

Colossians Chapter One
Urbana 90

by Luis Bush
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Introduction:

Jesus Christ, Lord of the universe, hope for the world. I discovered the meaning of that statement in what has happened in Argentina in recent years. An Argentine citizen, with a British mother and Argentinian father when, the Falkland Island crisis hit, I found myself in a crisis. Serving in a church in El Salvador at the time they were all rooting for Argentina. Knowing of my background they asked me: "Who do you think those islands belong to?" After thinking about it I said: "I think those islands belong to the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Lord of the universe and the Lord of those Islands. An Argentinian Nobel prize winner by the name of Borges who tried to capture the significance of the Falkland Islands crisis said it was just like two bald men fighting over a comb.

But that was not how the young people of Argentina saw it. To them it was a crisis of authority. Waking up to the fact that they had been misled by their earthly leaders an authority vacuum was created of enormous proportions leading to military, political and social upheaval. But in the midst of the chaos the written Word and the living Word of God were lifted up and multitudes of Argentinians came to recognize that it is Jesus who is Lord.

[Turn with me to Colossians chapter 1)

Carlos Anaconda was a businessman and deacon in his church when one Wednesday evening the pastor of the small church he was attending did not show up. He was invited to give a short message. Despite the encouragement of his wife who was sitting beside him, he did not budge. A second time his name was mentioned but he said to himself "I can't preach." Even with his wife's nudging he did not move. The third time his wife's nudge became a jab and he jumped up and spoke. God blessed his word and so he was invited to speak again. This time he said, "Yes." At first, he preached in the church, but it was too small, so would go to the soccer fields, set up his equipment and preach. Hundreds then thousands ... 5, 10, 15, 20, 30, 50,000 came to his meetings. His message was typically on the authority and Lordship of Jesus Christ. In the meetings held in Mar del Plata, 90,000 public decisions were made for Christ. Never had anything like this been seen in Argentina. But the apostle Paul had said it before in his letter to the Colossian Church in Chapter one and verse 19, "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him," that is Christ, "and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the Cross."

Take note; Carlos was a deacon and a businessman, yet God used him to bring 90,000 people to a public decision for Christ in one city alone. During your time here in Urbana you may question your ability to be a missionary or take part in some other unique opportunity to proclaim Christ at school or abroad. But with all the fulness of Christ in you there is no basis for doubt.

Just as there was a tremendous vacuum for authority and hope in Argentina, we are approaching a vacuum of a greater force. As we approach the year 2000 people all over the world are looking back at history and questioning authority. Walls are falling. The iron curtain is opening, through which Jesus, Lord of the universe,

is being proclaimed. At your schools there is a vacuum in the hearts of your classmates. Looking back in American history, drugs are out, the consequence of sexual sin apparent; and they were revolutions of the youth.

Symbols of the past are being discarded as people all over the world look toward the future. John Naisbitt, in his book Megatrends 2000 states that the year 2000 is the most powerful symbol of our lifetime, a symbol of the future. Two years ago, in a Wall Street Journal article, it was stated that every major corporation would have a product with 2000 in its name. There are 2000 towel dispensers. You can fill up a Pontiac Sunbird 2000 with SU2000 gas on the way to an eye exam 2000 and the list goes on. But, more importantly, A.D. 2000 is a date that God's Spirit is using to unite his body of believers in a common goal of completing the Great Commission. You are alive at a significant point of history. The largest movement of youth in missions at a time when the world is looking at a date that tells all that our very history recorded in reference to the life of Jesus Christ. Keep in mind where you are in history, your particular situation amidst the vacuum of this generation as we go on and continue to see how God filled the vacuum in Argentina.

Into that same authority vacuum walked a man by the name of by the name of Hector Gimenez. Hector had experienced the Lordship of Christ in his life giving him victory over a drug addiction problem. He rented a theater in the heart of Buenos Aires and began to share his testimony and the fact that there is power in the name of the Lord. People would line up all around the block waiting to get in. Today meetings are held every three hours throughout the week and there are over 100,000 people attending the meetings.

Gimenez learned what Paul had said to the Colossian Church in chapter one and verse 21, "once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight without blemish and free from accusation - if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel."

Argentina has been discovering that Jesus Christ is the Lord of the universe and the hope for the world. Today in your life those around you can discover the same as you allow the fulness of Christ to be manifested in your lives daily.

JESUS CHRIST, LORD OF THE UNIVERSE, HOPE FOR THE WORLD. That is the theme of this Urbana Conference and of the first chapter of Paul's letter to the Colossian church.

