

Colossians Ch 1 Vs 3-8

The First Fruits of the Gospel

Vs 3-8

There are certain people (it seems to me) that no matter what they put their hands to (when it comes to gardening, or planting flowers, or trees or whatever) that they can do no wrong. No matter what they plant, it always reaches its desired end. My Grandparents are that type of people, you can go to their house in the summer and their garden is always full. There are various flowers all over their property, grapes, growing on the vine behind their garden, and as the seasons change, so does the plant life, they just have a knack for success when it comes to planting and cultivating, growing and reaping. and Let me just tell you that's not something that's genetically inherited, I don't have a green thumb, I'm Mr. Bubonic Plague thumb, if it can be destroyed, I'll figure out a way to do it, my yard *had* apple trees in it, which I never got to enjoy. They were always small, bug infested, and seemed to rot before they ripened, we tried planting a garden once (once) and I don't even think our tomatoes survived. We planted entire rows of potatoes and wound up with about 6 new potatoes in one bowl of store bought green beans. Our rose bushes die, and I run over the flowers with the lawn mower. I'm just not learned in the arts of agriculture, I don't know what you can plant where, what soils certain seeds flourish in, what season's or climates foster the growth of certain seeds or anything else. Because every seed has a certain season, or geographical location, or climate that's necessary to stimulate growth in that seed, and if it's not *where* it needs to be *when* it needs to be there, it just won't produce, there will be no fruit bud forth from it, it won't reach it's desired end.

But there is *one* seed that's not bound by geographical location, it's not limited to certain climatic conditions, and if it takes root, it'll bring forth fruit in any season, and the part I love about it is that you don't have to be an agricultural wizard to plant it, and cultivate it, and water it and watch it bud forth and flourish with fruit. and That seed is the seed of the gospel, and This morning I want to take the time (though we'll discuss a few other things) but to consider and examine just a few of the characteristics (3 in particular), or, "first fruits" of the gospel. Signs of a healthy church, and we'll develop this more fully as we move on, Paul says in vs 3-4

Vs3-4

Now this would probably read a little better to say, "We give thanks to God, the Father..." and I believe that the NKJV is the only one that translates it a little different. But in the original Greek the words "the" and "and" don't exist, they were added here for clarification, so that it actually reads, "We give thanks to God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" and He's giving thanks to God for the work that *He's* doing in their lives, he didn't say we just want to begin by saying thanks for being such good witnesses, and flattering them, why? Because they had nothing to do with the good works that was being done in their lives, salvation in all of its goodness, in every detail belongs to God.

In the book of Rev 7 Vs 9-10 we read where the apostle John writes and says, “*I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”*” Salvation is of the Lord, and so Paul gives thanks to God for the work He’s doing, the bible says, in everything, give thanks, for this is the will of God. God desires that we be a thankful people. The book of Phil says that in everything by prayers and supplications, *with thanksgiving*, let your requests be made known to God.

I’ve commented before on the fact that generally speaking we don’t lack in the prayers and supplications department, but I find we fall short when it comes to thanksgiving. When was the last time that you heard of the way God was blessing someone’s life, or was causing someone to be an individual of integrity and blamelessness, representing the Lord accurately and gave God thanks for that person and was stirred to pray for them? Generally we ask God why them and not us, and we file our petition in the complaint department and that’s about as far as it goes. Let me encourage you to glean from what we’re seeing here, what Paul heard about these believers caused his heart to rejoice and to respond by praying that God would just continually bless them.

So when you hear something good regarding someone, I encourage you to pray for that person. Personally I have a tendency to pray for people when things aren’t so good for them, they’re hurting or backslidden. and Don’t get me wrong, prayer at that point is critical, but I wonder how much hurt, or backsliding would be prevented if we would pray for people prior to their misfortune? You’ve heard an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, we need to pray for people even while they’re doing well. Because inevitably there’s a bull’s-eye somewhere on their forehead and the enemy is waiting for that opportune time to launch an attack, so that he might tear down their witness or destroy their testimony; intercede for people while their doing well.

Paul says, “*praying always*” for you. That’s one thing I love about the apostle; God used him mightily. In a way (that I would say regarding the gospel) that has been unparalleled in human history, and one of the primary attributes that we find in Paul is that he was a man of prayer. He spent a major amount of time on his face before the Lord, and I don’t know why but generally speaking, when we think of powerful people of prayer, if you’re like me Paul for whatever reason doesn’t hit the top of the list.

