

Every Day Faith

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

3rd in a five-part series

August 25, 2019

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Colossians 1:15–20; 3:12–14 (NIV)

¹⁵ The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. ¹⁹ For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, ²⁰ 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.

¹² Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³ Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Knowing Jesus. The real Jesus.

I want to trust Jesus like I trust gravity, for the truth of gravity is so deeply embedded in me that I never even think about it, even as my whole life is lived in its reality. That is how I want to be about Jesus, a faith woven so deeply within me that it informs every action and thought.

I don't know how far I will get with this, but I do know that the journey began in earnest two decades ago, when God grabbed me hard and everything began to change. An essential piece of "the change" was my discovery of N.T. Wright, a leading New Testament scholar. At the time, I didn't realize how life-changing was my reading of *The New Testament and the People of God*, but I quickly began to listen to Wright's lectures and read more of his work . . . and my faith grew deeper and I began to walk in God's way as I never had. Bishop Wright, and others, equipped me for the life I strive to live now.

Simply Jesus

*Simply Jesus*¹ is an overview of Wright's decades of work on Jesus and the gospels. Wright is less concerned with figuring out only what happened in the events behind the gospel and, instead, seeks to understand the meaning of the gospels by embedding them in their historical/geographical/cultural context. *Simply Jesus* presents the events of Jesus' life and ministry as being at the center of a perfect storm, the epicenter of three: the Roman storm of empire ruling over an increasingly hostile Jewish community, the Jewish storm of building expectations that the time had come for God to act, and the storm that was Jesus, who, "as he came to Jerusalem . . . was embodying, incarnating, the return of Israel's God to his people in power and glory" (p. 38)."

For Wright, Jesus inaugurated the kingdom of God, an understanding that helps to explain his often cryptic and enigmatic words and actions. The arrival of God's Messiah simply would not meet Jewish expectations, who had no room for a "suffering Messiah," a phrase that was an oxymoron to the Jews of Jesus' day. Through all this, Wright forced me to consider just who Jesus really is, why he became incarnate only to die on a cross, and the implications of his resurrection.

¹ *Simply Jesus: A New Vision of Who He Was, What He Did, and Why He Matters*, by N. T. (Tom) Wright. HarperOne. 2011.

Who Is Jesus? (1:15-20)

In addition to his many scholarly works, Tom Wright has written a layperson's commentary for every book in the New Testament,² in order to help us hear the Word of God in Scripture. For example, on the Colossians passage above, Wright wrote:

What they [the believers in Colossae] need to know above all, if they are to grow as Christians, increasing in wisdom, power, patience and thanksgiving, is *the centrality and supremacy of Jesus Christ*. The more they get to know, and know about, Jesus Christ, the more they will understand who the true God is and what he's done; who they are as a result; and what it means to live in and for him. Much of the rest of the letter, in fact, is an exploration of the meaning of the poem. . . .

It's worth, then, going quite slowly through the poem and pondering the depths of meaning that are to be found in it. Christianity isn't simply about a particular way of being religious. It isn't about a particular system for how to be saved here or hereafter. It isn't simply a different way of holiness. Christianity is about Jesus Christ; and this poem, one of the very earliest Christian poems ever written, is as good a place to start exploring it as any. This is what the Colossians needed to know, and we today need to rediscover it.

There are three things in particular which the poem points us to about Jesus Christ and about what God has done in and through him.

First, it's by looking at Jesus that we discover who God is. . .

Second, Jesus holds together the old world and the new, creation and new creation. . . . The Jesus through whom the world was made in the first place is the same Jesus through whom the world has now been redeemed. He is the firstborn of all creation, *and* the firstborn from the dead.

Third, Jesus is therefore the blueprint for the genuine humanness which is on offer through the gospel. . . . Jesus is himself the one 'in whom' we are called to discover what true humanness means in practice. We have so often settled for second best in our human lives. Jesus summons us to experience the genuine article.³

How should we then live? (3:12-14)

We have been chosen by God. We are God's beloved, set aside and made holy for God. The appropriate response is straightforward. We are to clothe ourselves in Christ. We are to live out Christ's compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. We are to bear one another's burdens, as Christ has borne ours. We are to forgive one another as Christ has forgiven us. We are to dress ourselves in love, for only then can we find the unity and harmony that is to characterize the body of Christ. We are to love as God has loved us.

We don't live in this way because we have something to gain nor because others might expect it of us. We live in this way, clothed in Christ, because we have been raised with him and our lives, therefore, must reflect what is so. To the extent that our minds and hearts do not embrace the truth about Jesus, then we can never hope to embody the love of Christ.

Is Jesus the image of the invisible God? Were *all* things created in, through, and for him? If, as Paul claims, God truly resurrected Jesus, then our hope lies in God, not in ourselves. What *really* matters is what is true.

Christians proclaim to the world that the renewal that Paul speaks of in Colossians 3 is real. It is as concrete as Jesus' own death and resurrection. But we also know that we still must learn to walk in the Spirit of Christ, to walk in God's way, to walk in a manner befitting the new clothes that we wear. Paul knows that we are talking about a

² All the volumes are titled in the form of *{Book Name} for Everyone*. All are available on Amazon.

³ Tom Wright, *Paul for Everyone: The Prison Letters: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon*, (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 150–152.

process, not merely a moment. It is why he speaks of the new self as being renewed in 3:10. It is in the same sense as our proclamation that God's kingdom has come already, but not yet in all its fullness. We have been renewed and we are being renewed. We have been saved and we are being saved. And if we can train our minds to focus on God, then our hearts will flood open to God. Our trust in Jesus will be every bit as real to us as gravity. Let N. T. Wright help to equip you for your life in Christ, just as he has equipped me.

Daily Bible Readings

More on Jesus

Monday, Isaiah 52:13-53:12 The suffering servant

Tuesday, Acts 2:17-41 Peter's first sermon

Wednesday, Acts 26:1-23 Paul tells Agrippa and Festus his story of Jesus.

Thursday, 1 Corinthians 15 The resurrection of Jesus

Friday, Ephesians 1:3-14 Our many blessings in Christ

Saturday, 1 Peter 1:3-12 Jesus: the new hope

Scott Engle's Bible Classes

Monday Evening Class

A study of the book of Revelation

Meets from 7:00 to 8:15 in Piro Hall

Tuesday Lunchtime Class

A study of Paul's letter to the Romans

Meets from 11:45 to 1:00 in Piro Hall

About the weekday classes:

Join us whenever you can. Each week's lesson stands on its own. This is very "drop-in." Bring something to eat if you like. Bring a study Bible.

On occasion Scott must cancel class, so if you are coming for the first time, you can check www.scottengle.org to make sure the class is meeting.

Scott's 11:00 Sunday Class in Smith Worship Center

This is a large, lecture-oriented class open to all ages.

Video of each week's class is posted here: vimeo.com/groups/scottsbiblestudy

Current series: *The Destroyer of the Gods: from Pagan to Christian*