
ALTERNATIVE REALITY

Part 1 - Alternative Kingdom

Paul said we have been rescued from the dominion of darkness and brought into the kingdom of the Son He loves (Colossians 1:13). We live here and now but are a part of His Kingdom, and as people of God's Kingdom, we stand out, we are different because of who we are in Christ. We live an alternative reality to the rest of the world because we belong to an alternative Kingdom. But I wonder if we as Christians, have recognized that Australian society is headed a different direction than discipleship to Jesus.

Jesus makes it clear that to follow Him is to be different in order to make a difference (Matthew 5:13). That's why we're exploring Colossians. Over the next six weeks we will be looking into Paul's letter to the Christians in Colossae and the encouragement he brings to remind them of the incredible things Jesus has done for them and how that changes how they live now!

So, What Is Colossians About?

Epaphras founded the Church in Colossae, a once colossal city that is now somewhat in decline, like the western world we're in. He tells Paul how this gathering of believers loves the Lord, but the powerful Roman Empire and its symbols of success and thriving have seeped into their hearts. They're losing their potency as a witness, mixing and matching with lifestyles and beliefs from those outside the church.

Colossae is in modern day Turkey, 100 miles Northwest from the major seaport of Ephesus. And it's at Ephesus that Paul has done most of his gospel work. It's ironic as he sits behind bars for his faithful witness, that he's hearing from Epaphras about the Colossian church prone to compromise. They avoid persecution by blending in. So, Paul pens this letter full of thanksgiving, from the heart. It's not tackling an outright heresy, but it's a letter that gently works toward one point: Jesus is enough.

Our identity and mission in Jesus require us to be radically different for the benefit of our society.

Do we want to be just like the rest of the surrounding culture? Or do we believe that there's a better way in Jesus, immersed in His presence and submitted to His Lordship?

A Set Apart Family – Colossians 1:1-2

Paul is an apostle, but in the broader sense, every single one of us in an 'apostle', meaning an ambassador, a messenger sent by God to announce the good news to the whole world. The Colossians, just like us, are a sent people to be ambassadors for this alternative kingdom we belong to.

The Christians in Colossae were blending in more than standing out and Paul reminds them that they are 'God's holy people'. "Holy", set apart, they are made sacred in Jesus, to be radically different in order to make a difference.

What if holiness is ultimately about wholeness. Holiness is taking all the fragments of our life, and being put back together again as who God created us to be. Sin is a move toward fragmentation and death. Holiness is a move toward integration and life.

God calls us to find our identity not in how others see us, or by the success markers of the world around us, but who He says we are. Paul calls us to immerse ourselves in Jesus, to find a new identity. And this identity is a group identity, a family.

Faith, Hope and Love – Colossians 1:3-8

Faith, hope, and love, forms the basis for Paul's prayer for the church at Colossae. While the rest of the world around them was proclaiming Caesar is Lord, Paul is reminding them of the good news that they have believed and now proclaim - that Jesus is Lord!

Fruitful Prayer – Colossians 1:9-12

Paul wants their lives to bear fruit, to be the holy community sent on mission to the world. But they're embedded in their culture, prone to compromise. They need God's wisdom for the next step. Only God can tell them how their family should live – this is why we pray.

The world wants the kingdom without the King. But, without the King there is no kingdom, and the false hopes of the world are seen for what they are. But the sort of fruitfulness in the alternative kingdom is a life that honours and pleases God.

Rescued into an Alternative Kingdom – Colossians 1:13-14

Paul is reminding the church in Colossae, and us, that we are in the middle of a battle. The world wants you to blend in for your own benefit. But Jesus has rescued us all making a family with a potent witness.

How should we respond? We know that God sends us. But are we radically different, ambassadors for an alternative kingdom? As people encounter our community at Riverlife, do they find a family? Do they experience a positive culture shock that speaks of God's love? Are we a holy people set apart for the benefit of others, in our money, our time, our relationships, and our living arrangements?

We must submit our lives afresh to God as an alternative people of an alternative kingdom, waiting on God for where He would lead.

Would you commit across this series to seek God's wisdom, through prayer, for how to live as His Kingdom community, radically different for the benefit of the world around us?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does it mean to live as resident foreigners representing the Kingdom in a world like ours?
2. Does our church community cause a positive culture shock in a mixed-up world?
3. We are to radically identify with our culture so the message is understood, but be radically different so the message offers an alternative. How have we gone on both scores?
4. Read back through Colossians 1:1-14, noting themes of family, faith, hope, love, holiness, and fruitfulness. What is God saying to you through this?
5. Spend some time as Christian family seeking God's wisdom through prayer, for how to live as His Kingdom community, different for the sake of the world. Make one change this week.