



## **Colossians 1:1–2**

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, 2 To God's holy people in Colossae, the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ: Grace and peace to you from God our Father.

### **Reflection**

Jesus Christ has risen from the dead, ascended into heaven, and left his follow-

ers with the commission of sharing the good news of his life and teaching, death and resurrection with people from every nation. And so, on the very first occasion that someone stood up in public, to tell people about Jesus, he made it very clear that this message was for everyone.

It was a great day – we read about it in Acts 2 – sometimes people call it the birthday of the church. God's promised Holy Spirit had swept through Jesus' followers and filled them with a new joy and sense of God's presence and power. Their leader Peter, who only a few weeks before had wept bitter tears because he'd lied and cursed and disowned Jesus, found himself addressing a huge crowd, explaining to them that something had happened which had changed the world forever. What God

had done for Peter, God was beginning to do in the whole world: new life, forgiveness, new hope and power were opening up like spring flowers after a long winter. A new age had begun in which the living God was going to do new things in the world – beginning then and there with the individuals who were listening to him. ‘The promise is for you’, he said, ‘and for your children and for all who are far off’ (Acts 2:39). It wasn’t just for the people standing in this crowd. It was for everyone.

And within a remarkably short time this came true to such an extent that the young movement spread throughout much of the known world. We read in Acts 5 that shortly after Peter’s speech all of Jerusalem was filled with the apostles teach-

ing. As the authorities tried to stamp it out a great persecution of Christians began that, paradoxically, saw the gospel spread like wildfire, Christians fleeing Jerusalem and taking the gospel with them all over the Mediterranean. A young Jew by the name of Saul was enlisted in the task of eradicating this movement. He watched on in approval as one of the early church leaders Stephen, was stoned to death, and personally went from town to town to arrest Christians and throw them in gaol. That is, until, the risen Lord Jesus who had ascended into heaven, appeared to Saul. Here's how it played out, Acts 9,

9 Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest 2 and asked him for let-

ters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. 3 As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' 5 'Who are you, Lord?' Saul asked. 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' he replied. 6 'Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.' 7 The men travelling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. 8 Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So

they led him by the hand into Damascus. 9 For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything. 10 In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, 'Ananias!' 'Yes, Lord,' he answered. 11 The Lord told him, 'Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. 12 In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.' 13 'Lord,' Ananias answered, 'I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. 14 And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.' 15 But the

Lord said to Ananias, 'Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. 16 I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.'

Saul, better known as the apostle Paul, did go on to suffer much for Jesus' name as Jesus' chosen instrument to proclaim the gospel to the gentiles. And one way in which Paul did exactly this was through his letters written to young churches to encourage them in the faith. Today we turn to one of Paul's shortest and yet most exciting letters, his letter to the Colossians which begins,

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our

brother, 2 To God's holy people in Colossae, the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ: Grace and peace to you from God our Father.

In the ancient world, where literacy levels were low, and the cost of paper, ink and scribal services prohibitively expensive, letters were usually written to be read aloud, often to a large group of people who could not read for themselves. And so it was customary to begin a letter with who the letter was from, as the hearer did not have the luxury of being able to glance at the end of the scroll to see the identity of the sender. And so, as was customary, Colossians begins with,

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our



brother,

The Colossian church had come about as an indirect consequence of the remarkable two years that Paul had spent in Ephesus. For the greater part he had never met these people, however the Christians in Colossae would have held Paul in very high regard. Epaphras, whom Paul had converted in Ephesus, had brought them the gospel and it seems that Paul had similarly led Philemon to Lord, the wealthy businessman in whose home this young church met. Years have passed and it's likely that Paul is writing while he's under house arrest in Rome. The Colossians would have been well aware of this because Epaphras is in Rome with him, and would have felt greatly honoured to receive this correspondence. Indirectly,

through the conversions of Epaphras and Philemon, they owed Paul everything. Nonetheless Paul still reminds them of the authority that he has been given,

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,

Paul is an apostle, a member of a finite group of men who witnessed the life and teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus and were commissioned with unique authority and power by the Holy Spirit to carry on Jesus' work. And yet Paul all his life keenly felt unworthy, 'as one untimely born' amongst their number, working harder than all of them in service of Jesus 'by the will of God', not his own will, that had seen him breathing out murderous threats to the ones he now calls brothers.

The same grace that was extended to Paul, he extends to them by way of greeting,

Grace and peace to you from God our Father.

## **Think & Pray**

Reflect over the spread of the gospel in the early church today – from 120 to 3,000 in a single day, and then explosive growth in the months and years to come. And consider especially the extraordinary about-face in the life of Paul. In many ways, what happened to Paul is the experience of every believer. Our old way of life gives way to our new. After a long winter spring flowers begin to bloom. But not without suffering and often deep regret. And yet there is new joy, hope and peace as well

has deep conviction, new meaning and purpose. Is this your experience as it was for the apostle Paul?

Pray over your journey with Jesus this morning and ask God for his grace and peace in your day today.