

FEBRUARY 17, 2008

Colossians 1:3-8

Alright good morning. Grab your Bibles and let's go back to Colossians chapter 1. Last week we began looking at this really long Greek sentence that encompasses verses 3 through 8, and this week we'll finish it up. Let's go back and start in verse 3 so we can remember the context from last week. Colossians 1:3-8.

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and your love for all the saints – the faith and love the spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about it in the word of truth, the gospel that has come to you. All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth. You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.

Remember last week we saw that Paul is thanking God for what God has done in the Colossians that is so obviously not natural that he has heard about it all the way in Rome. He mentions their faith in Christ Jesus – their trust and commitment to life in Christ – that has resulted in their love for all the saints – their self-sacrificing service to all those around them – both of which flow out of and are possible because of their hope – that there is something in the future that is better than anything in the present could ever be. That hope means their sense of worth and value is secure in Christ which means they can bring that truth into reality though putting the needs of others above their own. And so can we – and so should we.

All this is possible we see at the end of verse 5 because they have heard the word of truth, the gospel.

Now that is a word that has become so church-ified that it is almost more confusing than helpful today. The **gospel**. But at this point in history, the word gospel had not become a uniquely church word. It was a common Greek word – **euangelion** – that basically mean **a news flash – it meant GOOD NEWS**.

Originally it was a term used in relation to battle. In Bible times there were what we might call city states and in Greece particularly these city states kept their own armies and would at times go to battle against each other. And when they did everyone back in the city would be on pins and needles about the outcome of the battle and they didn't have email or text messaging or anything so a messenger would come riding or running into the city after the battle and if he showed up with a shining face and a laurel wreath on his spear or swinging a palm branch then automatically the news and joy would fill the city – we had won. And the word used to describe that was euangelion – the good news – **the news of VICTORY**. And that's why the apostles used it in sharing the truth about Jesus Christ – because it was the good news of a great victory.

And we could spend a lot of time really defining what the gospel is but I'd rather focus on what the Colossians would have been thinking when they heard Paul's letter. In fact, Paul lays it out for us a few verses further into the letter, look at **chapter 1:21-23** with me.

Remember from last week – our hope – that there is something in the future that is far better than anything in this world – it is the source of our value and worth – that God sees us now and we will one day stand before Him holy in His sight, without blemish, and free from accusation.

Paul says in verse 6 that **all over the world** this gospel is bearing fruit and growing. Obviously this is not to be taken as strict literalness as if the gospel has been preached in every single place, but Paul

uses a purposeful exaggeration that is easy for us to read right by. He's saying **the gospel is not just one more MYSTERY religion of the Roman Empire. The gospel is not just some local sect's teaching** because that is what the Colossians are starting to get bombarded with – all this local nonsense trying to confuse the gospel. Paul is saying **this is the true good news and it is the good news for the whole WORLD.**

In fact I want you to hear the truth that brings Paul's exaggeration into reality. Listen to what John says in **Revelation 7:9-10**

9 *After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.*

10 *And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."*

Who was there? People from every tribe – every tongue. This is what we are a part of. The grace of God extending to all men. And in **Matthew 24:14** listen to what Jesus says.

14 *And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.*

This gospel will reach the ends of the earth and then Jesus will come back. And the fact that John says there are people from all over in heaven echoes what Paul is saying here – go back and look at it – the truth of Jesus Christ – **this gospel is bearing fruit and growing.**

What Paul is telling us here is that **the Word of God is a living thing – it is alive and powerful and it is PRODUCTIVE.** And it works in two ways. **The first idea of "bearing fruit" has an INWARD concept to it. The second of "growing" has an outward, SPREADING concept to it.** Like a tree that produces fruit on its branches but continues to grow itself. These two things will be the result of the gospel.

The good news is not merely a system of ethics – it isn't just a code of behavior – it is a transforming power. It begins to produce fruit in a life and then it begins to spread to other lives because of that fruit. That's exactly what we saw last week when Paul talked about faith in Jesus Christ and love for all the saints that he had heard about in the Colossians.

Listen – **you and I cannot have FAITH in Christ – a living relationship with Jesus that brings that truth into present reality and not have LOVE – the self-sacrificing spirit that results from believing the hope of the gospel.** Again – Christianity is public or it's useless, it's not real. The gospel is transforming or it isn't the gospel.

And to really bring it home, Paul uses them as the proof – as the example of what he is talking about. Look he says "all over the world this gospel has been bearing fruit and growing **just as it has been doing among you** since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth."

Paul is purposefully reminding them of what the gospel they heard has done in them. Look at it with me. In **verses 13 and 14** he says:

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.*

And then again in **verse 21 and 22** he says:

21 *Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior.*

22 *But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation--*

And then in **chapter 2:13** he says

13 *When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins,*

These people are not who they used to be. **God has performed a miracle in them through this GOSPEL he is talking about.**

And yet remember what is going on here. These same people are being told that Jesus is not enough. What you've heard is not enough. You need something more.