Background:

Despite the fact that he was writing from jail in Rome Paul had learned both through revelation and personal experience that Jesus is Lord. Some of you may be imprisoned emotionally as you sit here today, torn apart on the inside by broken relationships or fresh memories of dysfunctional family backgrounds. Others of you may be feeling shackled by a deep sense of inadequacy or by fierce academic competition. **It's time for a reality check. Our God is an awesome God. There is hope in the name of the Lord.** Paul's got a relevant message for us right here and right now so listen up. Jesus is alive and he is Lord of the universe and hope for the world. This is unveiled for us in Colossians chapter 1 perhaps more clearly than anywhere else in God's revelation.

What prompted Paul to write to the church in Colossae was the disturbing news which he had received from Epaphras who we read about in 1:7. Epaphras was himself a Colossian, according to 4:12, and the prime evangelist to Colossians for the previous six years. Epaphras was likely converted in the mighty movement of the Holy Spirit that had taken place in Ephesus as recorded in the book of Acts, chapter 19 and a credible witness, known to Paul.

The news from Epaphras, as one Bible student has suggested, was "that a strange disease, a peculiar form of heresy, singularly compounded of Jewish ritualism and Oriental mysticism had appeared among them, threatening the faith of Colossian Christians."

The college campus today is the hotbed of fanciful philosophies and ideas of all kinds. In fact, the same winds of false teaching from Hindu roots is sweeping across our campuses in makeshift disguises such as Transcendental Meditation or what has been called "The New Age Movement."

Now, to refute the false teaching that was threatening the Colossian church this letter was written as a plea for the Christians to grasp the fuller knowledge found in Christ. Paul forcefully presents the exalted nature and unmatched glory of Christ as the fulness of God's person and the fulfillment of God's plan.

Big Idea:

God's revelation is clear and human history bears witness too. **It is Christ and Christ alone who is Lord of the universe and hope for the world. And Jesus Christ, as Lord of the universe displays the fulness of God's person, and as hope for the world he anticipates the fulfillment of God's plan.**

In the first major section of the chapter the fact is established that Christ is Lord of the universe and in the second major section Christ is presented as the hope for the world. The first section deals with fulness and the second fulfillment.

First Jesus Christ, Lord of the universe is shown to be the fulness of God in three spheres; **the church, the creation and reconciliation.**

A. Christ, the fulness of God in the church 1:1-14

1. First., fullness, as expressed in the local church.

The fulness of God in the local church is displayed by faith, hope and love. Verse 4 reads: "...we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints - the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you ..."

It is a faith which reaches upward to God, a hope which reaches forward to the future and a love which reaches outward to your brother and your sister in Christ.

John Stott recently put it this way: "The secret of our relationship with one another in the Christian Church, especially when we have our differences, is 'Jesus Christ is Lord.'" Each of us must learn not to interfere with Christ's Lordship over fellow Christians when we are confronted with our differences.

2. Second, in the sphere of the Church is Christ, **the fulness of God in the universal church.**

Verse 6 " ... All over the world the gospel has been bearing fruit and growing we read in." If that was true in Paul's day how much more so in our today. When you consider that just 90 years ago considerably less than one out of every 10 believing Christians lived outside of the west whereas today it is estimated that almost 8 out of every 10 Christians live outside of the west you recognize the Lordship of Christ in fulfilling His promise when he said: "I will build my church." In fact, this two-thirds world church is bearing much fruit and itself becoming a sending church so that by the year 2000 there are expected to be more missionaries from the two-thirds world than from the western world.

3. Lastly, in the sphere of church is the fulness of God manifested through prayer 1:9-14

The key verb in this section is **fulness** found in vs 9. Paul prays that there might be fulness crescendo of spiritual expectation. This is what he would pray for you and me that we might be full of the knowledge of the

1. Will of God
2. Wisdom of God and the
3. Walk worthy of God

... all of which will be demonstrated as Paul expresses in his prayer in the life of the Christian ...

- a. By bearing fruit in spreading the gospel around the world
- b. By growing in the knowledge of God
- c. By being strengthened with God's power
- d. By giving thanks to God in all things

...which is why it is essential that you pray for each other on your campus to be effective

(Now Christ is not only the Lord and fulness of God in the church but also ...

