

Colossian truth - the prophecies of Balaam

Part 1

Speaker	John Scales
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[00:00:00] Just a couple of verses in the Epistle to the Colossians, in verse 24 of the first chapter of verse 4, to read a few verses in order to get the sequence.

Chapter 1, Colossians, verse 24, Paul speaks of himself, I, Paul, am made a minister who now rejoices in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church, whereof I am made a minister according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the Word of God, even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, [00:01:03] but now is made manifest to his saints, to whom God would make known what is the richest of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory, whom we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.

And then in chapter 3 in the first verse, if ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God, set your affliction on things above, not on things on the earth, for you are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.

We've been rather, well, we have been taken up this afternoon with what I may call the Colossian side of truth so far in the church's concern, [00:02:09] that is to say, as I understand it, the view of the church as pilgrims here, passing through the world, going on with the glory before us and with Christ amongst us.

Put it the other way round, with Christ amongst us and the glory before us.

That's what we have in the wilderness. They are the people of God, going through the wilderness, with the land before them, the ark of God in their midst.

And as they go through the wilderness, well, they are fed upon the manna, aren't they? The manna which speaks of the humiliation, the humanity about this in Lord Jesus down here.

But then you see, we must bear in mind as we think of the Colossian side of the truth, [00:03:02] also the Ephesian side of the truth. Perhaps sometimes we dwell on the Ephesian side of the truth, to the exclusion of the Colossian side of the truth. In Ephesians, we see the church seated with Christ in the heavenly glory.

And the counterpart of the Old Testament, surely is the people of God entering into the promised land, and the manna ceases and they eat of the old corn of the land, which, as we well know, represents to us the glorified Christ, seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

You know, I was rather brought up with a joke about this one day, when I was speaking to a Christian friend, not in our fellowship, and he said that his impression was, the way the brethren in their worship meetings always seem to be harking back to their sins, a certain other group of Christians with which he was in some way associated, they were much more concerned with the person of Christ glorified in heaven, [00:04:02] as the head of the church.

And I felt somehow, if that's what he noticed, it might be true of some believers in some places, and I hope we're not like that, because we don't want always to be thinking of the blessed man that was down here, we have as the head of the church, the wonderful, our Lord and our Saviour, he's not down here now, he's not suffering, he's not despised and rejected down here in his present experience, but he's seated in glory, he's seated in majesty, and he's there to intercede for us.

And I feel this is more the deficient side of the truth, which speaks of the power of God, which raised him up from the dead and set him at his own right hand, far above all principality and power and might and dominion in every name. It is named not only in that world, but also in that which is to come, and has put all things in subjection under his feet, [00:05:02] and given him to be head over the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all.

However, I feel the Spirit of God has led us into the Colossian side of the truth today, and we need to realize we're passing through this wilderness world, and so often we find in the ministry of those who have gone before us, and which have been led for us, particularly perhaps in some of Mr. Darby's hymns, the reference to this wilderness world, this world is a wilderness wide, and then he talks about this waste, there you find a hymn which talks about this waste, we never wrote it, but Mr. Darby wrote it, because he found the world was a waste, and in the waste there was nothing for him, everything for him was in the glory to come. That's the Colossian side of the truth.

Well now, here we are, and you know, as we were thinking this afternoon, this passage came before us in the 22nd and 23rd of Numbers, [00:06:04] particularly the 23rd of Numbers, where we have a doubtless hope upon the people of God.

The fact that it's through the eyes of an ungodly and a wicked man, nonetheless, it presents God's thoughts, because God was pleased to express his thoughts concerning his people through the eyes of Balaam, the son of Beor.

