

First Baptist Church Merritt Island
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COLOSSIANS – Hope of Glory
Bearing Gospel Fruit
Colossians 1:1-8

I was 19 years old when I preached my first sermon in a Sunday morning church service. It was at Olive Branch Baptist Church on Milton Bear Branch Road in Benington, Indiana – population 1,500. My sermon was from Isaiah 26:3 – *Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.*

I was so nervous, I mindlessly said “you know” 100 times in 25 minutes. They were kind enough to ask me back the following week. It’s been nearly 30 years. I’ve never had the opportunity to go back to that little church in Benington. It’s so out of the way that it isn’t on the way to anywhere else.

Recently, I looked up that church and found their website. And it appears that small church is thriving in that little farm community. I felt an unexpected wave of emotion come over me and began to thank the Lord for His grace and for evidence of the gospel’s work in that out of the way farm community. I haven’t been there in 30 years. But they are my family in Christ and in a world that is opposing the work of Jesus, it’s a joy to hear that other brothers and sisters are holding strong.

And that’s the dynamic in our text for this morning. The book of Colossians is a letter from the Apostle Paul to a group of Christians in the city of Colossae. Colossae was once a thriving community but over the course of hundreds of years, it had become a small, insignificant town. The nearest major city was the city of Ephesus, which was 100 miles to the West. In a sense, Colossae was so out of the way that it wasn’t on the way to anywhere else. As a matter of fact, chapter 2, verse 1 says Paul had never been there.

Many scholars say that of all the churches to which Paul wrote letters, the church of Colossae is the smallest church in the most insignificant city. But they were his brothers and sisters. While Paul was imprisoned in Rome, he received word that they were thriving in their little town. The gospel was bearing fruit. And Paul was deeply thankful for the gospel’s work. But this church was also under attack. False teachers had come in and were trying to lead this little community astray.

So, Paul writes this letter to encourage his brothers and sisters in Christ and strengthen them to withstand the false teaching that was creeping in. And our text this morning is the celebration of the big work of God in a little church in a small town named Colossae.

So, let’s begin our study of Paul’s letter to the Colossians.

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

The first thing Paul clarifies is that he is an apostle. The Greek word translated apostle in our English bibles is a word that literally means one who is sent. It was used to describe someone who had been given the authority of the one who sent them. For instance, it was often used to designate the representative of a king, kind of like a modern-day ambassador.

And Paul starts this letter by saying he is an apostle of Jesus by the will of God. That means his message carries the very authority of God Himself. This letter is the very word of God flowing through Paul. That distinguishes Paul from the false teachers who are trying to lead these

Colossians astray. He can shoot down their false doctrines and clarify the truth because he has a message that comes with the authority of God Himself.

Colossians 1:2-5

To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father. 3 We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, 4 since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, 5 because of the hope laid up for you in heaven.

Paul says he is thankful for 3 things he has heard about the people in Colossae. He has heard of their faith in Jesus, their love for the saints, and the hope they have in heaven. Keep those in mind, we'll come back to them in a minute. But notice how those things came about.

Colossians 1:5-8

Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, 6 which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth, 7 just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf 8 and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

Paul says the Colossians heard and understood the gospel because Epaphras was faithful to tell them about it. Epaphras is likely the man who planted and pastored the church in Colossae. It's possible he came to faith in Jesus through the ministry of Paul in Ephesus. Chapter 4, verse 12 tells us that Epaphras was with Paul when he wrote this letter. It seems that he went to Paul for help to deal with the false teachers and returned with this letter to them.

At any rate, Epaphras was the one who taught these believers the gospel. And Paul says from the day they heard and understood it, it was bearing fruit and increasing in them. What was that fruit? At the very least, it was faith, love, and hope.

And when you put all of that together, it gives us the big idea for this morning.

Big Idea: The Gospel bears fruit in us through faith, love, and hope.

The power of God is unleashed in the lives of people through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Lives are transformed, eternal destinies are changed, and God's glory is revealed through the truth of the gospel. I'm so excited about this study because the book of Colossians is filled with powerful truth about the gospel.

But, for this morning, let me walk you through some of the basic truths that help us understand the gospel.

The word "gospel" simply means "good news." It's the good news from God to the people of this world. And what is that good news? Look at the last phrase of verse 6: ***since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth,***

The gospel is the good news about the truth of God's grace to us in Jesus. Grace is the undeserved favor of God. It's Him showing kindness and doing good for us though we don't deserve it.

As a matter of fact, the moment we deserve something it's no longer grace. When you get to the end of the work week and your employer pays you for it, you probably don't think "Wow, that was awfully gracious." You earned it. You worked for it. That means it isn't grace.

