

Sermon preached by Pastor Ben on Colossians 1:1-14 at Victory of the Lamb on January 4, 2015.

Series: Profile
Today's Focus: Profile Prayer

"Whose Are You?"

In the name of Jesus Christ whose work here on earth has qualified us to enjoy an inheritance with God in heaven.

Friends, I know a lot of you are on social media. Maybe some of you just jumped on board for the first time. Like, Look out 2015...I'm on Facebook! Or, I don't know, maybe you're like my sister-in-law who said the other day that the first resolution she kept this year was to delete her Facebook account. But right now it's pretty interesting out there.

¹Stats from 2014 indicate that about ¾ of internet users are on social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, or LinkedIn. And then there's a whole bunch of newer social media apps that teens use and don't want their parents to know about! So even if you're not on social media, a pretty high percentage of the people you meet are. Actually it's 90% of internet users between the ages of 18-29 and 49% of internet users 65+. That one kind of surprised me. But overall that's a lot of people in our country.

That means surely there is somebody here today, at least one of you sitting here today, who can empathize with me in my dilemma. It's a dilemma I have faced every time I've registered for a new social media account: first it was Facebook, then I got talked into Twitter (and I'm still trying to figure out how to use hashtags), and then someone else convinced me as a pastor I should really be on LinkedIn. But each time I faced a dilemma. I felt a tension. *How do I create a profile?* Anybody else ever feel that tension?

And I don't mean that it was hard to figure out how to upload a profile picture or something like that. What I mean is that it was hard to decide what kind of picture to upload. After all, who's going to see this picture? Who's going to read the *About Me* section? What do I want everyone to see and to know? And what do I just want my friends to see and know? And who are my friends, anyway? And for that matter, Who am I anyway? Am I what others think of me? Am I what I *want* others to think of me? Who am I?

Friends, whether you're on social media or not, Who are you? Who are you *really*? Those are deep philosophical questions aren't they? Actually though I'm hoping we might start today by asking the question a little bit differently, *Whose* are you? That's the question I want to help you answer today as we start our journey over the next couple weeks into a book of the Bible called

¹ <http://www.pewinternet.org/fact-sheets/social-networking-fact-sheet/>

Colossians. Stick with us the next couple weeks and you can say you studied an entire book of the Bible! Here's how it starts out:

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother. So this is a letter that was originally written by a guy named Paul. Who was he? He was an apostle of Jesus. In other words he was sort of like an official spokesman for Jesus, handpicked by Jesus. And it was God who inspired and guided Paul to write this letter which is all about Jesus to a church.

2 To God's holy people in Colossae, the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ: Grace and peace to you from God our Father. So who's Paul writing to? *To God's holy people in Colossae.* Now let's stop there real quick. First of all Colossae was a city in what is today the country of Turkey. And at this time when Paul was writing, it wasn't exactly an up and coming place. It was kind of like a town that got bypassed by the interstate or a city whose industry had sort of dried up.

But here were these people in Colossae, most of them brand new Christians just like some of you in this new church. And just imagine for a moment if the members of the church in Colossae were trying to create their first century AD social media profile. What do you think they would've put in the About Me section? You think anyone would've put, "I'm one of God's holy people"? I mean is that how you would ever think to describe yourself?

But it was true. They were God's holy people, the members of the Christian church in Colossae, just as God considers you one of his holy people if you also believe in Jesus Christ as the one who has saved you from your sins by exchanging his perfect record for your sinful one. Because here's how this works. A person doesn't become holy over time by trying harder to be good as if you can just say, "Ok it's a new year so I'm going to make a resolution to be a better person and I'm going to really work at it. I'm going to make God happy by going to church more" or something like that.

No, a person is declared holy by God when he or she recognizes, when you recognize... how lost you are on your own but trust in Jesus Christ alone who lived a holy life in your place, who died on the cross in your place, who opened the door to eternal life when he rose from the dead. And then not only does God declare you holy but he considers you his own. One of God's holy people!

