

THE SUFFICIENCY OF CHRIST
COLOSSIANS 2:1-5

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

For centuries the Arabian Peninsula (PROJECTOR ON--- ARABIAN PENINSULA) was known as a region of the world that was poor, isolated, and backward. In the seventh century it gained fame as the home of the prophet Mohammed and the birthplace of the Islamic faith. But still it remained a poor and backward region.

The desert topography meant that it had a limited number of inhabitants. The Bedouin tribes who inhabited the region eked out a living by selling dates and raising camels and goats and sheep. Historically the various tribes fought with each other. So there was never a political or military power that developed in the area, or even a country.

Then in 1938 a valuable discovery was made. Foreigners from a little company in California discovered oil there. (SAUDI ARABIA OIL) The company was Standard Oil. In the ensuing years the Arabians gradually began to realize the significance of this natural resource. Today Saudi Arabia is recognized as having the second largest oil reserves of any country in the world. This oil has provided billions and billions of dollars of income. It has made the Saudis rich. It has given them great influence in the Arab world. It has given them tremendous economic clout, as their control of oil production has had a big influence upon oil prices and the economic well being of other nations in the world. (PROJECTOR OFF)

For centuries the Saudis were sitting on a treasure. But they didn't know that it was there, and they didn't know its value. It took outsiders to come along and show them what was available and how to make use of it. When they did learn these things, the people of this region came to realize the complete sufficiency of oil to meet all of their economic needs.

For centuries most of humanity has been unaware of the greatest resource that has been available to mankind. That resource is the God who created us and who desires to have a relationship with us. This God provided His Son to meet our deepest needs. Our responsibility is to appreciate the significance of this resource and to learn to use and apply it. Even we who are Christians need reminders of the greatness of this resource. For we live in a world that encourages us to think only in material and physical terms. Our Creator wants us to be aware of spiritual realities. He wants us to be convinced about the sufficiency of Jesus Christ to meet our deepest needs.

That was the concern of the Apostle Paul in the first century when he wrote his letter to the Colossians. (PROJECTOR ON--- COLOSSAE MAP) He was a prisoner in Rome when he got a report from a guy named Epaphras about this local church in western Asia Minor. Colossae was a small town with a small church. He had no criticism of the

church for being small. He commended the Christians there for their faith and hope and love. But the apostle also learned that there were false teachers in Colossae who were seeking to lead the Christians astray. These heretics were telling the Christians that Jesus was OK, but they needed something more. That problem needed to be addressed.

In #1, after commending the Colossians for their faith and hope and love, Paul assured them of his concern and prayer support for them. He spoke about the sovereignty and deity of Christ. He explained that Christ's death provided the means by which sinners could be reconciled to God. Last week we saw that Paul explained that his mission was to proclaim the gospel of Christ. This gospel involves a mystery, the revelation of spiritual truth that was previously unknown. That mystery consists of the explanation that Jews and Gentiles can now be united in one body by faith in Christ and that Christ comes to live within His followers. Today in #2 we shall see that Paul explains that Jesus Christ is sufficient to meet the deepest needs of every human being.

I.

In v. 1 of Colossians #2 we shall learn first about THE STRUGGLE NEEDED TO PROMOTE THE SUFFICIENCY OF CHRIST. (I. THE STRUGGLE NEEDED TO...) In v. 1 the Apostle Paul writes, **"For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face..."** Laodicea was another small town near Colossae. (LAODICEA MAP) In #4 of Colossians Paul will make reference to a letter which he sent to the Christians there which will be coming to the Christians in Colossae. That letter has been lost to history.

The original word for "struggle" in v. 1 is *agon*, (AGON) from which comes our English word "agony." Paul had agonized over the Christians in Colossae and the nearby city of Laodicea. Yet he had never even met these Christians personally. So what kind of a struggle could he have had over them? We have also learned that Paul was a prisoner in Rome under house arrest. He was chained to a Roman guard. He probably couldn't even leave the house. So what was the nature of his struggle?