I might be prone to think Moses, a man who would at times deter the wrath of God from coming upon the entire nation. Or Samuel, one of the greatest prophets to ever grace Israel’s

scene, I might think of Elijah who called fire down from heaven, or David the master articulator of the Psalms. Obviously I would think of Jesus, but Paul just doesn't ring a bell at 1st, but I would challenge you to research the epistles that he wrote and simply jot down or take note of how many times he mentions his prayers for people, or the prayers that he records for certain churches, it'll blow you away. Twice in the short book of Eph Paul records his prayers for them, in 2 Tim 1:3 Paul said, "*I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience, as my forefathers did, as without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day.*" Rom 1:9 "*For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers.*" 1 Thess 1:2 "*We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers.*" Philem 4 "*I thank my God, making mention of you always in my prayers.*" Acts 16:25 After having been wrongfully arrested, beaten and thrown into a dungeon we read, "*But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.*" Paul was a man of prayer, and it comes up again here in Col, in vs 9 he says we do not cease to pray for you, in 2 Cor 13:9 he said, "*And this also we pray, that you may be made complete.*" To the Phil he said, "*And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment.*" I find a common thread woven between the people who are used radically of God, they're people of prayer, 1 Thess 5:17 says we're to, "*pray without ceasing.*"

Why, because you don't have to be a brilliant military strategist to know that anytime you're in a war, communications is of the utmost importance. When we began our attack on the Taliban, and went to war in Afghanistan what was the 1st thing we took out, we neutralized their communications. with out communications you're left with guess work, you can't receive direction from headquarters, there's radical confusion, and you're rendered in many respects virtually non-effective.

The book of Eph makes it real clear to you and me that as believers we're in a war, and if you're to be wise in waging intelligent and effective warfare, not against flesh and blood but against, "*principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.*" Then it's absolutely critical that you keep the communication lines open and that you're consistently receiving direction from headquarters.

The enemy will do all that he can to neutralize your communication lines, be it through condemnation, guilt, deceit or whatever, because once your communications are severed, you'll be virtually non-effective, confused, and left with guess work. Guard your prayer life with all diligence, don't grow weary, Paul says we thank God for you, and we're always praying for you, you have a good testimony and we want God to continue to use it for His glory, now he gets into that which he's heard regarding them.

and So here the Holy Spirit unveils to us what we might consider the triad of first fruits of the gospel 1. Faith, 2. Love, 3. Hope. These are things that he's hearing as it regards to the "reputation" (if you're willing) of the Colossian believers, this is the word that's getting out about them. These are the marks of a solid church, of a healthy church, of a mature body of believers. Now today you ask someone today how a certain church is doing and their analysis will more than likely be predicated upon that churches bank account, "show me the tithe records", or "how big is the church", or "how many influential people go there?" But none of those things are what the scriptures reveal to us as the characteristics of a healthy church, I know of several huge churches that I would consider to be inundated with carnality, big money churches that are corrupted with heretical doctrines.

Now, sure we believe that where God guides, God provides, and healthy sheep will multiply, but those things are peripheral, they're secondary, those are the things that spill out, or result from these primary things being a reality. and The 1st development we see resulting from the seed of the gospel is faith. Rom 10:17 tells us that; "*faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*" with out faith the bible tells us that it's impossible to please God, and whatever's not from faith is sin.

So faith is the 1st and most vital development that results from the hearing of God's Word, because it's by grace that we're saved *through faith*, so the gospel, the seed of God's word has intrinsically with in it, the power of God to salvation, Rom 1:16, "*I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes.*" The Word of God is alive, Heb tells us that it's Living and powerful, and anytime it takes root, it will bring forth fruit, the 1st of which will be faith, believing God for what He's done and will do, faith rests upon historical fact.

Notice here with the Colossians in vs 5 that it was based on what they had heard "before" in the word of the truth of the gospel. Faith isn't simply a leap in the dark, it's believing God for what He's said, and He asks you to believe the gospel, the good news declared in the work of His Son. Jesus Christ being born of a virgin, being fully God and fully man, leading a completely sinless life which He laid down of His own accord upon the altar of the cross, having shed His blood for the remission of your sin. He was taken down from the cross dead, raised up again on the 3rd day, ascended back into Heaven where He is seated at the right hand of God making intercession for the saints. and Has sent His Holy Spirit into the world to empower the believer, to assist the believer, to comfort and conform the believer into His image and one day soon He's going to return again to receive us unto Himself. These are the facts that He asks us to believe; this is the "truth" of the gospel.