Are you kidding me? You know who I used to be? You know what God's done? More? Come on. God's given a dead man life through the gospel and through Jesus Christ. You've got nothing that can compare to that.

You know I meet people all the time who claim to be Christians and they are so mopey complaining critical. They are just a walking minus sign – they are constantly in complaint mode. They act and talk like God's just not doing enough for them. And that just grieves me. You know why – because it puts us into a dangerous position.

When we fail to remember and recognize what God's done for us, how awesome that is, we set ourselves up to FALL for worldly deception.

And it is easy for that to happen. After we've been saved for a little while, we get further and further removed from our pre-Christian life and we fail to really appreciate what God's Word says about our depravity and our hopelessness and so amazingly – unbelievably – the work God accomplished in giving us new life somehow doesn't seem all that remarkable anymore. And so instead of turning back to the One who saved us, we start looking for someone or something new in addition to give us purpose or fulfillment or value or whatever. We start looking at worldly wisdom.

Paul is saying stop. Remember what God has done in your lives. You are the proof.

People it is the gospel – the truth – the grace of God – that CHANGES the hearts of men and will change our world.

Do you understand what a powerful message God has given us to proclaim? This gospel is bearing fruit and growing all over the world. It is the gospel that is power of God. And I am so glad. Listen, I know that I am not the most skillful preacher. You and I both know that I'm not the best at presenting the Word. But thank God that's not what plays the decisive role. The power is not in the preacher – the power is in the gospel. It's not up to me to get results when the truth of God is shared. God is sovereign. And He says He uses His Word to save those who are lost.

That's why we should say with Paul in **Romans 1: 16**

16 I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

This gospel is the power of God. John MacArthur once wrote "Inherent in the gospel message is the power of an omnipotent God. That power alone is sufficient to save the vilest sinner and transform the hardest hearts – apart from any human argument or ingenuity."

And yet listen – we are not off the hook. This gospel is spread by man. Look again at verses 7-8. **You learned it from Epaphras**, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ, who also told us of your love in the Spirit.

This gospel is reported and spread by men – by US. There's got to be a human channel and that's us – you and me. **Acts 1:8** – Jesus says that you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses – that us.

In **Romans 10:14** we get it as clearly as could be:

14 How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone – what? – without someone preaching to them?

God wants human agents. As John MacArthur says, “This glorious gospel and all that God has done funnels down to a dependence on men and if you're not going to do it, God will find somebody [who will.] But oh what a joy to be a part of it.”

So here's what I want us to understand today.

We must speak the gospel. But we've got to understand that there is more to it than saying “believe in Jesus and get a home in heaven.” The gospel is about now – about life – about changing kingdoms from the kingdom of darkness in this world to the kingdom of light in Jesus Christ.

But also realize that what changed the Roman and Greek world is exactly what it is going to take to change ours. They didn't need another gospel. They didn't need another way to heaven. They already had that – everyone already had a belief in a god that promised them what they wanted. And people today are bombarded by philosophy and deception and every lie of the enemy that tells them what they want to hear. Just telling them we have another way is not going to cut it.

What changed the Roman world – what enabled the SPREAD of the gospel is exactly what Paul thanks God for in the Colossians. And that's why I wanted us to go back and get the context from last week. Paul says “I thank God... when I pray for you because I've heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and your love for all the saints.”

It was a radically DIFFERENT life that made a lost world listen – and the same is true today.

Folks we are the Epaphras to Wichita Falls. We are where it starts. And though we must be willing to share the gospel of truth, if we aren't living it, then they won't listen to it.

So today we are challenged in several ways.

First – to go back and remember the gospel – remember the good news – remember what God alone has done in you. And if you've gotten away from it or have begun acting like you need something else in life then begin to live like you believe what the gospel says is true in you.

And if in looking at what the gospel does, if it hasn't happened in your life – then realize that you may not have embraced the truth – you may still be deceived.

Because the gospel will bear fruit.

The gospel will grow.

And it will happen through us.

That's the heart of what we know life in Christ is – it is the reason we as a church exist – to be living a life that is first surrendered by faith to truth. And then a life that is changed by belief into obedience. And that will express itself in a life that is linked through relationships into family and life that is shared by service to our world.

People – our vision as a church – and the challenge for each of us today – is to be LIVING the gospel of Jesus Christ. For us to be doing life day in and day out holy in His sight, without blemish, and free from accusation because of Jesus Christ. For us to be living our faith through our love for one another so that this world sees that there is a God who is real and can change their lives. So again we pray,

Jesus show us your glory and help it change our lives today!