

Faith in Jesus: So Far, So Good

Apr. 8/18

Series: Colossians - Complete in Christ

Colossians 1:1-8

Is it possible that there is a **plant**, perhaps a **tree** that is capable of growing vigorously and perennially anywhere it is planted in the world? From the Arctic Circle and Siberia to the Atacama Desert in Chile, the driest place in the world. From tropical to boreal climates, from mountainous terrain to swamplands, from the rocky crags of the Himalayas to savannahs in Africa or Australia? What is the name of such a plant? There is... **no such plant... no such tree**. Some suggest dandelions or strawberries can survive *almost* anywhere. Maybe onions and garlic? But a tree? Ever seen an 'air plant.' *Tillandsia*. No roots, no soil... but it grows! It lives!

I will proclaim this morning that there is something that continues to flourish in region after region, country after country. Sometimes in incredibly **harsh** conditions... it **thrives**. Just where people said, *"that will never grow here. You might think it can thrive where you come from, but, no, not here. Not a chance"*!

It's the Gospel, the message of life in Jesus Christ! It has an ability to grow; to take root and flourish right where you wouldn't think anything like it could grow! For 2000 years now the gospel has taken root, grown and produced fruit in country after country, town by town, village by village... life by life.

Once upon a time in small city in a far-away country (today- modern day Turkey) the gospel took root. The town was called **Colossae**. A typical, commercial town on the Lycus River. Nothing spectacular. Very ordinary, and no longer there. Not even a village, just a bit of archaeological digging in the area (a Tel) a highway and a hotel, simply because it happens to be a place mentioned in the Bible. **Colossians is the book**. Find it with me. **Colossians** was a letter written by the Apostle Paul to a church that had been established there by a man named Epaphras. His name was likely shortened *from* Epaphroditus. Nothing really unusual or remarkable about him either. He was a faithful man who knew and loved the Lord Jesus. He was likely from a non-religious or *pagan* background. Epaphroditus was a name taken from

Aphrodite, a female Goddess of fertility- very popular in that day. But he had become a believer, likely through Paul while in Ephesus. And God used him to pull together a small band of Christians in a house church. Paul wrote to them, having heard of their faith and also learning that they were undergoing some difficulty in combatting some **wrong notions** and teaching that had come their way. What he did was pour out the **truth about Jesus Christ**, Saviour, Creator, sustainer and more! Paul had never met these Christians. He never travelled to the church. There were actually three towns in the area (Colossae, Hierapolis and Laodicea) with house churches... Paul welcomes them no differently than he would some other churches he did directly establish, such as in Philippi, Ephesus, Galatia and Rome.

Read: Colossians 1: 1-8. (1-2)

Gospel: (Meaning? Usage? Context?) variously: scripture describes the gospel with numerous phrases; Acts 20:24, the **gospel** of the grace of God, Romans 1:9 the **gospel** of His son, 1 Cor. 9:12 the **gospel** of Jesus Christ, Romans 15:16, the **gospel** of God, 2 Cor. 4:4 the **gospel** of the glory of Christ. Eph. 6:15 the **gospel** of peace, Rev. 14:6 the eternal **gospel**. Here in Col. 1:5 we see it as the **gospel** of truth, or *the message of truth*. Descriptions like this have led to the rise of expressions like 'gospel truth' when people are really trying to express their sincerity!

Gospel is the Greek word *euangelion* from which we derive the English term **evangel**, or **evangelism**. Literally it's '**good news**.' In classical Greek it was used of a good report brought back from battle. 1 Cor. 15: 1-4 summarizes some good news "that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures."

We are told to **proclaim** it, **defend** it, **advance** it, **fellowship** in it, **suffer** for the sake of it, make sure our lives don't **hinder** it, never be **ashamed** of it, and realize that it carries with it a **divine empowerment** wherever it goes...

1. The letter begins with some introductions... Paul... (1-2) **to the saints** (holy *ones*... always plural in the bible) *faithful brothers (and sisters) in Colossae*. Timothy was Paul's assistant who would eventually take over the ministry.

2. The gospel that grows (1:3-5) is beautifully presented and explained here as Paul writes about the thankful heart he has as has learned about the Colossians and their church. (3-5). It's a wonderfully simple picture of **faith** and **love** that spring from **hope**. They had been taught and they had learned well. As I said, the book was written to encourage them as Paul had heard that they were being harassed by some wrong, crazy teaching. Paul to the rescue! He gives them the straight goods about Jesus.

Here's where I'll lay out and explain the theme for this series. Over the centuries the gospel has had to deal with and continues to deal with a lot of... simply put '**contamination**.' Additions to it... Jesus **plus** ideas... Things that get **added** to Christianity. Don't we like foods with pure, simple ingredients... Yes!

