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Bearing Fruit & Increasing

Scripture: Colossians 1:3-8

Sermon Series: *Colossians*

Topic: Gospel



Colossians 1:3-8 (ESV)

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. 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.

Introduction

The thing to see in this opening paragraph is the power of the gospel. When the gospel is rightly proclaimed, heard, and understood, lives are changed. Those who are lost are given hope, faith is given, love spreads, fruit is produced, increase is seen, grace is given, and God is glorified. When the gospel goes out, people are brought into the kingdom of God. Good and wonderful things happen when the gospel of Jesus is proclaimed in the world. God is changing the world through the gospel of Jesus.

Review

As we noted last week, "*Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus,*" is the author of this letter. According to the tradition of the time, the author of a letter was noted first, so that the reader is not left guessing until the end as to the source of the letter. Paul is Jesus' specially chosen spokesman. He was personally chosen by the risen, resurrected Jesus and then sent out with the charge of taking the gospel of Jesus to the Gentiles—to us. Jesus started him on this mission and He sustained Him on this mission.

Paul is writing this letter to the "*saints and faithful brothers at Colossae.*" The Greek word translated "brothers" here is *adelphoi*, which refers to "all siblings in a family," so Paul has in mind both men and women. We could legitimately translate this, "to the saints and faithful brothers and sisters at Colossae."

An Encyclical

Another fact about this letter that should be mentioned is that it is an encyclical, that is it is a letter that is written to all the churches in a region. In other words it was written for many churches, not just one.

Colossians 4:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea.

The contents of this letter are for all of God's people. This letter was written with all the churches of God in mind. So what is written here was not merely to be applied for one church. The truth Paul expresses is for us today.

The presence of Jesus, by His Spirit, guiding and empowering Paul to preach, is the reason for Paul's effectiveness. Many people came to believe in Jesus as God's messiah through the ministry and preaching of Paul. One of these people was *Epaphras*.

Epaphras: Beloved Friend and Faithful Minister

Epaphras was a *dear friend* to Paul and a *fellow minister* in the gospel. It was he who planted the church in Colossae and it was he who came to Paul to give him an update on the church and the progress of the gospel. Speaking of the gospel, Paul writes,

Colossians 1:7-8 (ESV)

⁷ just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf⁸ and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

The Colossians learned the gospel from Epaphras. It was he who taught them about Christ, not Paul. Paul had never been to Colossae, but Epaphras had grown up there. Colossae was his home town (Col. 4:12). Epaphras was both their minister and their messenger. He had taught them the gospel and he had come to Paul bearing news of how the young church was doing. He had "*made known to*"¹ Paul the spiritual condition of the church. There was much for which to give thanks, however there was also several reasons for concern. Very likely there was confusion and lies floating around.

False Teaching Creeping In

As we continue to read through the letter we will see that there was some false teaching beginning to creep in. Paul doesn't name the false teaching specifically, however, there are several pointers to the nature and content of it. Paul addresses those who may have been embracing a philosophy based upon "*empty deceit*" and "*human tradition*" (2:8). Chapter 2:10-11 may indicate that part of the false teaching included the teaching that *Jesus was not fully God* (2:9). There were also questions and confusion about the observance of certain *festivals* and the *Sabbath* (2:16). Finally, there was a growing emphasis upon *asceticism*, the *worship of angels*, and whether or not God still spoke through *visions* (2:18).

By referring to Epaphras not only as a "*beloved fellow servant*," but also a "*faithful minister of Christ*," Paul was setting his public stamp of approval upon his teaching and ministry.

Epaphras was a *beloved friend* of Paul's, but more than that he was also a *faithful minister*. Epaphras had been ministering on *behalf* of Paul. He had been preaching the gospel since Paul could not be there in Colossae. Epaphras had fulfilled this task *faithfully*. This means that he had been accurately preaching the truth of the gospel. Epaphras had his facts straight about Jesus. He knew the details of Jesus' life and he had accurately and faithfully preached the gospel to the people in Colossae.

¹ Col. 2:8.

Thanking God for Colossian Faith

When the gospel is accurately preached and rightly understood, it will make a difference. Where the gospel of Jesus is received, lives will be changed and the fruit of that transformation will be seen. The evidence of this was the reason for which Paul began this letter with thanksgiving.

Colossians 1:3-5 (ESV)

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.

When Epaphras had preached the gospel of Jesus to them and they heard what He had done and the gracious gift that He nows gives to all who will receive it, they put their *faith in Jesus* as God's messiah. You'll notice that Paul thanks God the Father because the Colossian people put their faith in Jesus. This points us to the reality of God's sovereignty over human salvation. Paul's giving thanks to God for the Colossians placing their faith in Jesus demonstrates the fact that God, not the Colossian people themselves, is ultimately responsibly for their salvation.

