

Text: Colossians 1:3-8

Title: Thanks to God for Faith, Love, and Hope

Truth: The Christian Gospel transforms the lives it touches.

Date/Location: Sunday morning June 28, 2015 at FBC

Introduction

Paul reports on his own prayer to God, and the content of his prayer is thanksgiving. He prays constantly for the believers **since** the time he heard of their faith toward Christ and love for believers—and also **because** of that faith and love. Paul also thanks God for the certain-to-come expectation or "hope" which is reserved in heaven for the believers by God. He mentions that they heard of all this when the gospel came to them, and brought fruit and grew as it had in many other places. It brought that fruit from the very day they heard it. They were transformed by the saving work of the gospel to cleanse them of sin and give them new life. We could almost say that the church arose out of nothing. Epaphras was a key instrument that brought this message of hope, life, love, faith, and salvation to the people of Colossae, and he then brought news to Paul in Rome of the gospel's effect.

I. Theology and Application

A. **Exercise Love.** One of the Gospel's effects is love for God, and another is love for other believers (verses 4 and 8). The disposition of an unbeliever is to dislike and even hate God, and to dislike and even hate Christians. The believer has experienced a great change by which he or she expresses faith toward God and love toward believers. Not that we don't love non-Christians, or that we hate them. In fact, we are taught to love our enemies (Matthew 5:44-45)! But there is a special place in the believer's heart for fellow "sanctified ones" who are brothers and sisters in the family of God. This love rejoices with those who rejoice; it aches with those who are hurting; it pushes us to help those who are in need; it burdens us to pray for those who are persecuted and those going astray. It does not keep a record of wrongs and forgives when wronged.

B. **Know the Nature of God.** The recipient of the prayer is God the Father. He is identified that way relative to the Son, so that we know Son has same nature as the Father. The title *Lord* on Jesus' personal name and with his office title of Messiah indicates the deity of Jesus. The Christian God is not strictly monotheistic, nor tri- or poly-theistic. His nature is Trinitarian, trinity in unity, tri-unity, three-in-one.

C. **Be Encouraged.** When you are down, it is encouraging to hear of God's work in far-away places, even those places you do not know. How encouraging it must have been to the imprisoned Paul, this news of salvation coming from a far-away city. The Colossians' faith derived ultimately from his ministry, perhaps in Ephesus, through Epaphras. That is uplifting news, and true cause for thanksgiving!

D. **Watch your translation.** In verse 6, two modern translations say:

NKJV: which has come to you, as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit...

ESV: which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit **and increasing**...

What is the difference? The Textus Receptus omits "and increasing" (or "and growing"). This Greek text was derived from a small number of ancient manuscripts which happened to be missing those words at this point in Colossians. The vast majority of manuscripts, as well as the consensus of modern scholars in what is called the Nestle-Aland and United Bible Societies Greek text (NA/UBS or just NU for short), agree that the words "and growing" are part of the original text. So do I, which means I think the KJV and NKJV are in error at this point.

E. **Be Like Epaphras.** Notice that he is identified two ways:

1. A dear fellow servant. In terms of his relationship to Paul, he is a fellow minister of the gospel. He and Timothy are on the same team as Paul. Whatever encouragement Epaphras has, Paul has too; but also whatever griefs he has, Paul shares. They all three consider the good things going on in Colossae, as well as the bad.
2. A faithful minister of Christ to the church. Thank God for faithful ministers.
3. It appears that the human reason the gospel got to the cities of Colossae, Hierapolis, and Laodicea, was that Epaphras took it there.
4. Maybe you think that this would never be you, but I beg to differ! We train and teach here at the church so that not only will you be protected from false teaching (from wolves in sheep's clothing), and not only so that you will grow in grace and the knowledge of Christ and bear fruit in your own life, but also so that you can cause the gospel to grow by impacting other people and families. If we don't see ourselves as ministers that way, the church eventually just withers away and dies.

- F. **Thank God.** We need to look around for every possible reason to give thanks to God. Remember that saying I came across not too long ago—if God were to take everything away from us for which we did not express thankfulness, how much would we have left? To the point of what Paul is modeling here, we need to thank God for people’s spiritual progress—constantly, fervently, and with spiritual content.
- G. **Be a thanksgiving-inducing Christian.** In other words, does my life look like the Colossian Christians? Am I giving evidence of spiritual life with fruit and growth? Can others look and give thanks for progress they see?
- H. **Recognize your hope.** Your hope is that expected future blessing of the final installment of all of salvation’s benefits.
1. Our hope is not in this world, with all its fancy things and wicked schemes and walking dead. Our hope is reserved/kept safe in heaven. It’s not going anywhere no matter the trials we face. We have to face the blessed yet hard fact that we are pilgrims on this earth, no matter what country we dwell in. We should carefully think through the implications of Psalm 39:12, Hebrews 11:13 and 1 Peter 2:11. We are citizens of another kingdom not of this world (John 18:36, James 2:5).
 2. Our hope is in the Lord. That entails things like freedom from sin; everlasting life in the future; dwelling with God; fellowshiping with saints of past ages and dear ones who have gone before us; serving and worshipping God forever; experiencing no need or stress to make provision for food or shelter; elimination of pain and suffering; no fear or worry or depression—whether for persecution or anything else.
 3. The world doesn’t have this hope. We have something they are desperately missing. We must not be high-minded about it, but we can also rejoice and in a sense boast, in our God, regarding what we do have. The world ought to be jealous but instead it hates.
- I. **Acknowledge the truth.** The gospel is “the word of truth.” It is a true message; true truth. It is not human opinion; it is not a myth or legend.
1. It is absolutely true, and quite demonstrably so, that all people are sinners.
 2. It is absolutely true that Jesus was born, lived, died, and rose again from the dead—all historical facts.
 3. It is utterly true that you need to turn away from sin and place your faith in the one true and living God and His Son Jesus Christ.
 4. It is true that all other gods are empty idols.

5. It is also true that Christ Jesus died for our sins to deliver us from this present evil world and to create for himself a people who are eager to do good works and who earnestly desire to be holy.
6. It is true that God loves you, and even if you are outside of the family of God right now, He has a deep compassion and concern for your soul. He made provision for sinners just like yourself so that you could come to Him with empty hands, with a sinful heart, and He promises to save, cleanse, heal, and bring new life into your being.

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