The equation we'll consider will simply be this: **Jesus + nothing = Everything**. People have always tinkered with the gospel. Like: You need to add everything from Theological systems to complicated confessional statements to a style of music (numerous!) to experiential requirements (the haves and the have-nots). Secrets to *this* and *that* books! We find that Colossians will affirm: don't mess with the good news about Jesus Christ. Yes, we'll look at what crazy teachings they were facing, but we need to relate them to our world, and more importantly to us personally. Because the gospel grows in each of us personally.

There is a purity and essentials in the gospel... you keep it pure and let it work. It will. 3-6.

Faith (v. 4) Means to be persuaded that something is true and that you trust in it. And not just intellectual embrace, but it involves **obedience**. The root word of faith (*pistis*) is to obey. Obedience and belief are connected in the NT. Biblical faith is never a 'leap in the dark'. It's often grounded in facts and evidence. **Heb. 11:6** describes it as 'The *assurance* of things hoped for and the *conviction* of things unseen.' I can act in full faith, convinced that God will work! I

can act upon his promises. On several occasions now I have had the opportunity to drive on a new Hwy. 17 bridge as Ottawa transitions into Arnprior travelling west of the city. Lovely new bridge! Watched it being built. Did I stop and pray or shut my eyes and cross my fingers as I drove over it for the first time? No. We trust such structures are safe based on the evidence. (construction, engineering, inspection).

Love. (v. 4) The Saving faith of the Colossians had the fruit evidence of “**Love** for all the saints.” ‘By this shall all men know that you are my disciples...’ Jesus in **John 13:35**. The truth of the gospel is received by **faith** has always has been evidenced by **love**.

Hope had frequently appeared with Faith and Love as a great triad of virtues. Paul describes Hope as ‘laid up, stored up or reserved for you in heaven.’ The writer of Hebrews says hope is the anchor that tethers us. It’s an anchor for the soul. Our faith is fastened to the future by hope. Because we know (**Phil. 3:20**) that we have a citizenship in heaven, we can consider a willingness to sacrifice the **present** on the altar of the **future**. This will run contrary to human nature! Don’t you think Christians could be willing to forsake the comforts of here and now, present satisfaction for future glory that is his in Christ? How? Like maybe taking a career path that will result in less here, for greater eternal reward. What did Jesus say? Don’t worry about stuff in the here and now, but lay up for yourself treasures in heaven... You really need to understand what is eternal and what isn’t. What Two things are eternal (other than God)? The Word of God and people. It was Jim Elliot who said “*He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.*”

3. It Grows everywhere! (**v. 6**-read) “*All over the world, this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as has been doing amongst you since the day your heard it and understood God’s grace in all its truth.*” The gospel grows all over the world. Often where the climate is pretty inhospitable! On any given day, c. **30,000** people come to Christ (personal conversion) in China. On any average day, **20,000** people come to Christ on the continent of Africa. South America... **10,000** a day. I bet the gospel presented is pure and straight-forward. World-wide **70,000** per day are coming to faith in Christ.

In other places around the world the growth of the gospel is **slow**! Takes years to break through into people's lives. China, southern continental Africa and S. America have been recipients of great missionary efforts for hundreds of years now... takes time. Sometimes a lot of time...

The Japanese people are the second largest unreached people group in the world. After nearly 500 years of Christian witness, the evangelical Christian population remains only 0.25%.

Missionary work is legal there, but many will labour for years and see few come to Christ.

Churches are typically 30-35 people (mostly older). Missionary Rob Fleming has spent his life/career there (30+ years now), in church planting and now in seminary training near Tokyo, an area of 40 million. He recently reported that the Christian population they do have is aging.

Hard arid **places** really of course refers to the hearts of 'difficult' people: their hearts and lives.

The gospel can grow there. Have you seen the gospel take root in someone formerly hard and resistant to Jesus and the gospel? Yes!

4. The Gospel grow and flows. (7, 8) ***"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."*** The gospel is to grow and flow **through** you. It needs to flow. The power of the gospel flows **into** you... and **out** of you. **You won't keep it to yourself.** Let that light shine.

Are you, *personally*, healthy and growing in Christ? If you are alive in Christ, you should be growing, bearing fruit (verse 6). What evidence of growth do you see in your life? (Hint: Fruit of the Spirit). A church will only 'grow' if the people themselves are growing... If you're not in a 'growing in Christ' place yet, let's get going. We'll talk to you about knowing God personally, get you a Bible, take some notes on Sunday!

Theme verse **2:10**... "And you have been given **fullness** in Christ..."

You will be gripped with the greatness of the **gospel** as you are gripped with the greatness of **Christ**. What becomes special in Colossians is the sense of **dimension** rather than unique doctrine. Paul teaches things in this letter that we can typically find in his other letters. Paul's statements in Colossians about Christ are truly **colossal**! Sweeping, immense and soaring!