The terminology of "struggle" implies some kind of opposing force. It may be an enemy, or a competitor, or our own physical challenges, like health and aging and tiredness. Paul's physical circumstances were limiting, in that he was a prisoner in Rome. But in Ephesians #6 we get an idea of what Paul regarded as the primary opposing force, which merited his struggle. (EPHESIANS 6:12) In v. 12 of #6 he writes, **"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."**

In Paul's situation of imprisonment one of his primary weapons for use in his agony, his struggle, was prayer. He agonized over the Colossian Christians and their battle against these unseen forces in prayer. Prayer was not an afterthought or a nice introductory blessing to his real ministry. It was central to his work. Beginning back in v. 9 of #1 we saw that the apostle said that he did not cease praying for the Colossian Christians. He

agonized over these people he had never met. He truly cared for them. He wanted to see their church strengthened and expanded. He wanted to see the work of God go forward there and elsewhere.

If we understand something of the sufficiency of Christ, we will make prayer a priority. We will pray not just for our family and friends and church. We will pray also for other churches that come to mind. I suggested a couple of weeks ago that one way for us to follow the example of Paul in praying for Christians whom he did not know was to take one of our church's missionaries and make him or her or them and the people among whom they minister as an object for your regular prayers. Rob would be happy to give you our monthly missionary prayer update so that you could pick out one of these missionaries.

Long before William Carey (WILLIAM CAREY) became a famous missionary in India, he worked in a leather shop in England. His job was making shoes. But as he read the Bible and began to think about the world, he started praying for people in other parts of the world who had never heard about Jesus. He cobbled together a globe out of pieces of leather, and he began to agonize in prayer over countries that he read about in books. Eventually he went to one of those countries and was used of God to teach thousands of people in India about the sufficiency of Christ to meet their needs.
(PROJECTOR OFF)

If we really believe in the sufficiency of Christ to solve the biggest problems that people have, we will work at prayer. Perhaps you would consider joining us for our Wednesday church prayer meeting. We are meeting right now by Zoom.

There was a mom in Florida who had a daughter with a messed up life. At one point Nora had a successful business career. But she became addicted to crack cocaine. Eventually she lost her husband and her two children. She became a homeless drug addict.

But Nora's mom prayed for her, regularly and fervently. One Sunday night she was praying for Nora in her church in Hialeah, Florida. At the same time that she was praying, Nora was in a crack house with several other women. A few "rocks" of cocaine fell off of a table, and the women scurried to the floor to pick them up. At that instant Nora had what she called a "revelation." Suddenly she saw the dirty, desperate addicts "in a different perspective." She saw them for what they were, and she was repulsed by the person that she had become. She knew that she had to break free of her ten year bondage to drugs, or die.

Nora soon after entered a drug program with Teen Challenge. Her life turned around. Some years later she became a pastor's wife. Now she helps her husband run a shelter for homeless people. When we are convinced about the sufficiency of Christ, we will pray for people around us. (Religion Today, 2/12/1999)

A second factor that I suspect was involved in Paul's struggle for these Christians was letter writing. That's a real struggle for some of us, right? It can take work. E-mail today makes the task a bit easier. I doubt that Paul just threw this letter together in a few minutes. He put a lot of thought and prayer into it. There are at least four other letters in the New Testament that were written during this two year imprisonment in Rome. There may have been other written instructions and letters that he sent. No doubt he gave verbal instructions and advice and encouragement to other Christian leaders who came to see him. All of this took time and energy and thought and prayer.

There have been a few times when I have really been provoked to write a letter to the editor or to an elected representative. A little over a week ago I wrote a letter to one of our local agencies to appreciate an act of service that one of their employees did. Occasionally I have a sermon or some kind of speaking opportunity when I have something on my mind that I really want to convey in an effective way. In these situations I may lay awake at night and mull over the wording of what I want to say or write. I imagine the effect which my words will have. I organize what I want to say in my mind. I rewrite it in my mind. When I actually sit down to put the words on paper, I write what I have already struggled with in my head. I suspect that Paul experienced that kind of thing frequently. Perhaps there is a situation which you have faced where you should do something similar.

