



The Sermon

Austin Duncan

Colossians 1:3-8

"Thank God for the Gospel"

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TRANSCRIPT

So, will you turn with me in your study of the book of Colossians to what I believe is your second message in Colossians. Dr Lawson got us started in verses 1 and 2. My assignment is Colossians 1:3-8, just a glorious passage that really sets this book up so well with Paul's prayer. The title of this message is "Thank God for the Gospel." "Thank God for the Gospel," Colossians 1:3-8. I'll begin by reading this text.

We'll begin with verse 1 to get some momentum: "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father." Now verse 3, our passage: "We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints; because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth; just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf, and he also informed us of your love in the Spirit." This is the very Word of the living God.

I'll ask you a question here at the outset: "Would you rather be robbed or be the robber? Would you rather be robbed or be the robber?" This is a question that comes from the experience of a well-known Puritan named Matthew Henry. If you've Googled him up ever, all his commentaries in the Bible are vast and readily available. He's a very helpful source in the Scriptures having written on almost every verse of the Bible.

Matthew Henry was a Puritan and a Bible scholar, and once he was attacked by thieves and robbed of his purse. In those days men carried handsome satchels, like my bag there, and they called it a purse; so just to clarify in this gender-confused age. So Matthew Henry had a satchel, a purse, and he was robbed by thieves, relieved of his possessions; and he wrote in his diary, as was his custom, the following words of gratitude: "Let me be thankful. First, I was never robbed before; second, although they took my purse, they didn't take my life; third, although they took my all, it was not much; and fourth, let me be thankful, because it was I who was robbed and not I who did the robbing." The apostle Paul would understand that kind of a prayer. The chief of sinners lived his life and conducted his ministry with full awareness of the grace of God.

To thank God that we were robbed and not that we're robbers is to remember the power of God in the gospel in our own lives. And that's what the apostle Paul is doing as he begins his letter to the Colossians. And he writes this letter in the very traditional format of an ancient letter. As you learned as you open this book with the signature at the beginning, the epistolary greeting, he says, "Paul an apostle of Jesus Christ," - identifying himself; this was the custom in an ancient letter by the will of God - "and Timothy our brother," - is co-author - "to the saints and faithful brothers in Christ who are at Colossae:" - that's the recipients; and then just a very standard Christian greeting - "Grace to you and peace from God our Father."

The other convention an ancient letter would take is it would begin after stating the sender and then the recipients. The next word after, perhaps, the word of greeting would be a prayer to the gods. Pagan letters began with a blessing spoken in the letter to the recipient about how the gods would bless

them, bless their fertility, their fruitfulness, their work, whatever, in the name of all these gods and goddesses. Well, Paul adopts that same style but sanctifies it entirely, because he knows the one true God. And what he pins at the opening part of Colossians is a Trinitarian prayer, a Trinitarian prayer that focuses on the effect that the gospel has had in this backwater out of the way place called Colossae.

Scholars normally say, that have studied the book of Colossians, that this is the most insignificant place that any New Testament document was ever addressed to. And as I'm sure you'll hear in your study of Colossians, it was a backwater place. It was a place of a former significance that had been overshadowed by the metropolises in the Lycus Valley that had grown to prominence, to importance. And this was a place on decline. There was an earthquake in 60 AD or 61 that brought the whole area into shambles. The larger cities were rebuilt; Colossae, not likely.

In fact, Colossae is one of the few places in the Bible that still remains unexcavated in modern times. It had a massive Jewish population we know through various records from the ancients. But there's a project starting just in maybe this year or next year where they're going to start to dig up Colossae; and maybe then we'll have a little more background information. But what we do know is that it was an insignificant place that received one of the most glorious treatments of the supremacy of Jesus Christ in the pages of the New Testament, alongside the book of Hebrews, the gospel of John.

This is a depiction of the incomparable Christ and His glory; and Paul writes to these Colossians out of concern, because he received a report from their founding pastor, who we meet in verse 8, named Epaphras, that there was some threats to this church. So without the vitriol of the book of Galatians, but with the warm-heartedness of the book of Romans, but with still a polemic concern something needs to be addressed, he looks to these Colossians and sees the threats that are assailing their faith; and with a gentle, careful approach, he counters it, not with complicated arguments that tell us all the specifics of the Colossian heresy – it's rather complicated. Instead, he simply shows them the glory of Jesus.

The apostle Paul believes that the glory of Jesus in their own experience of the gospel in their lives and in their community and around the world, that Jesus' nature, His work, His ongoing ministry is the solution to whatever could assail their faith. And so the high watermark of the book of Colossians is verse 13 of the same chapter. Look at it, it says, "For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." And then this glorious Christological hymn: "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation: for by Him all things were created, both in heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones, or dominions, or rulers, or authorities - all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together."