So saving faith is related to the past, believing what God has done for you, and it's important that we draw attention for just a moment to the object of their faith. Because faith is

only as good as it's object, we hear phrases today like, "you gotta have faith", or "keep the faith", but it's never really made clear; faith in what? Kept in whom? Faith in faith? Faith in my bank account, boy if that's the case I'm in for a world of hurt. People say, you have to believe in yourself, well the problem with that is that I'm not always able to deliver, there are times when I lack the ability to follow through, and so if my trust is in myself, I'm going to find myself in dire straits over and over again, being placed in the balance and found wanting. The pagans of the past believed in god's of stone or wood, precious metals and so on.

The psalmist wrote in Ps 115:4-8 "*Their idols are silver and gold, The work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they do not speak; Eyes they have, but they do not see; They have ears, but they do not hear; Noses they have, but they do not smell; They have hands, but they do not handle; Feet they have, but they do not walk; Nor do they mutter through their throat. Those who make them are like them; So is everyone who trusts in them.*" Blind to the truth of God, deaf to the voice of God, and calloused to the things of God, the pagans of today worship money or possessions, but it's just as futile, no ability to deliver the desperate condition of the soul.

The object of your faith is critical, and if it's anything other than Christ Jesus, it will not deliver, only Jesus can deliver you from the emptiness of this life, the bondage and wages of sin. So 1st of all faith in Christ Jesus, 2^{ndly} love for all the saints. Two words jump out at me when I read this particular phrase, 1st of all "love" 2nd of all "all", so the 1st thing that the seed of the gospel develops in our life is faith, believing what God has done, dealing with the past, the 2nd thing we see here is love, which deals with the present. You know I hope that the reputation that this fellowship acquires isn't the fact that we grumble against one another, or that we're critical of one another, that we bite and devour one another, but rather that we love one another.

Jesus said that by this people would know that we're His disciples, by the fact we have CSN bumper stickers on our cars, or we wear Christian clothing, that's not what He said, but by our love for one another. The bible tells us that the fruit of the Spirit is love. and Anytime that we spend criticizing another, or gossiping about someone, or slamming your brother or sister, speaking ill about the ministry or the leadership or anything else we're not walking in love.

1 Cor 13 Tells us that, "*Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*" Too often we're looking out for ourselves in any given situation, seeking our own, we think evil of other brothers or sisters, we're easily provoked and lack for patience. You see we lack in love for the saints, Jesus said in John 13, "*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another;* (that part isn't new, it was in the OT, but Jesus added) *as I have loved you, that you also love one another.*"

We're to love one another the way Jesus loves us, with agape', it's Christ like love, a giving and sacrificial love, you see Jesus is longsuffering and kind, He's not envious or proud,

He's not rude or selfish and He's always concerned for the best interest of others over that of Himself. and He demonstrated that in His stepping down out of Heaven and becoming a man in order to die the death that we've sentenced ourselves to so that we might live forever with Him. and Paul says that this is the type of love that he's hearing about that's circulating in the Colossian church, the love that's other's centered and sacrificial, what a testimony.

It's not a love that's only for those in their little cell groups, no cliques or clubs in that church and they were just as loving to Christians that didn't go to that church at all, they had a Christ like love for "all" the saints, and what was it that fostered, and cultivated the love and faith that was in these believers? #3 The hope that was laid up for them in heaven, hope dealing with the future. So past, present, and future all wrapped up in faith, love and hope, and remember that the biblical understanding of hope isn't our cultural understanding of hope, for us the word "hope" carries the connotation of "wish", when we say, "I hope so" we mean, "I sure wish it goes this way." But the biblical understanding of hope involves, assured expectation, and guaranteed certainties.