Oh boy we could just camp out here at these verses all day long but let's go on. *3 We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, 4 because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people— 5 the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel 6 that has come to you. In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world—just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God's grace. 7 You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, 8 and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.*

So here we get a little window into these people. Their faith in Jesus Christ was living and active. A little bit later we're going to learn they had some struggles too but the good news was that their faith wasn't a stagnant thing. They loved each other and it showed because together they had the hope of eternal life in heaven through Jesus.

Friends, what do you hope for? What are you hoping for this new year? Maybe you recently received some sad news that makes it feel like hope has been snatched away from you. Maybe you feel kind of hopeless and that's why you're here today. Well the good news is that because of Jesus you can always have hope! Christians can always be optimists—not because everything you experience in life is going to feel good but because you belong to God who promises that he will work it all out, the good and the bad, for your eternal good—the goal of heaven. Nothing can rob you of that hope!

It was a pastor named Epaphras who seems to have started the church there in Colossae and told them this. He was likely the first person to share the good news about who Jesus is and what Jesus has done for these people. So if you're here today and you've never read the Bible or you don't really know much about Jesus and this is all new to you...that's ok! Welcome! We all start out like that. It's ok to feel like you're at square one today. The Colossians once did too.

So the church there in Colossae was probably started by this guy I just mentioned named Epaphras. I think it's likely that Epaphras learned about Jesus from the Apostle Paul himself—perhaps in Ephesus which was about 100 miles to the west where Paul stayed for some time years earlier. But here's what's going on in the background of this letter. We learn from the end of Colossians that Epaphras is with Paul in Rome from where Paul is writing this letter to the Colossians. In other words Epaphras made a trip to Rome where Paul was staying in order to tell Paul about the church in Colossae and tell him about how the Colossian Christians were doing. You have any idea how long of a trip that was to do that? About 1,300 miles! And they didn't have Twitter back then. They couldn't just email. It's likely Pastor Epaphras walked most of the way to Rome. Can you imagine? 1,300 miles...in sandals.

What would possess someone to do that? Well throughout the course of our journey through Colossians over the next couple weeks we're going to learn more about this so you're going to want to come back the next couple weeks. But here's what it comes down to...the Colossians were starting to forget who they really were in Christ. They were forgetting *whose* they were. They were starting to combine various teachings from different religions to come up with something new...to kind of update and customize their spiritual profile, give it a fresh new look, to look better in the eyes of certain new friends, to move beyond simple faith in Jesus to something more sophisticated. Friends, that's easy to do, isn't it? To fall into the trap of looking beyond Jesus. To try and find your identity in what other people think of you, to measure your status by how you feel about your own accomplishments or your family or how much money you make, or to evaluate God even on the basis of your own thoughts and opinions rather than the simple clear

and comforting truths of his word. So here's what the apostle Paul prays for the Colossians and it's a fitting profile prayer for all of us today as well.

9 For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, 10 so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, 11 being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, 12 and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. 13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Now if you were to pray for one blessing for yourself and for the people you love in 2015, what would you pray for? Well when Paul here prays for the Christians in Colossae, he prays that God would fill them with spiritual wisdom and understanding. He prays that they would be able to take the Bible's wisdom and apply it to their everyday lives. He prays that God would fill them with the understanding of his word so that they would be able to tell the difference between what is true and what is a lie. He prays for spiritual blessings for them! And friends, there is no greater spiritual blessing than this—to know *whose you are*. Listen again as Paul says that God the Father has...

...qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. 13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Friends, let me just ask you... Any of you make it through 2014 without wrecking a friendship, without ever making a parenting mistake, without ever angering your parents, without breaking a promise, without doing something stupid, something sinful, something that you can't undo, saying something you regret? Me either. But that's why God gave us a Savior. That's why he sent us Jesus. To redeem us.

Friends, the most important resolution this new year isn't one you're going to make. It's the one that Jesus made a long time ago on the cross—when the problem of your sins was resolved through the sacrifice Jesus made so that you could be redeemed from sin and death, rescued from the controlling power of darkness, and enjoy a brand new status in the eyes of God through the forgiveness of all your sins.

Who are you? Better yet, *Whose* are you? Over the next couple weeks I pray that you would be able to join me in saying, "I am God's. I'm one of God's holy people whom he delights to love! All because of Jesus." Amen.