15-20),

from N.T. Wright, *Colossians & Philemon* (Tyndale NTC, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968) p. 65.

Section 1

- 15a Who is the image
of God, the invisible one
- 15b firstborn of all creation
- 16a for in him everything was created
- 16b in the heaven and on the earth
- 16c the visible and the invisible
whether thrones or dominions
whether ruler or authorities
- 16d everything has been created
through him and unto (for) him

Section 2

- 17a and he is before all things
- 17b and all things in him hold together

Section 3

- 18a and he is the head
Of the body, the Church

Section 4

- 18b Who is the beginning
- 18c the firstborn from the dead
- 18d so that in everything he might become pre-eminent
- 19 for in him all God's fullness
was pleased to dwell
- 20a and through him to reconcile
everything to him(self)
- 20b making peace through the blood
of his cross (through him)
- 20c whether things on the earth
or things in the heavens

The Colossian Diagnosis and Hope 1:21-23

- Paul closes this section by reminding the Colossians of their state and plight before they came to faith in Christ, giving the diagnosis of "alien and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds" (1:21).
 - Is this a diagnosis that we readily accept? Paul's intent is not to be condescending either to the Colossians previous state in life or other (non-converted) pagans, but to give them the full scope of what they are to be grateful to God for.
 - The means by which God has been reconciled to those who were/are hostile towards him is the cross of Christ. Paul will return to the significance of the Cross and what God was accomplishing through it for sinners and his own justice in chapter 2 (see 2:13-15)
- Through faith in Christ, God will present us to himself "holy and blameless and above reproach" (1:22). How can this be, especially when we have days (or seasons) of life when we certainly don't act holy or blameless, or even feel that way?
 - *simul iustus et peccator* – at the same time righteous (justified) and sinner. The Christian is not an innately holy creature, not yet at any rate, and still carries the nature of sin. But through Christ that sin is not counted against us, and in its place God reckons or credits the righteousness of Jesus (see Romans 4:22-25 and 8:1-4)