There's no gamble involved, (maybe so, maybe not, but I sure hope so) that's not biblical hope. Apart from Christ there is no hope, Eph 2:12 tells us that when we were with out Christ that we were alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, having no hope and with out God in the world. But in Christ there's no question, we have an assured expectation concerning the eternal. We spoke a couple of weeks ago regarding the relational peace that we have in Christ, Christ being our peace, and 1st Tim 1:1 also reveals to us that Christ is our hope, 1 Peter 1:3 says, "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.*"

Our hope is a living hope, because the expectations that we have are alive in Christ, we have a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ it's Christ confidence, He is our hope, and as sure as He rose from the dead, He will come again and receive us unto Himself that where He is there we will also be, that's the hope that's laid up for us in heaven. and A healthy church will be one that believes what God says, which pulsates with the love of Christ, and is consistently focused on the eternal. Faith, love, and hope, the first fruits of the gospel. and They're virtually inseparable, and constantly feeding on one another, faith in Christ, will cause me to love those who are Christ's, and trust in His words results in this assured expectation laid up for me in heaven, and the assurance of this hope just builds my faith.

We see these 3 in various places in the NT, we see them here, and in 1 Thess 1:3 we see them all come together again as Paul writes, "*remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father.*" and Of course we're familiar with 1 Cor 13:13 "*And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.*"

Because love is that which is carried on into the eternal, our hope and faith will culminate in the reality of our being face to face with Jesus Christ But love will just go on and on and on,

why, because God is love. So their faith and love was spurred on, because of the hope, which is laid out for them in heaven, hope changes lives.

The story is told of a self-made millionaire by the name of Eugene Land, who had been asked to speak to a class of 59 sixth-graders in east Harlem. The goal was to inspire them because the drop out rate was so incredibly high, and not knowing what to say he simply said from his heart, "Stay in school," "and I'll help pay the college tuition for every one of you." In other words you make it through high school and I'll put you through college, nearly 90% of that class graduated, what made the difference? Hope, they had an assured expectation awaiting them and it changed their lives, something they could look forward to with certainty. and Hope in Christ changes lives. and Paul reminds them here that they'd heard the reality of what Christ had done, and the sufficiency that was there for them in Christ prior to these false teachers getting a hold of them. Notice vs 5 (last 1/2)

See the "truth" of the gospel as opposed to the lies that they were being confronted with. The truth being the content of the gospel that I shared a few min ago, born of a virgin, lived sinless, died for the sins of the world, bringing the remission of sins through the shedding of His blood for all who would call upon His name.

Vs 6

Note the phrase, "in all the world" in Paul's day, some 32-34 short years after Christ's ascension they had carried the gospel into all the world. Some people think Jesus can't come back until the gospel goes everywhere, but according to God's word it already has. Not each single person, but every continent has been introduced to the gospel. and The book of Rev makes clear that God has a plan to get the gospel out personally by His own means prior to the return of Christ, don't think He would entrust such a vital issue simply into the hands of man, He'll take care of that. But here's our key phrase, it's "bringing forth fruit" as it is among you, anywhere the gospel takes root, it brings forth fruit.

Jesus spoke of the reality of that in Mark ch 4 in the parable of the sower, likening the Word of God to a seed being sown and when it lands in good soil, a heart that's soft and pliable, it'll bring forth fruit, in some 30, others 60, and some 100 fold. It works effectively in those who believe, 1 Thess 2:13 says, "*For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.*" and It begins that work the day you hear it, knowing the grace of God in truth, as opposed to the humanistic, intellectual philosophies and deceit that they were being subjected to. and People are still subjected to those things today, but vain philosophies of man work destruction and ruin, but the grace of God in truth brings forth fruit.

Vs7-8

Again be careful what you declare about people, Epaphras was careful to share good things regarding the believers in Colosse, he declared their love in the Spirit. Not how he disagreed with the way things were happening, or how they were all immature and needed some spiritual discipline, but he emphasized their love in the Spirit, and this is the only direct emphasis on the Holy Spirit in this letter. Again this letter illustrates Christ and His sufficiency, and so may we be a group of believers that are known for the fruit of the gospel budding forth in our fellowship, being a people of faith, a people of love, and a people of hope.

But if you're here this morning and are without hope, because you're alienated from Christ, you've never dealt with the sin in your life. God wants to grant you a living hope through the resurrected Christ that'll change your life forever. If God's Word has been stirring in you and you're ready to believe the gospel, the fact that Christ died for you and wants to forgive you of everything you've ever done and reconcile you to Himself through His shed blood, don't wait, take that step of faith today.