Sometimes we get worked up like this when we're angry. We go over and over in our mind what has happened to us and how we are going to unload our anger at the offending person. A much better thing to do is to think about how we can promote the sufficiency of Christ to our children and our grandchildren and our coworkers and our neighbors, to think about how we can get the neighbor kids to come to Vacation Bible School or Sunday School. There is a mental struggle that goes on in all of this. But if we are truly convinced about the sufficiency of Christ, we will engage in that struggle to promote it, recognizing that it is ultimately God who changes hearts.

II.

In vv. 2 & 3 we learn about THE WORK NEEDED TO UNDERSTAND THE SUFFICIENCY OF CHRIST (PROJECTOR ON--- II. THE WORK NEEDED TO...) What is the object of Paul's struggle? At the beginning of v. 2 he says, "**...that their hearts may be encouraged...**" Paul's message is a positive message. It is encouraging. He wants Christians to be built up in their faith. He wants them to realize that Jesus is sufficient to meet their deepest needs.

He goes on to say, "**...being knit together in love...**" This is a legitimate translation. But the Greek verb can also mean "instructed." In all ten of its appearances in the Greek translation of the Old Testament it has that meaning. The context here also seems to be more about instruction and understanding than about unity and love. So I am inclined to translate this second phrase as "**having been lovingly instructed.**"

The Christians at Colossae and the nearby city of Laodicea had heard the gospel message through Epaphras and perhaps other Christians. These guys lovingly

presented the gospel and the basics of the Christian faith. They taught them about the sufficiency of Christ.

Furthermore, they learned about **“all the riches of full assurance of understanding.”** Learning about these spiritual truths is of much greater significance than the accumulation of material wealth. This information provides answers to the questions about who we are, where we have come from, how we got here, and where we are going. There are many who are wealthy in material terms and have advanced degrees in education who don't have a clue about these matters.

I was in college at the time when streaking became popular. Students would run naked through some event that was being held on campus, and that was supposed to be cool. After one such event I remember the professor in my philosophy class the next day stressing the importance of defending the rights of students to do things like this. This is the kind of idiocy that results when people do not have knowledge and wisdom that is based in reality and in the God who created us. I have a hard time imagining that James Madison had this kind of a right in mind when he penned the Bill of Rights.

The apostle goes on in v. 2 to explain that a correct understanding results in **“full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ.”** The word for “knowledge” is *gnosin* (PROJECTOR ON--- GNOSIN) in the original Greek. A century later the heretics in Colossae were known as “Gnostics.” Probably the false teachers in Paul's day had some of the same beliefs as the later Gnostics did. They claimed to possess secret knowledge that Christians were lacking. Here Paul says that a correct understanding about Christ produces *epignosin*. This is full and complete knowledge.

This complete knowledge involves a mystery. (PROJECTOR OFF) We learned last week that a mystery in the New Testament involves something previously hidden and unknown that has now been revealed by God. This mystery involves two elements. It involves the fact that Gentiles and Jews who believe in Jesus as the Messiah are part of one body, the church, and enjoy an equal status before God. The second element of the mystery is that Jesus lives within those who are His genuine followers.

The focus of this mystery is Christ **“in whom,”** according to v. 3, **“are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”** The false teachers at Colossae were looking elsewhere for their treasures. According to them Jesus was not fully sufficient. Paul says that He is the source of all wisdom and knowledge.

In our culture a common catch phrase is “follow your heart.” The idea is that by looking within, you will be able to determine what is the wise course of action and/or what is the morally correct decision to make. The underlying presupposition is that deep within us are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. That is not a correct Biblical and theological position to take. The prophet Jeremiah warned in #17 v. 9 (PROJECTOR ON--- JEREMIAH 17:9), **“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?”** The underlying assumption here is that we are not

naturally good and moral creatures. We have great value and worth, but we have sin natures. We have this bent toward doing what we want to do. We are very good at justifying ungodly behavior.

