

UPWARD CALL

Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but this is my one aim: to forget everything that's behind, and to strain every nerve to go after what lies ahead. I press on toward the finish line, where the prize waiting for me is the upward call of God
IN KING JESUS.

(Philippians 3:13-14)

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Proclaim King Jesus

During this so-called *unprecedented day*, injecting God into a conversation might be a little easier than during less unprecedented days when people are under less strain. Some might even think that injecting God into a conversation today is like presenting the gospel. But is it? I don't think so. It is not a given that when we, as Christians, say God, the people listening understand to whom we are referring. After all, God can mean many things to many people. It is a lot like using the word *prayer*. It seems that more times than not, people say they prayed over something and their prayer produced some result. So, the mantra goes out by well-meaning Christians that "we must pray over" *whatever*, but where is God in the prayer and the answer, especially if the answer doesn't match up to the prayer? The point is that people don't connect the prayer with God who hears the prayer and answers all in accord with His perfect will. If prayer isn't connected with God directly, then our so-called *prayers* are just that—ours, as if we made something happen. Prayer is a topic all unto itself and not what is on my heart for what follows.

The point is this: We can use the word *God* in a conversation in such a way that it becomes too generic and the Christian message to the world gets lost, or we can leave *God* entirely out of our conversation, as if His part in something is clearly understood by all when it is not.

Now, this leads to my point. As Christians, our message has to be rooted and grounded in Jesus, the Son of God and our Lord and King, whether in casual or formal conversations. To make the point, I want us to consider what Paul wrote to the Colossians (verses noted). The following verses are taken from N.T. Wright's *Kingdom New Testament*. I find his rendering rather refreshing.

Paul claims that he was commissioned *to fulfill the word of God* (1:25), which means he was charged by God to make a full presentation of God's message or to deliver God's message in full. This message was kept a secret or was a mystery to past ages and generations, but in his day was being revealed to God's holy people. In other words, this mystery remained a secret or an unknown until that point in history in the first century. It was a mystery that was a rich glory among the nations. Paul declared that there was a key to this mystery. What was it?

And this is the key: the king, living within you as the hope of glory! (1:27)

But then, get this!

He is the one we are proclaiming. (1:28)

Who is this king? Well, Paul started his letter with this: **Paul, an apostle of King Jesus by God's purpose** (1:1). Paul's commission was to proclaim King Jesus. This was God's purpose for his life as he was charged to deliver God's message in full. Paul's entire life after the king broke into it on the way to Damascus was devoted to instructing everybody and teaching everybody for one purpose: **to present everybody grown up, complete, in the king** (1:28).

Paul struggled for the early congregation of the Lord's people as he sought to encourage their hearts to be brought together in love. Listen to the heart of this brother.

I want them to experience all the wealth of definite understanding, and to come to the knowledge of God's mystery—the Messiah, the king! He is the place where you'll find all the hidden treasures of wisdom and knowledge. (2:2b-3)

In all his time of serving the living God, Paul never deviated from the core message—the Messiah (Christ), the king! I truly love this next verse.

So, then, just as you received King Jesus the Lord, you must continue your journey in him. You must put down healthy roots in him, being built up brick by brick in him, and established strongly in the faith, just as you were taught, with overflowing thankfulness. (2:6)

Throughout this epistle and, in fact, all of his epistles, Paul had only one message. It is true that he had to deal with specific issues in the early ecclesias (what some call *occasional letters*), but he always drove it back to the only answer—that is, the mystery of King Jesus that he was charged to reveal to the nations and for which he was chained.

King Jesus is the head of all rule and authority (2:10). The one in whom you have been circumcised and baptized in a new way (2:11-12). The one in whom God made you alive together with Jesus, forgiving us all our offenses (2:13). The one in whom we all died, and are now raised to life with him (the king) (3:1).

Don't you see: you died, and your life has been hidden with the king, in God! When the king is revealed (and he is your life, remember), then you too will be revealed with him in glory. (3:3-4)

The king is everything and in everything! (3:11)

And, let us not overlook the great poem (as some call it) that Paul presented in this epistle that he signed off by his own hand.

He is the image of God, the invisible one, the firstborn of all creation. For in him all things were created, in the heavens and here on the earth. Things we can see and things we cannot—thrones and lordships and rulers and powers—all things were created both through him and for him.

And he is ahead, prior to all else, and in him all things hold together; and he himself is supreme, the head over the body, the church.

He is the start of it all, firstborn from realms of the dead; so in all things he might be the chief. For in him all the Fullness was glad to dwell and through him to reconcile all to himself, making peace through the blood of his cross, through him—yes, things on the earth, and also the things in the heavens. (1:15-20)

Dear saints, in these unprecedented times, let us not shrink back from declaring this mystery to a world that is changing before our very eyes. Let us not be generic in our testimony, but instead, let us proclaim King Jesus, the mystery of God that is now lived out in each one of us who believe. Surely, we all have some living experience we can share with others in these days as we reveal the King of all kings. This is the day to proclaim King Jesus in all His glory and why He is the hope of the world.