

Colossians 1:3-8

³We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, ⁴because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints—⁵the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel ⁶that 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. ⁷You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, ⁸and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.

Dear children of God who trust and hope in God alone,

How powerful is this glass of water I am holding? It doesn't look real powerful and in fact it looks rather weak and simple, doesn't it. But what would happen if I would take this water and boil it to the point of making steam. Again you might say that steam doesn't look very powerful – it only looks like a vapor cloud. But people discovered in the early 1700's that if you heated water and made steam that steam was powerful enough to run engines that ran pumps and eventually other things like locomotives, ships and many other things leading us into through the Industrial Revolution. Who would have ever thought of boiling water to make steam to make a powerful energy source? Not Me!

As I hold up this cross, people might think to themselves that this isn't very powerful. It is only a cross. While that might be right, it is what happened on this cross – which we call the Gospel or Good News of God's love for us that is very powerful. Again who would have ever thought of a cross and a man dying on that cross as powerful? In and of itself it looks rather simple, but as Paul reminds us in our words for today:

SERMON THEME: Thank God For The Gospel's Power!

- 1. It is life saving**
- 2. It is life empowering**

Paul says: **“We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you...”** Why is Paul thankful? Paul is thankful because he has heard about the faith of these Colossian believers.

But how did all this happen? Did the Colossians wake up one day spiritually reprogrammed? Was there some unidentifiable ingredient that made its way into the Colosse water supply which caused them to suddenly put their trust in Jesus Christ for the salvation of their souls? Remember, the Colossians were flesh and blood people just like you and me. They dealt with sickness and death. They enjoyed times of prosperity and times of financial depression. Although it was over 1,900+ years ago, the Colossian Christians lived in the same real sinful world that we live in. And yet they lived each day with hope – an

expectation that they would one day receive the crown of eternal life....an understanding that this world of tears is not the end of the story...a daily certainty that their heavenly Father was watching over them, blessing them, and would one day call them home.

What caused such hope? The gospel. The good news about Jesus Christ. Paul knew this good news well. Paul used to hate Christians and he spent much of his time trying to get rid of them. Paul had a hatred for Christ, the one who claimed to be the Son of God. Until one day all that changed. One day Christ, the very Son of God, met Paul on the road to Damascus. Surprisingly, Christ did not destroy Paul, but instead embraced him with his love. Paul never forgot that.

The Colossians could relate to Paul. Many of them did not have Jewish blood running through their veins, which meant, they did not grow up with the Bible. They grew up with either no gods or false gods. But then came the good news about Jesus Christ and everything in their lives changed. They learned that the Holy Father would not punish them for every last thing they did wrong for Christ had already paid a terrible price for their sin. They learned that their eternal salvation did not rely on how well they've lived or how hard they could work for everything had already been done for them by Christ. They learned that a heavenly inheritance had already been promised to them and was waiting for them. That was good news! That was life changing!

How did they find out about this golden good news? Well, this also isn't all that flashy and exciting...somebody told them. They hadn't been initiated into some secret organization and thus gained access to some privileged information. They hadn't journeyed up a mountain to visit some wise old man who shared some hidden body of knowledge. It was just some ordinary man named Epaphras who told them the good news about Jesus. **“You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf.”**

Quietly, without fanfare and fireworks, the gospel had turned unbelieving Gentiles in to heaven-bound believers. Does this sound familiar? Sure the names have changed. Paul has been in heaven for almost 2,000 years. Epaphras too. But the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are still real events. And that powerful yet simple message of Christ dying for sins is still being preached from pulpits and taught in Day Schools and Sunday schools...babies are being baptized, consciences are being soothed at the communion rail...Bibles are being read, home devotions are being led by fathers and mothers – and God is filling his people with his love and reminding them of what has been accomplished for them in Christ...and their faith is being strengthened and everyday Christians like you and me are walking around in the world full of tears but we know this isn't the end of it. We know a perfect home in heaven awaits.

It all seems so ordinary, so simple. In reality, what God accomplishes through his powerful gospel is amazing and awesome. He turns cold-hearted unbelievers into warm-blooded believers. He takes loads of real sins and offenses...and buries them in the heart of the sea. He takes the holiness and perfection that only he could provide...and he wraps it around you and me. He gives strength to the weak. He gives confidence to the unsteady. He gives grace to those who just don't deserve to have it -- all this in his simple, yet powerful gospel message.

No wonder Paul says, **“We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you...”** He knew about the solid trust the Holy Spirit had worked in their hearts and he was

overjoyed. He also knew about the byproducts of that God-given faith. He had also heard about their **“love for all the saints.”** By saints he doesn’t mean the figurines people put on their dashboards, but fellow believers. The more the Colossian Christians heard about Jesus, the more their trust increased and the more their anticipation of heaven grew. And the more their faith in Christ grew the more they wanted to love and serve Christ and each other.

2. It is life empowering

Don’t forget that’s not a natural, human-born reaction. The natural mind asks, “How can I make sure I’m serving myself...who cares about others?” “Me first...and then maybe if I have a little bit of time and energy left over I can consider thinking about someone else.” “Okay, so I’m supposed to love others. Well, what’s the least amount I can do to still get by?”

But a new command has been given to those whom Christ has made into new creations: **“love one another.”** Or the way Paul puts it when he’s talking to the Galatians: **“do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”** Or the way Paul puts it here: **“we pray that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way; bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God.”**

As new creations we have a new way of looking at things, a new way of doing things. Imagine you are going on a trip to see Disney or something else that is going to be real fun. You pack yourself into the van and you head out. The whole point of this trip is to have fun. But the fun doesn’t just start when you get to Disney, you have the whole trip to have fun. What sense would it make if you bickered and argued and bad mouthed each other the whole way there?

In the same way, we are headed for heaven. We know there is going to be a beautiful and enjoyable place awaiting us there, where all believers will live together in harmony with each other and in the presence of God. What sense does it make for us to bicker and argue with each other now while on earth as we are walking down that road together that leads to that heavenly joy? What sense does it make to badmouth each other and criticize one another and make life miserable for one another? We know we’ll be sharing the joy and bliss of heaven soon enough...let’s not wait until then to act like good sons and daughters of the Father. At our baptisms we have been made into children of God...and that has made us brothers and sisters with one another as well. When Paul heard reports about the Colossians, that fact stood out. They were living like brothers and sisters. They were expressing love for one another.

The Lord desires that for us as well. That we may, day in and day out, grow in the knowledge of God...grow closer and closer to Christ...And having a genuine love for one another that also grows and shows. It shows in how we treat each other. It shows in how we respect one another. It shows in how we go out of our way to serve one another...as if we were serving Christ himself. Those things are happening...here and around the world. **“All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit.”** The gospel is powerful. It is strengthening and solidifying our trust in Jesus. It is bearing fruit among us. For that we praise and thank God. May it continue to do so...so that the riches stored up for us in heaven drive us to be more fruitful and more faithful in our lives here on earth. God grant it. Amen.