And although Balaam went up onto the high places, overlooking the camp of Israel, with the purpose in mind of cursing them, and then God saw to it that he blessed them, and we have the four prophecies which he uttered, the first three of them at least are inspired, and the fourth one, presumably, is inspired, although it's not so directly inspired as the first three. The first three prophecies, God specifically told him what to say, and in the fourth prophecy, when he found out the way God's thoughts went, [00:07:03] then he expressed his own development of God's thoughts. And it's a sad prophecy, as we shall see. I don't want to take up all the time, because I'm sure somebody else is wanting to say something this evening. But in the first prophecy, chapter 23 and verse 7, I'll just point out this.

There is God, as it were, looking down through the eyes of Balaam, and this is what he says. From the top of the rocks I seek him, and from the hills I behold him. Lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations. Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel? Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his.

What do we see there?

We see there that God sees, through the eyes of Balaam, a people who are quite distinct and separate from the world.

God had called his people out from Egypt, [00:08:01] he brought them out, and he was making them, he had made them his people. And he made it quite plain to them that they were not to get involved with the nations round about, and his purpose for them was that they should be entirely distinct, and set apart for himself.

We call it in New Testament, in New Testament parallels, we call it sanctification, don't we? Set apart in openness for himself.

And God sees his people through the eyes of Balaam in this way. There is a people, they have no part among the nations. And you know the problem for you and me, is to work this truth out, this purpose of God out, in so far as its application is proper to the church, and I believe it's entirely proper to the church, regards people in the world today. The church, its purpose for them is that they should be dwelling in this world, amongst the people of the world, [00:09:02] and yet be entirely distinct from the world. And you and I, as we consider the word of God, we must always keep this in mind, that God has called us out from the world, and set us apart in holiness to himself. And the word is repeated in Peter's epistle, and particularly in Peter's epistle, as he takes it from the Pentateuch, the word be holy, for I am holy.

And God's purpose for us is that we should be holy, in this world.

And the Lord Jesus, in his prayer in the 17th of John, he says, for their sake I sanctify myself, that they also may be surely sanctified.

His purpose is that his people should be sanctified, as we're here with him.

Now the second prophecy, stresses another part of God's view of the church. We look at it in the same chapter, verse 21.

He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, [00:10:03] neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel. The Lord his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them.

That's the part I particularly wanted to stress.

And then just in the end of verse 23, what hath God wrought?

It's one disaster after another. One tragedy after another.

We read about the plague. We read about the earth opening and swallowing them up. We read about

the fiery serpents, and so on. It's a terrible recital of human failure, and human disobedience, against the God that had blessed them, and called them, and brought them out by his mighty hand from Egypt, and had set the land before them. In human terms, it's a terrible tragedy. And yet here, we see this.

He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel. Why hasn't he seen it?

Why, the answer is perfectly plain, [00:11:02] as we consider the scripture as a whole, and that was that God viewed his people as being covered by the blood of the Lamb. You see, these people that he brought up, Egypt, they were redeemed by the blood of the Passover Lamb, and God saw them on redemption ground.

Right the way through their wilderness journey, they were on redemption ground. Although they were disobedient, although they were urban, although they didn't follow the teachings of the Lord, God saw them covered by the blood of the Lamb. And you know, we have this same teaching worked out in full measure in this day of God's grace. We have this wonderful statement being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.

And you and I, as we look at ourselves honestly, in our mirror, I don't mean a glass mirror, but I mean when we do a self-examination, we see what a rotten bum we are, don't we? I see what a dreadful chap I am, [00:12:01] how thoroughly unreliable, how selfish, how deceitful, and all the rest of the things I know about myself.

And yet I know that God, as he looks down upon me, then he sees me as being covered in the blood of Christ. You know the little story here, forgive me for diverging, but I think it's such a good story, so useful in the Gospel. It concerns a man that bought a Rolls-Royce. And in his Rolls-Royce, he went touring on the continent. And it broke down.

And so he, with a bit of quandary, because nobody could repair a Rolls-Royce on the continent, so he rang up the factory.