Thus it is that Proverbs #28 v. 26 (PROVERBS 28:26) declares, **“Whoever trusts in his own mind is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom will be delivered.”** This does not mean that we don’t take into account our own talents and desires and interests in making decisions in life. But in seeking moral direction, we are much wiser in referring to our owner’s manual, in following the directions which we have been given by our Divine Manufacturer. Today, unfortunately, many of our young people are being encouraged to look within to discover what their true gender is, to the point of denying biological reality. The Bible tells us that truth and wisdom are best found outside of us, from the One who created us.

Paul says that wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ. (PROJECTOR OFF) They are not hidden there for the purpose of being kept secret. They are kept there for the purpose of being found. Typically on Easter Sunday we have some kind of candy hunt for the kids. We have these plastic eggs that we put around in the church yard. We don’t hide them in very difficult places, because we want these fun little packages to be found.

So it is with the God’s treasures of wisdom and knowledge. They are meant to be found. But these treasures in Jesus are like a mine. The treasures reside in Him. The means of discovery are the writings of the apostles that have been left to us in the New Testament. We have to dig for them there. Mining takes some work. It involves personal Bible study. It involves prayer for understanding. It involves listening to good preaching, CDs, and Christian radio. It involves reading Christian books. Learning results from going through the process. But the treasures are there to be found.

Christians often complain that they don’t have time to do such things. The truth is that we all have 24 hours each day. We make time for the things that are important to us. Too often the truth is that we don’t make Bible study and devotions a priority. Sometimes I suspect that the problem is that we aren’t truly convinced about the sufficiency of Christ.

C.S. Lewis wrote a letter to a little girl less than a month before he passed away. In the letter Lewis wrote, **“Dear Ruth... Many thanks for your kind letter, and it was very good of you to write and tell me that you like my books; and what a very good letter you write for your age!** (PROJECTOR ON--- CS LEWIS QUOTE) **If you continue to love Jesus, nothing much can go wrong with you, and I hope you may always do so.**” (CS Lewis, *Letters to Children*, 1985, p. 111) “If you continue to love Jesus, nothing much can go wrong with you.” Such is the sufficiency of Christ. But we must work at it if we want to understand it.

III.

In vv. 4 & 5 the Apostle describes THE CAUTION NEEDED TO DEFEND THE SUFFICIENCY OF CHRIST. (III. THE CAUTION NEEDED TO DEFEND...) He writes in v. 4, **“I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments.”** This is the only place in the New Testament where the original word for “delude” appears. But it was used in Greek outside of the New Testament of thieves who would seek to escape capture by fast and smooth talk.

Paul is specifically addressing the potential danger in Colossae and the surrounding area. There are false teachers around who are denying the sufficiency of Christ. They are denying that the treasures of wisdom and knowledge lie in Him. Instead they are claiming that their secret knowledge and their spiritual beliefs are the key to spiritual insight. Some of these heretics are probably good talkers. They know how to debate. Their arguments may seem to be persuasive. So the Christians need to be convinced about the sufficiency of Christ.

There are many religions in the world today that acknowledge that Jesus was a great leader and prophet and religious mystic. The Moslems recognize him as a prophet, but they say that something more is needed. People need to recognize that Mohammed is God’s special prophet. The Christian Scientists acknowledge that Jesus was a great man, possessed with the Spirit of God. But something more is needed. To really be sufficient you need *Science and Health: Key to the Scriptures*, by Mary Baker Eddy. The Mormons claim to be followers of Jesus, but they say that something more is needed. People need to read the *Book of Mormon*, given by the angel Moroni to Joseph Smith.