B. Christ is the fulness of God in creation 1:15-18

This year's conference of Urbana 90, this book of Colossians and this chapter is about Jesus Christ and his sufficiency. It is what has been called: "Paul's full-length portrait of Christ" as:

1. ... God's son 14
2. ... the object of the Christian faith 14
3. ... the redeemer 14
4. ... the image of God 15
5. ... the Lord of creation 15
6. ... the head of the church 18
7. ... the reconciler of the universe 20

"He alone, with mysterious and unassuming ease unites in himself God and man, nature and supernature, eternity and time, heaven and earth, past and future, all worlds and our world, all transcending sovereignty and all sufficient saviorhood that in all things He might have the pre-eminence."

Jesus Christ is sufficient for you and all the challenges you face on campus and in your work place. Through Christ's fulness in your life they can experience the supernature united with nature, time with eternity, and witness heaven united with earth.

Marxism is marching off the center stage of history. Now it is time for Christ's Lordship, for you and me in the fulness of God to rise up and proclaim the pre-eminence of Jesus Christ throughout all history. [pause] And then, as the entire world looks toward the year 2000 the most powerful symbol of our lifetime, a symbol of the future will be united with the past as they look back 2000 years to what split recorded history into B.C./A.D., the birth of Jesus Christ.

(Yes, Jesus Christ is Lord of the universe and the fulness of God ...in the church [pause], in creation [pause] and thirdly,

C. Christ is the fulness of God in **reconciliation** 1:19-23

The word fulness appears three times in this first chapter. vs 9 in Paul's pray for the Christians, here in vs 19 assertion that in Christ, the whole fulness of the godhead dwells and in vs 25 the expression of the ministry of the Apostle Paul as one who has been called to steward the fulness of the word of God.

All the fulness of God dwells in Christ, not some of it, not only a portion of it but the entirety of God's attributes; his completeness, his sufficiency, all his power, all his righteousness and all his justice, and all of his unstoppable love and grace is all contained in the person of Jesus Christ.

In reconciliation Christ "makes peace through his blood shed on the cross", verse 20. As such he is the one who brings reconciliation between man and God and between man and man. Verse 21 reads: "Once you were alienated from God and were his enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish, free from accusation.

It is the reconciliation of Christ that can pull a marriage back together or any other difference you may have with a brother. How can alienation prevail in the knowledge and reality of Christ's shed blood?

As a teenager growing on the streets of one of the largest cities in Latin America, I was alienated from God, a gang leader, running the streets barefoot, requiring each gang member to do one bad deed per day to remain in the gang. That was until the police caught up with me as did my parents, but I still wasn't either reformed or transformed. Then it came time to do the military service in Argentina. I remember presenting myself to the officer on duty who was taking the down the names of the new recruits. When it came to my turn, he wrote down the letters PUFF. Despite my efforts to explain otherwise he left the name as he had written it and the list was used to make the name tags and mine

came out PUFF. The other soldiers would call be PUFF which in Spanish is pronounced POOF. As you can imagine, I had an identity crisis. Then I heard the good news of Christ's death on the cross for my sin. This time I was ready. Christ became my Lord and Savior. He brought reconciliation between POOF and God.

It is Christ who can bring reconciliation to a country torn by racial prejudice as we will be hearing from Caesar Molebatsi of South Africa.

From Lord of the universe we move to Christ as hope for the world in Colossians One)

Section Two: The Lord Jesus Christ as the hope of the world and the hope of the fulfillment of God's plan is developed in 1:23-29. Here we can observe a 1) concern for fulfillment, 2) the hope for fulfillment, 3) and the way of fulfillment.

A. The concern for fulfillment

Paul described his concern for fulfillment of God's plan in 1:23 when he wrote: "This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, have become a servant." In his mind the gospel "was bearing fruit all over the world". (1:6)

While Paul is certainly dramatizing the rapid spread of the gospel into every quarter of the Roman empire within just three decades from Pentecost and thus refuting the charge of the false teachers that the Christian faith was a local or regional faith, he is also underscoring a vital truth.

As Christians we should be concerned with fulfillment, that the gospel be proclaimed to every creature under heaven in the whole world, not just locally. And as Paul notes in verses 6 and 10, that gospel bear fruit in every good work making a difference in the community where it has been planted through God's people incarnating the fulness of Christ there.

The report is out that the baby boomers, of which I am one, just barely, and the baby busters are not concerned about the whole world but rather their own world. May we as Christians rise up in the fulness of Christ and make a change in focus.