And the Rolls-Royce factory sent out a fitter, all dressed in white uniform, who came out by air and hired a car and came rushing up to the scene where this car had broken down and brought all the parts that were necessary and did a repair, and went back by the way he came. And the chap that had bought the Rolls-Royce, he was scratching his head, and he said, well, I don't know, this is going to cost me just as much as if I'd bought a new Rolls. So he went back home again. [00:13:02] And he never had a bill, they've seen. And so, eventually, he thought, well, this is obviously wrong. They've forgotten to send me the bill. So he wrote to the company and said, dear sir, you did so and so and such and such a date. And they wrote back, dear sir, we have no record of any Rolls-Royce having ever broken down anywhere in the world. Yours truly.

You see, this is the picture. God does not recognize your sins and mine. He's put them right behind his back and forgotten about them.

You know, it brings me back to what my dear brother said. We're always hopping back to our sins. It's right that we should remember them. It's right that we should remember the pit that we've been dug out of. But we need to remember too that God has put them behind his back. Remember the

wonderful work of Christ in which he bore them in his own body upon the tree. But we don't need to feel guilty before God. The worshippers, once purged, should have no more conscience of sins, Hebrews says.

And that's the position that we're in. Justified freely by his grace [00:14:03] through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel. The Lord his God is with him and the shepherd king is among them.

And you know, this is long before King Saul. Eventually the people asked for a king and they upset God by asking for a king. But it was in God's purposes that they should have a king. But it was in his time they were to have a king. And he had his Christ in preparation to send into the world who is to be their king. And David before him, the man after God's own heart, who beforehand represented the Messiah here as the shepherd king over God's people, the shadow of a king, says Boland, the shadow of a king is among them. And you and I, you know, we're not so much looking forward to the Lord Jesus as our king, but we're looking forward to the glorious day when he is to be king over all the earth, when he comes forth in triumph, [00:15:01] king of kings and lord of lords.

But for you and me, he is our lord, he is our head, and he is to be our heavenly bridegroom.

That's the thought which is before us so far as the Lord Jesus is concerned.

As we go along our pilgrim pathway through this world of the glory before us, the shout of the king, the Lord Jesus is there, we're going to meet with him. That's our blessed hope.

Now just passing on quickly, and as they beheld these people, the end of it, 23rd verse, what hath God wrought?

And we see the church in the world today, for all its failings, it's a representation of what God has achieved in this age in Christ, all those who are redeemed by the precious blood, and there are thousands, there are millions, not just in England, nor yet in Europe, but in the whole world.

There are millions and millions of redeemed souls going on to the glory, [00:16:01] and there are revelations to the world around what God has done. They're born again. They don't belong to the world. They're separate from the world. Something that God has done, and the evidence of it is here in the world for the world to see.

And you and I, you know, we have this witness to give to the world that God has wrought something in us.

It says at the end of one of the Psalms, I can't remember which one it is, Come and I will tell you what God has done for my soul. This is our testimony to the world, what God has done for our soul. And the world as it looks upon us, it should see that we're different from them. We've got something that they haven't got, something which is great, and something which is precious, something which is infinitely to be desired. Do we show that to the world? Or do we show the world a picture of a dreary soul flogging along with a load on our back and hoping one day we're going to find something a bit different from what we've got today? And that's so many Christians doing that. We're not striding forth purposefully, holding our banner high, and saying we're going on to the glory and we can see the light.

[00:17:01] The third one, chapter 24, he took up his barrel again, and in verse 5, How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel, as the valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the riverside, as the trees of thine own which the Lord hath planted, and as cedar trees beside the waters.

What is this?

It's order.

If you go to the beginning of Numbers, you see the order of the camp, the second chapter.

And then, as they began to move forward, as the ark moved forward, following the pillar of cloud, the pillar of fire, so the tribes fell into line in their order as they marched forward.

You know, you go to a campsite, as I've been trying to witness in a campsite in Europe, it's pretty chaotic, there's tents, caravans scattered about all over the place [00:18:01] in a sort of a melee of pointless, purposeless holidaymakers.