This incomparable, glorious Christ is the theme of the book of Colossians. It is the main subject, and it is the solution to their troubles. As he unfolds the glory of Christ in this brief letter to this backwater place, he has confidence that the solution to the problems that they face are fixed by a right Christology, an accurate and worshipful understanding of who Christ is and what Christ has done.

And so the prayer that's before us this morning in verses 3-8 is not just some ordinary conventional prayer, but it's taking that form that ancient letters took and transforming it for the apostles purposes to show them that the starting point of the Christological glory that he's about to unfold is for them to join the apostle Paul in this heartfelt thanks for God's work in the gospel. And so he thanks God for the gospel and its impact in Colossae, and he invites the Colossians to join him in this gratitude and thanksgiving.

And so I think we look at it in three parts to understand how we too can thank God for the gospel, because though you're not in a backwater town, you're in the Big D, a town of significance and valor. The message of Christ at the center of everything and of a prayer that's thankful for God's work in the gospel is relevant to every Christian congregation. It's relevant to every single person who understands that they are the object of God's grace, that

they've been redeemed by God and rescued by God. And so if you're thankful for your salvation, then you'll be thankful to God for the gospel for at least the three reasons I see in this text.

Let's start, number one, verses 3-5, "We thank God for the power of the gospel. We thank God for the power of the gospel," verse 3 and the first half of verse 5. Well, what does this verse say? Dig into verse 3 with me.

He says, "We always give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you." The apostle Paul's gratitude transforms automatically into praise to God and prayer to God. His heart of thanksgiving, of gratitude, the appreciation he feels towards the Colossians is directed at the outset to God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And he begins with that most common title in the New Testament, that the Lord Jesus Christ speaking of His sovereign supremacy, His rulership: He's the Lord. Jesus, His human name; Christ, the messianic expectation that He fulfilled. He's the Lord Jesus Christ.

And it's variances of that the apostle Paul loves to use for different reasons and different contexts. In Romans 1:4 he says, "He's Jesus Christ our Lord." In 1 Timothy 1:2 he says, "He's Christ Jesus the Lord." And here, as in Philippians 1:2, He's called the Lord Jesus Christ. All of this is to remind us that the entirety of the Godhead, the perfection of the Trinity is in Paul's mind as he gives thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And then in verse 8, the Spirit as well as mentioned." So we have all of triune perfection in Paul's prayer as he directs his heart of gratitude towards the Lord.

This is how Paul will teach the Thessalonians to think about Christ and to think about their God. In chapter 3, verse 17 of Colossians, remember what he says there. He says, "Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus," - And then what does it say? - "giving thanks through Him to God the Father." And so this posture of gratitude, of praise, drives this prayer, because "give thanks" or "always giving thanks" is the primary verb in verses 3-8; everything else hangs on that grammatical

expression, on that important word, "giving thanks always." The thanks is continual, it's ongoing, it's ever-present, because he gives praise and thanksgiving to an eternal God. He's building on the foundation of praise, because God has always demanded praise from His people.

Turn to any Psalm. Psalm 90: "Lord, You've been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were born or You gave birth to the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting, You are God." Psalm 91: "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty." Psalm 93: "The Lord reigns, He is clothed with majesty." Psalm 92: "It's good to give thanks to the Lord and to sing praises to Your name, O God Most High."

The thanksgiving and praise that's Godward is always going to be a mark of God's people. And so Paul in his prayer starts with a Godward focus, and he thanks God for the power of the gospel. He says, "when we pray for you"; it's directed towards God. And then in verse 4, why is he thanking God? What is the occasion or the basis of his prayer? Well, that word "because" in verse 4 in your Bible says, "because we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love you have for the saints," - verse 5 - "on account of the hope laid up for you in heaven."

Well, our eye is automatically drawn to those three familiar words, isn't it, that triad of the Christian religion. It is faith, hope and love. We've seen those words together so many times in the Scriptures. Well, here is an interesting depiction of these words. He thanks God because of their faith in Christ Jesus.

Now the Greek word for "faith" could be translated faithfulness; but I think he's thanking God for their faith, because the focus here is on the gospel - verse 4, verse 6, verse 7 - the gospel, the grace of God in truth, the word of truth, the gospel. And so their faith is in Christ, a glorious preposition to speak of the object of their faith being the Lord Jesus Christ. And as he thanks God for the power of the gospel, the question I'd ask you is, "Why does he thank God? Why does he thank God?"

He could thank the Colossians for placing their faith in Jesus. He could thank the evangelist, which he does, when he talks about Epaphras in verse 7, or at least acknowledges his role. But I think there's something very theologically significant to the reality that the apostle Paul thanks God for the faith of the Colossians. And you know why that is; that's because no one in their right mind thanks someone who didn't give them something.

I had dinner last night. A true friend picks up someone from DFW, and I flew into DFW last night. Mr. Kent picked me up, he took me to dinner. Men don't work, men don't eat. So we went to dinner, and Mr. Kent paid the bill. I couldn't find my wallet, so it worked out really good. And after he paid the bill, I looked at the people at the table next to us and profusely thanked them for dinner. It's absurd, right? That's because I need to thank Mr. Kent for dinner, because Mr. Kent bought my dinner, picked me up from DFW; and so that makes sense.

