



## HG214: Our Hope Is Found In: **Christ Alone**

Colossians 1:15-23

Home Group Study Notes

14 February 2021 - James Van Cleef



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN  
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION  
**BEFORE THE MEETING!**

*Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group  
with you, along with any previous notes and other  
resources which might be helpful for your discussions.*



### **Welcome** (10 mins) *Ice Breaker*

If you could be any character from any book or film,  
who would it be, and why?



### **Looking Upwards** (10 mins) *Worship*

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs  
of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using  
Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...



## HG214: Our Hope Is Found In: **Christ Alone**

Colossians 1:15-23

Home Group Sermon

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A couple of months back, when the preaching rota for this home group series was being organised, we were asked if there was a particular title we wanted to preach. I love Paul's letter to the Colossians, and Colossians 1.15-23 is one of my favourite passages. So I asked for it.

Of course, there's more to it than it being a favourite passage. All the texts in this current series are phenomenal, and each are clear-as-day reminders about who gives us hope and the solid foundation on whom our trust is built.

But for me, the superlative text that completes the title 'Our Hope Is Found In...' is 'Christ Alone!' You see, without Jesus, all the others could not stand. If there is no Jesus there is no resurrection. If there is no Jesus he couldn't dwell in our hearts. If there is no Jesus the scriptures have no point. If there is no Jesus the Spirit would not have been sent. If there is no Jesus there is none to deal with sin. If there is no Jesus we would never know the Father.

The distilled essence of Paul's gospel, from the Damascus Road to his death is this: **Jesus the Christ is Lord!** Jesus is the one through whom we experience God, the one through whom we see everything, and the one through whom we find our true identity. **Jesus is everything, or he is nothing!**

So, on to Colossians...

A bit of background: it seems that the believers in Colossae were being undermined by advocates of a syncretistic blend of Jewish, pagan, and 'Christian' religious practice and philosophy. They were being told that real spirituality was a matter of observing food regulations, keeping holy days, aspiring to heavenly visions and engaging in ascetic practices (see Colossians 2.6-23). They were at great risk of losing sight of the preeminence of Jesus, and this would lead them away from the hope that is theirs in Christ.

Paul reminds them that if Jesus the Christ is Lord, then all the 'essential things' they are being told are really shadow, illusionary, and of no value. The reality is Christ!

What does ‘the reality is Christ’ mean? How is it significant for the Colossians and, by extension, for us? First, it is a clear reminder that their trust is in Jesus, and because of that trust they are full of love for one another. Second, it underlines their motivation: they are focussed on the kingdom and live according to the truth of Jesus. Their lives are bearing fruit, their character is transformed into Christlikeness. Third, they know that though they live *at* Colossae, at the same time they are to live *in* Jesus, being present to the Presence amidst the distracting voices that promise, but cannot deliver, spiritual well-being.

Significantly, that Christ is their reality speaks of who they are as God’s people *now*. Paul writes, ‘*the Father has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light*’ (v12 ESV). How is this important? To begin with, ‘inheritance’ opens the door to the story of the Exodus. It is the story in which God promises to establish his covenant with Israel, to give them a land, and to deliver them from slavery.

God said, ‘***I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the LORD your God...***’ (Exodus 6.6-7 ESV. See also Isaiah 63.16).

But if the Colossians are Gentiles, and outside of God’s promises, how are they qualified to share in the inheritance of Israel? Let’s look at 1 Corinthians 10, where Paul - writing predominantly to Gentiles - says that *their* fathers are Israel, who passed from slavery through the sea, and in the wilderness were given spiritual food and spiritual drink. The spiritual drink came ‘*from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ*’ (1 Cor 10.4).

For Paul, Jesus the Christ, the Messiah, is active in the deliverance of Israel. If Gentiles are delivered from darkness to light, if they are nourished with spiritual food and spiritual drink as the Israelites of the Exodus were, then they must share in the same blessings. In the same inheritance. This, in Christ, is their reality.

Now, at this point (1.15-20) Paul uses what is thought to be a hymn to paint an extraordinary picture of the supreme greatness of Jesus. Some see this as a digression—he is so enthralled with Jesus he simply cannot contain his praise. Though I am fond of digressing, I see this as a hub - from this exalted recognition of Jesus the Christ, everything holds together. Let’s look at the detail:

***‘He is the image of the invisible God...’*** Not *made* in God’s image, like humanity, but the ***‘exact representation of His nature’*** (Hebrews 1.3 NASB). God is revealed in Jesus, and as we look at him we are both audience and participants in the fullness of God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. For me, I can ground my hope in Christ alone because of these words alone! It is impossible to overstate the supremacy of Jesus the Christ! But there is more!