But these people of God, they were like a well-disciplined army. They were laid out, all precisely taken by God, where they should go, where they should pitch, how their tents should be arranged, the ark of the covenant in the center, and everything there in precision and in order.

And you know, this is what God desires, this is God's thought for his people today. He looks for order in the church.

And you and I, we need to recognize God's thoughts in this respect, and we need to observe order. Although we ourselves, as we look around generally in Christendom, we see utter chaos in human terms. We see absolute disorder so far as the testimony to the one body is concerned. We are called upon to give the testimony to the one body and to observe the principles of the one body. And that doesn't mean we've got to be a very nice, tight, celebrity little fellowship [00:19:01] or on our own, ignoring all the rest of the believers round about. But we need to give expression to the one body by our obedience to Scripture, by our meeting to the Lord and to his name alone, but at the same time recognizing that all those who are truly born again, they all form a part of the body of Christ. And to us, to work this out in practice is a problem.

It's difficult, but we're called upon to do it. God, as he looks down from heaven, he sees order in the church. He looks for order in the church and I believe that he calls upon us who have been so blessed with the teaching of Scripture and leading in our teaching of the Holy Spirit to give expression to disorder, that we should be seen by him like the lion aloe that the Lord has planted.

That's what he saw.

And you know, so often we feel, in human terms, we feel that the church's testimony is such a raven.

But that's not his thought. [00:20:02] As we were quoting in prayer earlier, the Lord Jesus said those words, I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. There is the order and there is the view of God as he sees it from the tops of the rocks.

And then in verse 9, he couched down, he lay down with the lion and there's a great lion who shall stir him up.

Blessed is he that blesses thee and cursed is he that curses thee.

It suggests, doesn't it, a potential strength, a strength there which is perhaps lying dormant, the lion which is couching and raises free the church. The church, under the leadership of the Lord Jesus Christ, is about to enter into its victorious phase where it's going to inherit all things in Christ.

Well now, just to pass on quickly to the fourth prophecy, [00:21:05] where Balaam, he doesn't see God's face.

He talks about himself in verse 17.

I shall see him, but not now. I shall behold him, but not nigh. He doesn't come into the picture. He has no part in this blessing. But then he says, there shall come a star out of Jacob and a scepter shall rise out of Israel and shall smite the corners of Moab and destroy the children of Sheol.

Out of Jacob shall come he that shall have dominion and shall destroy him that remaineth of the city.

He'd been called upon by Moab to curse, but here he says that the victory is with the people of God.

And surely this is what you and I need to have in our hearts. The Lord Jesus says to his disciples, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.

He doesn't call upon us to overcome the world. He calls upon us to resist the powers of the devil. [00:22:03] We are in the conflict.

He doesn't call upon us to overcome the world. He's already done that. We need to be in the power of his victory.

And there you are.

The star is coming out of Jacob and a scepter arising out of Israel.

Out of Jacob shall come he that shall have dominion and shall destroy him that remaineth of the city.

We've been talking about a city this afternoon. This isn't the same city.

This is the worldly city, isn't it? This is the city where the king of Moab holds sway.

And all the enemies of God, whether the Moabites or the Ammonites or the Amalekites or any of the other Hittites and the Thursites and the Aramites and the Jebusites and so on, all the powers of this world, all those powers which are activated by Satan, the Lord Jesus is going to destroy them. And he's going to destroy the power of the Antichrist and consume him by the breath of his mouth [00:23:02] and destroy him by the brightness of his coming. The Lord Jesus is going to come in power and great glory. We're going to come with him. So you see, the victory is ours. We need to have this thought before us. We're not here as the defeated people. We're not here as those that are dying out. We're

not here as those that are representing a very, very feeble and failing remnant. We're on the side of the victorious Lord Jesus Christ and we're going on and we're going to see the day of his victory. We're going to be with him. We're going to be in his train as he comes forth to be glorified in the saints and to be admired in all those who believe.