When you thank someone for something, you say "thank you" to them for what they have done. The word for 'thank' (*eucharisteō*, εὐχαριστέω) that Paul used here is a word that he consistently uses in reference to God's work in the lives of others.² Paul is thanking God for what **He** has done in the lives of the Colossians. God has done for them just as He did for Lydia. Luke writes,

Acts 16:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart³ to pay attention to what was said by Paul.

What Paul spoke about was the gospel of Jesus (i.e. of His sinless life, atoning, substitutionary death, and victorious resurrection from the dead). Lydia was a worshiper of God, but she knew nothing about Jesus. She worshiped God but she did not know that God had already sent His messiah. Paul explained who Jesus was and what He had done. He explained that Jesus was the personal fulfillment of all of God's great promises. As he taught her the historical events of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, the Lord opened Lydia's heart, through the inner work of His Spirit⁴, to understand and pay attention to Paul's words about Jesus. Then she became a believer in Jesus. She believed the events Paul spoke of actually took place and that God was

² Peter T. O'Brien, [Colossians, Philemon](#), vol. 44, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 9.

³ Jesus did a similar work among His disciples "to open their minds to understand the Scriptures" and how they revealed that He was messiah (Lk. 24:45).

⁴ 1 Cor. 2:14.

at work in world through Jesus. This is exactly what happened to the Colossians. They heard the gospel, God granted them the ability to understand it, and then they put their faith in Jesus. The gospel,

Colossians 1:6-7 (ESV)

*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.*

Epaphras preached the gospel to them, they heard it, God granted them—through the inner work of the Holy Spirit—to understand what they heard and then they put their faith in Jesus and their lives were transformed. Paul is thanking God for this taking place because God is sovereign over salvation and He it is who grants the ability to understand and embrace the truth of it. “Salvation belongs to the Lord,”⁵ thus God is to be thanked for the faith of the Colossians.

The Gospel is the Grace of God

This work of God in their lives is completely a work of God’s *grace*. It was a work of grace that Jesus died for unworthy people. Jesus was completely innocent of any sin, therefore, He was not obligated to die. And yet He did. This is nothing but grace. Secondly, God was not required to grant salvation to the Colossians, nor anyone else. There is nothing but grace that moves God to open our hearts, overcome the deadening effects of our own sin, and then help us to understand the gospel. This, too, is a work of grace.

God providing Jesus as an atoning sacrifice is grace as well as is God then overcoming the heart-deadening, mind-numbing effects of our own sin so that we can understand who Jesus is and then put our faith in Him. This is what God has graciously done for all of us and this is why Paul then appropriately begins His letter with thanksgiving for this work of God in their lives. It was the grace of God that caused Jesus to die, it was grace that opened the eyes of our hearts, it was grace that sent a messenger like Epaphras to preach the gospel, and it was grace that allowed us to receive and believe the gospel truth. The ultimate reason the Colossians received the gospel and put their faith in Jesus was owing to the gracious work of God in their lives at many levels. Paul can’t help but “*always give thanks to God*” for this.

The Fruit of the Gospel

Not only does the gospel produce **faith**, but it has other effects as well. When the gospel has really taken root in your life, there are a few things that happen. First, it gives us an unshakable **hope**. Second, it produces **love**. Third, it bears **fruit**. Finally, it **increases**.

⁵ Ps. 3:8; Jonah 2:9; Rev. 7:10.

Hope Laid Up In Heaven

The gospel gives hope, an unshakable hope "*laid up for you in heaven.*" It's easy to look at this world and all the confusion & craziness and simply fall into despair. However, the gospel holds out hope like a treasure hidden for you, awaiting your arrival. The fact that hope is "laid up for us in heaven" mean no one can take it away from us. Once given, it cannot be taken away from. The devil can never rob you of what God intends to give you. Your hope is safe in heaven, the stronghold of God.

The hope of heaven is eternal life after the resurrection from the dead.⁶ It is also the fulfillment of all of God's promises given to His children.⁷ It is the promised glory and goodness of a world free from the sorrowful effects sin.⁸ It is a kingdom free from suffering, sadness, and loss. It is a kingdom full of life, joy, and great gain. Ultimately, it is the confidence that one day we will enjoy an unbroken, happy communion as we dwell forever in the presence of our great God and Savior.