And the message of the gospel is that what God does for us through Jesus is a work of His grace. In other words, you don't deserve it, and you can't earn it or repay it by any work you do. So, any teaching that says your standing before God depends on something you do is no longer the gospel. And that's going to be a huge theme in the book of Colossians. In Chapter 2, Paul confronts the lies of false teachers who were trying to get these believers to adopt a so-called Christian life that centered on the work they did to make accept them. That isn't grace. That isn't the gospel. The good news is that our relationship with God rests entirely on His grace to us in Jesus.

And what does God graciously give us in Jesus? Let me show you a couple of things right here in chapter 1. Look down at verses 13-14:

Colossians 1:13-14

[God] has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

God's grace redeems us through the work of Jesus. The word redeem means "to buy back." It's a term that was associated with the ancient slave trade. Imagine you were sold into slavery. As a slave, you would be powerless. You would be the possession of someone else. And the bible teaches all of us have sinned, and because sin has entered the human race, we are all held captive as slaves to sin.

In other words, we cannot live a life that pleases God by our own power because we are powerless. Verse 13 says we are captive to the domain of darkness – that's the realm that is ruled by Satan, the enemy of God. That's what is wrong with our world today. The people of this world are held captive to the satanic schemes that oppose God and His good design for our lives. We've been sold into slavery by our sin and need someone to redeem us...to buy us back.

Go back to that idea of slavery. In the ancient world, if you were sold into slavery, someone who loved you could enter the slave market and buy you back. They could redeem you. And that's what God has done. In His gracious love for us, He sent a Redeemer, the only One who had the ability to buy us back, to pay the price of our sin so that He could bring us redemption.

And that Redeemer's name is Jesus. Jesus, the Son of God entered this world as one of us. God became flesh. He entered the slave market of this world. He lived the life we all failed to live, a sinless life of perfect obedience to God the Father. And He died the death we deserved to die. As Jesus hung upon the cross, God placed our sin upon Jesus and punished our sin by pouring out His just wrath on Christ. Three days later, Jesus rose from the dead as the display of His power to defeat the powers of darkness and to establish a new Kingdom where men and women could live free from the power of sin, Satan, and death itself.

That's the good news of the Gospel. By God's grace to us through Christ, we are forgiven of sin, restored to God, and set free to live in Christ's eternal kingdom. That's why Paul starts the letter the way He does. Go back to verse 2.

Colossians 1:2

To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

Paul calls these believers saints. The word "saint" means "holy one." That's who you are in Jesus Christ. You are redeemed from sin and made a holy in the eyes of God. You are completely forgiven of all your sin and counted holy and blameless in Christ.

Do you ever wonder what God sees when He looks at you? If you are trusting in Jesus, I'll tell you what He sees when He looks at you: He sees a saint who is as righteous as His Son. The whole world might look at you and see a messed up, washed up, wretched sinner, but that's not what God sees. He sees the righteousness of His own Son and He treats you the way He would treat Jesus.

And you might think, "I don't deserve to be treated like Jesus. If you knew all the things I've done, you'd never think that I deserve anything but hell itself." Of course you don't deserve it! That's why it's grace! It's the undeserved favor of God. That's why the gospel is good news.

But wait, there's more! God's grace doesn't just bring us redemption through the work of Jesus. **God's grace unites us to the person of Jesus.** Look down at verse 27.

Colossians 1:27

To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

When we come to faith in Jesus, God miraculously unites us to the person of Christ. That's how Jesus was able to bear our sin at the cross, we are united to Him. And through that union with Christ, Jesus will live in His resurrection power in and through us. We will talk more about this in the weeks to come, but the Christian life isn't something we do for God, it's something Jesus does in us. The way we live in freedom is not by trying our best to obey the law of God. We live in freedom by trusting Jesus to be Jesus in us. That's our hope of glory. When we trust in Christ, He begins a work in us that He will complete in us. He will present us to God the Father as a finished work, holy and blameless and just like Him.

That's the gospel. That's the truth of the grace of God. So, what does it look like when the grace of God is at work in our lives through the gospel?

Well, remember our big idea. Remember what Paul is so thankful for. He has heard that the Colossians have faith, love, and hope. That's the fruit that the gospel. That's the evidence of grace.

Let's take those one at a time.

1. The GOSPEL IS AT WORK IN YOU...WHEN YOU PLACE YOUR FAITH IN JESUS

Colossians 1:3-4

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus...

The way you receive the gift of God's grace is through faith in the person of Jesus. The word "faith" is a word that includes the ideas of belief and trust.

So, you have faith in Jesus when you believe the truth about Jesus. Namely, you believe that He is the Son of God. You believe that He lived a perfect, sinless life. You believe He died on the cross for your sins. You believe He provides forgiveness and redemption. You believe that He rose again from the dead and will raise you by His power to a brand-new kind of life. Faith is believing the truth about Jesus.

But faith is more than just belief. It's more than just mental assent to those truths. The Bible says that even the demons of hell believe the truth about Jesus. Faith is more than just belief in Jesus. Faith is trust in Jesus.