Jesus is supreme in creation (vv15-18):

By him **all things exist**

He is **before all things** and **above all things** and the **sustainer of all things**

He **holds all things together**

Jesus is supreme in redemption (vv18-20):

He is the source, the origin of the gathered people of God - Jew and Gentile! He is the first in resurrection and thus the guarantee of new life in the new creation

There are two further points about the supremacy of Jesus in redemption. First, the Colossians thought they were 'full' because of their feasting and fasting, their holy day observance, and their philosophical insight. Their heads were full of 'God things' so they must be full. But Paul corrects them: If you want to be truly filled, be filled with Jesus, and out of that fullness love and forgive and endure and be humble and be kind and be patient. Think about it. If the fullness of God is in Jesus, and if Jesus is in us, what is there that is 'not of God' that can compare to God and bring us the same joy? Self-made religion is always a poor diet, and even spiritual practice detached from relationship with Jesus is self-deluding. As Jesus said, *'apart from me you can do nothing'* (John 15.5 ESV).

Second, the supremacy of Jesus in redemption is shown in the cross: *'All the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe—people and things, animals and atoms—get properly fixed and fit together in vibrant harmonies, all because of his death'* (v20, The Message). **And all means ALL!**

This is one of the great redemption verses in the Bible; we know that creation is out of whack with the Creator and needs reconciliation and restoration to the original purposes of God (see Romans 8.19-23). And this happens in Jesus. His cross is the means by which reconciliation and peace are effected. In Jesus, by the blood of his cross all are brought together into the life of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit! In Jesus, we are already accepted! Surely cause for worship!

This really expands the horizon; this is 'blue sky' thinking. In Christ those who were far off are near; those who were strangers and aliens are citizens; those far off and those near have the same access to the Father in one Spirit (see Ephesians 2.11-22, and Romans 11.11-36; Galatians 3). We need to look again at the Exodus, for in addition to their liberation, God gave Israel the call to be a light to the nations, to be a kingdom of priests, to live out everyday the reality of their redemption and the mercy shown to them. Redemption, reconciliation are meant to be reciprocated. If all things are reconciled in Jesus—made whole, brought to completion, fulfilled, *fit together in vibrant harmonies*—then those who follow him are to live out that reconciliation. Right here. Right now.

*'All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation...we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us' (2 Corinthians 5.18, 20 ESV).*

Let's jump to the end ...

... with this question: From what were we alienated (v21)? Not 'from God' (which is not in the original text). We were alienated from Israel, from the election as God's people, from the covenants, the promises, the inheritance, the calling. And this alienation leads to hostility. Darkened minds leads to darkened behaviour. In our minds, before we knew of Jesus' universal reconciliation, we were opposed to God's ways, to his grace. In the dark, we act with hostility. We judge, condemn, divide, exclude. And the spirit of the world is always looking for someone else to blame, someone to scapegoat, someone on whom to pour out its violence.

Whereas God's economy is grace and peace: you are bestowed with blessing without merit. The present reality is that all things are reconciled in Christ. We are already accepted! All are brought into the inheritance in Christ. All are the people of God. In Christ we are presented as holy and blameless and above reproach. Without Christ we lacked form; in Christ we are transformed.

And this grace is an appeal for reciprocal response. Will you accept God's acceptance? You can refuse to, of course, but apart from Jesus you will never find your true self and will continue to live with a darkened mind with darkened behaviour - hostile, judgmental, condemning, divisive, exclusive, violent, looking to blame ...

What is required of us? *'Not shifting from the hope of the gospel'* (v23). Persevering trust. Trust that stands. Trust that refuses to move from the foundation in Jesus. By persevering character our love grows (see 2 Peter 1.3-11). So *how* do we persevere? And what is the gospel? The answer to both is: **Jesus the Christ is Lord!**

Because Jesus is the image of the invisible God and has reconciled all things by the blood of his cross, we can declare with certainty: Our hope—for today, for tomorrow, for our families, for our nation, for our end, for everything—is found in Christ alone! ***Amen!***

## **Emmanuel Church Text for 2021**

*“We have this hope as an anchor for the soul,  
firm and secure.”*

**Hebrews 6:19**



## **Looking Upwards** (40 mins)

### *Bible Study*

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

**1.** Take some time (before you meet if possible) to meditate on Colossians 1.9-14. Hear Jesus praying this for you. Then meditate on Colossians 1.15-20. Let the supremacy of Jesus draw you into worship.

**2.** ‘Jesus is the one through whom we experience God, the one through whom we see everything, and the one through whom we find our true identity.’ How does Jesus change the way we encounter God, the way we interact with the world, and the way we see ourselves?

**3.** What are contemporary examples of ‘distracting voices that promise, but cannot deliver, spiritual well-being?’

4. Jesus is ‘the head of the body, the church’ (v18). How does this truth make a difference in how we function as a church?

5. ‘*All the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe—people and things, animals and atoms—get properly fixed and fit together in vibrant harmonies, all because of his death*’ (v20, The Message). Jesus reconciles all things. But how can we be agents of reconciliation in a broken and dislocated world?

6. We are accepted in Jesus. But we also need to remain in him. How can we help one another remain ‘stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel’ (v23)?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



## **Looking Inwards** (15 mins) *Caring For Each Other*

*Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an opportunity to share, not something you have to do, however, 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!')* for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



## **Looking Outwards** (15 mins) *Concern For Others*

*Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours or church, which you would like to share (please be sure not pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared) for:*

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?

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