And there is one part of the world that more than any other desperately needs the gospel today. If you were to look at a world map, you would observe a geo-political region from 10 degrees north of the equator to forty degrees north of the equator from West Africa to East Asia that could be called the 10/40 window where the evidence of Christ's Lordship is strangely absent.

And I find it no coincidence that Iraq is at the center of this unevangelized belt, into which hundreds of thousands of Bibles have been sent to the troops who stand together in the desert shield.

This is a significant region because it is the cradle of civilization, and where God's dealings with man were worked out as recorded in the biblical account. Yet here you will find more than 9 out of 10 of the people living in the 55 least evangelized countries. Here you will see over 8 out of 10 of the poorest of the poor. In fact, in the 10/40 Window there are 2.3 billion people who are both among the poorest of the poor as well as least evangelized.

This is where the quality of life is the lowest, where clearly Satan and his demonic host have usurped the rightful place of Christ. For as Paul writes in 1:16 "...by him," that is Christ, "all things were created: things in heaven and things on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones," which is a reference to the highest grade of angelic beings, "or powers or rulers or authorities, all things were created by him and for him."

If you and I are to be concerned with the fulfillment of God's plan as Paul shows that he is in Colossians chapter one, without neglecting our commitment to other parts of the world or the community in which we live, we must particularly focus on the 10/40 Window.

(That leads us from concern for fulfillment to ...)

B. The hope for fulfillment

Webster defines hope as "the highest degree of well-founded expectation of good."

Biblical hope in Colossians chapter one is developed in 1:4, 1:23, and 1:27. First, as the content of hope which is faith and love that springs from it and is centered on God. Second, is its nature as a gift offering salvation in the gospel. Third, is the basis of hope which rests in the gracious work of God (not in the works of man.) Christ is our hope." J.B. Phillips paraphrases verse 27 this way: "Christ in you! Yes, Christ in you bringing with him the hope of all the glorious things to come."

Jesus Christ is the basis for hope for this world. The verse has been paraphrased "Christ is being revealed in the midst of the church as the hope of glory before the watching eyes of the nations."

(That raises the question, how can I be a part of this glorious plan of God to make Christ shine through me to bring hope to a world in need? This has to do with ...)

C. The way of fulfillment

1. Become a servant of the gospel (1:23b)
2. Be prepared to suffer as Paul was (1:24-25)

Now most of us may not have suffered as Paul did, but I'm sure you sacrifice your time as a student in order to pass exams. Studying for an exam can be tough on the brain. Studying until the wee hours of the morning for an abstract subject has got to be classified as mental suffering. [pause] After suffering even in the context of school it makes us aware of how we need to do at least as much for the sake of the gospel. Prayerfully studying God's word and becoming a servant of the gospel in our particular vocation.

3. Hope in Christ not in yourself (1:26-27)

4. Admonish others (1:28-29)

Conclusion

Wherever you are you in life, in almost any career you take make these ways your ways and you will contribute to the fulfillment of God's plan for the nations.

God through Paul revealed his antidote for the oriental mysticism that threatened the faith of Colossian Christians much in the same way the New Age Movement has captured the youth of many college campuses today.

Jesus Christ became Lord of the universe, hope of the future for hundreds of thousands of Argentines as his fulness filled the vacuum of inadequacy in man's authority and rule. The fulness of Christ through you can be the hope for your generation. God raised up men who weren't preachers and yet hundreds of thousands were reached. Don't put yourself in a box. There are no limits to what Christ can do through you.

It is an encouragement to hear at this point in history the echoed words of D.L. Moody, who nearly 100 years ago participated in a movement to complete the Great Commission by 1900 as he said: "It can be done, it ought to be done, it must be done." Between 1890 and 1900 mission societies experienced tremendous growth helping to contribute to the fulfillment of God's plan for the nations. But many denominations and societies operated in isolation of each other and there was massive distraction. People were drawn into all sort s of causes.

The same could happen today. However, God's Spirit like a mighty river has already joined several streams of churches, denominations, Christian organizations, networks and the Christian community in many countries on the basis of a major thrust to fulfill the Great Commission by A.D. 2000.

God's revelation is clear and human history bears witness too. It is Christ and Christ alone who is Lord of the Universe and hope for the world. Make him Lord of your life. Bring the hope of Christ to those around you locally and don't put any limitations on how God can uniquely use you in today's worldwide Mission 2000. **Completion of the Great Commission by AD2000. With the fulness of Christ in and through you and each of his followers it can be done, it ought to be done, it must be done!**

And may you say as Paul did as he concluded this chapter "To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy which so powerfully works in me."