Years ago, Emily and I took our family to visit her aunt and uncle who lived just outside of Washington, D.C. We decided to take one day and visit the Capital and the way we were going to get there was by taking the train from Maryland into D.C. So, we went to the train station and purchased tickets for the train. Then, we got on the platform and waited for the train to arrive. When it did, the door opened up and something had to happen. We had to believe that train could take us to D.C. But, simply believing wasn't enough. What did we have to do? We had to get on the train. We couldn't just put part of ourselves on the train, we had to put our whole selves on that train. We didn't leave our legs outside to try and help the train along. That would have been disastrous. That train had more than enough power to get us where we needed to go without any help from us. We just had to put our whole selves in the place of depending entirely on the train. In other words, we had to trust the train.

And that's what faith is. It's placing our whole selves in dependance on and confidence in Jesus to do for us what we can't do for ourselves. That's faith in Jesus.

And that's how you can know that the gospel of God's grace is at work in you. You get on the train and enjoy the ride. You place your faith and trust in the person and power of Jesus.

So, that begs the question: Are you trusting in Jesus and Jesus alone to do for you what you cannot do for yourself? Friend, the price has been paid. The door of salvation is open wide for whosoever will. All you have to do is believe the truth about Jesus and place your faith and trust in Him. Don't leave this place today without knowing beyond the shadow of a doubt that Jesus is your Savior and Heaven is your destination.

But that's not the only evidence that the gospel is at work in you. Because once the train of salvation leaves the station, things begin to move, the landscape of your life begins to change.

That brings us to the second evidence of the gospel's work.

2. THE GOSPEL IS AT WORK IN YOU...WHEN YOU LOVE OTHER BELIEVERS

Colossians 1:4

since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints,

As Jesus lives in you, Jesus lives like Jesus in you. And the primary work of Christ in our hearts is a work that makes our hearts more like His. And what is the heart of Jesus for His people? It's a heart of love. He so loved the people of this world that He gave His life for us.

That's what Jesus does in you as you trust in Him. We talked a lot about this last week, so I won't spend much time here. But I want to show you a connection Paul makes between love and hope...

3. THE GOSPEL IS AT WORK IN YOU...WHEN YOU LIVE WITH THE HOPE OF HEAVEN

Colossians 1:4-5

since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven.

Biblical hope isn't wishful thinking. Biblical hope is a confident expectation for a good thing in our future. And one of the evidences that the gospel is at work in us through our faith in Christ is that we are confident that our future is completely secure in Christ. Heaven awaits us.

- We have an eternal inheritance where we will gain possession of everything that belongs to God (Eph. 1:11-14; Rom. 8:17; 1 Cor. 3:21-23)
- There will be no more sickness, sorrow, or sin. No more problems or pain or persecution. You will never again be weak or weary or overwhelmed. All things will be new, including you. (Rev 21:1-5)
- We will see Jesus face to face and experience the fulness of joy and perfect pleasure of which the joys and pleasures of this life are just a dim shadow and a faint echo. (Psalm 16:11; 1 Cor. 13:12; Rev. 22:4)

And when you believe that's your future in Christ, it impacts the way you live today. Notice one of the ways hope impacts the way you live in verse 5. He says "because of the hope laid up for you." Their hope is causing something. Namely, it's causing them to live in love for other believers. He's saying they live with love toward other believers because of the hope they have in heaven.

There is an entire sermon wrapped up in this concept. But, quickly, just think about some of the ways the hope of heaven impacts the way we live toward people now.

- When we believe Heaven is real and eternal and glorious and guaranteed in Christ, we want others to go and that makes winning their soul more important than winning an argument.
- When we believe Heaven is real and eternal and glorious and guaranteed in Christ, we don't blow our temporary circumstances out of proportion. We don't care about the things of this world as though they are ultimate and matter the most. We aren't possessive and argumentative and obsessed with getting ahead in this world. Why would I fight with others over things that don't matter at all in light of the eternal glory that is right around the corner?
- When we believe Heaven is real and eternal and glorious and guaranteed in Christ, we begin to see our brothers and sisters in light of their eternal disposition. Every follower of Jesus you know is the recipient of the same grace that is given to you. Despite their sin and unworthiness, they will one day be transformed into the glorious reflections of Jesus Himself. They will be perfectly and completely holy and you will eternally and gladly share your inheritance with them, no grudges, no competition, no complaining, no criticism, no selfish ambition, or petty arguing. And if you truly believe that's where you're heading, you move in that direction now.

So, are you moving in that direction? If you are struggling to express love toward other believers, it might be because you are living as though your hope is centered around the temporary stuff of this world? Are you living with hope in heaven that's producing love for all the saints?

If not, then look to Jesus and ask Him to do in you what only He can do. You only have one hope for glory and it's Christ living and working in you.

Big Idea: The Gospel bears fruit in us through faith, love, and hope.