Even within the realm of more orthodox Christianity there are those who say that Christ is Lord, but to really experience all that God has for you, you need to be baptized in the Holy Spirit with the necessary evidence of speaking in tongues. In order to really have your needs met, you need to be slain in the Spirit. To experience all that Jesus has for you, you need to go into a monastery or convent and live a life of self-denial.

There are smooth talkers and persuasive arguers around who believe many different things. That is why we need to be committed to the sufficiency of Christ and rooted in the Bible so that we will not be swayed when false teachers come along.

In v. 5 Paul adds, **“For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ..”** The apostle is thinking about these Christians. He is praying frequently for them. He is writing letters to them. He is talking to Epaphras, who has exercised a leadership role with them. So he can truly say that he is with them in spirit.

Furthermore, the overall situation is encouraging. There is a threat to the church from false teachers. But so far there is no evidence that the Christians have given in to them. The Colossians have demonstrated “good order” and “firmness.” These two words were originally military terms. “Good order” referred to the military position that a soldier was assigned to occupy and hold. “Firmness” was originally used of a fortification, or defensive position. A good soldier would hold his position and resist attacks that came

from the outside enemies. Paul is rejoicing here to see that the Christians in Colossae and Laodicea and nearby areas were resisting the attacks of the false teachers and maintaining their allegiance to Christ. They were continuing to be convinced about the sufficiency of Christ to meet their greatest needs.

We likewise need to resist the attacks that the world around us makes about our faith in Jesus. We should do it tactfully and wisely. But we shouldn't concede the ground that our commander has assigned us to occupy. We need to know our Bible, say our prayers, and maintain our devotions.

Most of you are probably familiar with Joni Erickson Tada. (JONI ERICKSON TADA) She is the Christian speaker and writer who became a paraplegic as the result of a diving accident she had when she was a teenager. She says this about her experience:

“I remember years ago when I first got out of the hospital, I spent so much time, so much effort trying to manipulate others to meet my needs. And if it wasn't other people, it was things. Listening to the music of the past, constantly talking about the way things were, the way things used to be. Frankly, I did not believe that Christ was a present reality. I manipulated other people to meet my needs because I did not believe that Christ could.

“Well, it did not take long for a caring Christian friend named Diana to confront me. She saw what I was doing to others and to myself. And she said a very wise thing; she said, ‘Joni, I have no intention to make light of your struggles, but you are heading the wrong way. Christ is your sufficiency, not your old record albums or your yearbook. No, the Lord is your all-in-all, not your memories or your photo albums. And you've got to stop thinking that your needs are going to be met in things and in other people because they won't.’

“Well, I felt like throwing up on her shoes because I knew she was right. I knew she wasn't just pointing me to some cross-stitched platitude set behind glass in a pretty frame. ... This was a friend who understood that Christian love sometimes means confronting a friend. What's more, once she shared that truth, she was ready to step up to the plate and help me live out that truth...

“And you know what? She did. In fact, it was the wonderful hours my friend Diana and I spent together which convinced me that Jesus was enough – that Christ, indeed, was sufficient. The Lord bore the burdens of my soul in and through this friend of mine. She was able to expose to me my misguided belief about where security and significance could be found. ...Christ became my sufficiency through my friend. And more than 45 years later, we are still friends, deep and true. ... My friend Diana intervened and confronted, and she did it all in love to show me that ‘Christ is our sufficiency.’”

Where are you looking for your deepest needs to be met? Inside of yourself? Are you looking for them in your husband? In your wife? In your kids? In your job? In your friends? In sports? In your hobby? The best source is Jesus Christ.

In the Book of Ephesians the Apostle Paul talked about the need for Christians to learn about the sufficiency of Christ in a way similar to what he does in our passage. In Ephesians #1 (PROJECTOR ON--- EPHESIANS 1:18-19A) he writes, “[**I pray that**] **the eyes of your hearts [may be] enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe...**” May God help each one of us to be convinced in our hearts that Jesus Christ is sufficient to meet our greatest needs.