This is the kind of hope will cause you to let go of the shadows of the good things to come in order to take hold of what is real and substantive and lasting. This hope will free you from slavery to temporal things in order to take hold of eternal things. This hope will let you spend yourself, your time, and your treasures in order to help others take hold of eternal things too. This hope will cause you to view everything you do as a means of magnifying Christ Jesus and helping others to fall in love with him. The of hope of heaven is living with Jesus forever.

Love for All the Saints

Another effect of the gospel is "*love for all the saints*" (v.4). The Colossians heard the gospel, put their faith in Jesus, and then, because of the hope of spending eternity with Jesus, they were able to show *love for all the saints* now. Knowing they were loved by God allowed them to show love to all the saints. When you are loved, you can then be loving to those around you.

The good news of the Gospel is that God showed the depth of His love for us by sending His only Son to die in our place. God loved us enough to give up His only Son so that those who would go to Him through the Son, could enjoy all the eternal goodness of His heavenly kingdom. Because they experienced God's love, they were then able to spread and share that love. They tasted God's goodness and therefore they wanted to share His goodness. The Colossians expressed their faith in Jesus by showing love in tangible ways to *all the saints*.

⁶ Titus 1:2; 3:7; cf. Acts 23:6; 1 Ptr. 1:3.

⁷ Acts 28:20; 2 Cor. 1:20.

⁸ Gal. 5:5.

Love From the Spirit

They were able to do this because the love they expressed was enabled and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Look at verse eight. Epaphras had “made known” to Paul their “*love in the Spirit.*” I take this to mean that by virtue of their union with Christ through faith, they were now “*in the Spirit*” and thus able to love all the saints. Because they were “in the Spirit,” they had resources they did not have when they were not “in the Spirit.” I’m not talking about financial resources but spiritual and emotional resources. When the Spirit within you begins to teach you how gracious God has been to you, you then become equipped to show love to those who are unlovely, be patient with those who are impatient towards you, to demonstrate kindness towards those who are unkind toward you. You can love those who do not deserve to be loved because God has shown love to you who are undeserving of His love. Without His Spirit this is impossible, but with His Spirit, all things are possible.

Bearing Fruit

A third and fourth effect of the gospel is that it is *bearing fruit and increasing*. This is a rather general statement that causes us to wonder what exactly Paul has in mind. Thankfully, he answers the question in 1:10.

Colossians 1:10 (ESV)

10 so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

Bearing fruit means being active “*in every good work.*” It means that when the gospel is embraced by a person, the actions of that person change. This is not saying that a person does good works in order to be worthy to receive the gospel, but rather it means that when a person receives the gospel by putting faith in Jesus, the natural outcome is that that person begins to act in accordance with the gospel. He or she begins to do deeds and actions that are good because the gospel is good. Doing what is good and right is what God’s people do because the gospel reveals what good truly looks like.

Increasing Inwardly

Lastly, the gospel results in increase. The gospel is not stagnant. The gospel is dynamic. It moves, grows, and increases. Particularly Paul means “*increasing in the knowledge of God.*” When you become a believer your knowledge of God is limited. However, as a person embraces Christ through the gospel on then does the great blessing of knowing God begin to explode. There is so much more of God to know. The gospel is just the beginning. The gospel is the doorway to a new dimension of understanding all the attributes of who God is.

The gospel opens our eyes to God’s grace, but His grace does not end at the moment of our salvation. It is only beginning to unfold in our lives. God’s providential care over us brings us to point of salvation but it does not end there. His care of us continues throughout our lives. Knowing God in salvation is the beginning of a relationship. His work continues in our lives by

the indwelling presence of His Spirit. We only begin to know God in salvation, and knowing Him more and more will continue throughout our lives.

Increasing Outwardly

The knowledge of God increases inwardly, but it also increases outwardly. When the gospel goes out into the world, more and more people embrace it. For example,

World missions historians tell us that when all the foreign missionaries were kicked out of Mao's China a few years after the Second World War, there were probably no more than 3 million believers in Jesus Christ in the whole, vast nation. But today, seven decades later, the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life counts 67 million Christians of all kinds—35 million independent Protestants, 23 million Protestants in government-sanctioned churches, and 9 million Catholics. Other estimates go even higher.⁹

Conclusion

Where is your Colossae?

Is the gospel bearing fruit and increasing in your life, deepening your faith, grounding your hope, manifesting love, experiencing God's grace?

Are you giving thanks to God? If so, for what?

⁹ Eric Metaxas at BreakPoint. Source: http://www.breakpoint.org/2018/09/breakpoint-chinas-pastors-take-their-stand/?utm_source=Colson+Center+Master+List&utm_campaign=0d45e31f7e-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_07_17_08_49_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_84bd2dc76d-0d45e31f7e-8583397 accessed 28 September 2018.