Here's the issue: the reason the apostle thanks God for the faith the Colossians have in Christ Jesus which leads to the love that they have for all the saints is because God is the one who gave them faith. "We always thank God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ when we pray for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints." You see, Christian, you are not the one who is ultimately responsible for the faith in your heart. You are not the one who will receive the credit on that last day when you stand before God in heaven. Even your faith is a gift from God, Philippians 1:29. That's why Ephesians 2 likewise says that "this" - speaking of faith - "and grace is a gift from God, so that no one could boast."

And so we thank the Lord for His power in working the gospel in the recipients of the gospel's hearts, because God is the one that does it. The congratulations, the affection, the joy is not for the one who believed, but the one who gave that belief to the recipient who opened our eyes to the truth of the gospel. You understand this, right, experientially. The reason you're a Christian and the reason your brother or your sister is not a Christian is not because you are intrinsically better, or more moral, or more

holy, or more intelligent, or because you deserve the grace of God; that's not how grace works. The reason that you're a Christian and perhaps your neighbor is not is solely and exclusively on the basis of God's unmerited grace, right? And so we thank God for that grace, and we thank Him exclusively for the faith that's on display in the gospel.

Well, that faith is never alone. Note that that faith in this power of the gospel is accompanied by love you have for the saints. Faith and love are most often depicted together: Romans 5:1-5, 1 Thessalonians 1:5, Ephesians 4:2-5 – all places where you see faith and love connected to each other; and that's because they are truly inseparable virtues: faith and love. You can't imagine one without the other, because consider faith apart from love would be cold, would be dead, would be unfeeling, unloving, unkind, uncaring; it would be orthodoxy without any warmth. Likewise, love without faith would be all heart and no head, all affection but no basis in truth or reality. And so we thank God that faith and love are in perfect complement, so that when a person believes the gospel, one of the evidences of that gospel, according to 1 John, is that they love the brothers.

I teach in the pastoral ministry department at the seminary, and I try to weed out the guys who want to be pastors, because they love to study, and they're good at Greek, or they love theology, but they don't love people. You've heard maybe pastors joke or a minister joke about, "I love ministry if it weren't for the people." That's a terrible attitude. It's an ungodly attitude. It's the opposite of the relationship of faith and love. Ministry is the people, and the people are to demonstrate their faith by their love for one another. And that's exactly what the Colossians did. Their love for the saints was a result of the faith they had in Christ.

Now that last clause that brings that triad to completion of faith, love, and hope is phrased differently. In fact, I just messed it up because I said faith, hope, and love. That's how it is in 1 Corinthians 13, right? But here it's faith, love, and hope; and you would think it would be a natural progression: faith you believe the gospel, that message of salvation in Christ, then you are transformed to be one who loves your brothers and sisters in Christ, and then you expectantly await the hope of heaven.



But that's not what he says. He says, "We heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for the saints." And then the Greek preposition here, that's those words that talk about movement and relationships spatially (for, on, because, instead of, on top of, underneath ) all those kind of spatial words, prepositions and theologies all about prepositions, verse 5, "on account, or because of the hope laid up for you in heaven." Did you catch that? The basis, the reason that they have faith in Christ and that they love the saints in this passage is presented as "on account of the hope laid up for you in heaven."

That's remarkable. That's a remarkable relationship that's underlined in these three very familiar virtues. We would think that the tangible expression of faith is love, and it is; and we would think that that would work us towards hope. But this passage teaches us that in one respect hope is the foundation and the source of faith and love. That's what on account of verse 5, "the hope laid up for you in heaven," means.

You see, these Colossians believe the gospel. The gospel was that announcement of God's victory over sin and death and the devil, because of the death of Christ and the cross, and because of His glorious resurrection. If you believe on Jesus Christ the Son of God who lived a perfect life and died in your place, that's the gospel, you will be saved. If you believe in your heart, confess in your mouth, turning from your sin and confessing that sin to God and trusting in the sacrifice of Jesus, that's the gospel that they believed, and in that gospel foundationally, and as part of that message was a message of hope.

This is important to understand today, and it's because so many want to make the gospel about the here and now: societal transformation, assistance of the poor, reforming the education system, political progress, digging wells in the third world, all things – I think I'm in favor of everything on that list. I like wells, education; I'm grateful for hospitals. And Christians get a lot of credit for so much good that's happened in this world: hospitals, advancement in education for society, the end of slavery – that's all

because of Christians. Here's the thing: that's not the point of the gospel. The gospel at its heart is future aimed. It's heaven sent and heaven oriented.

I was reading this little book on the airplane by John Flavel the Puritan, and J. I. Packer wrote a lovely introduction to it. He uses Richard Baxter's quote, "Heart work and heaven work," as the characterization of real Christianity, heart work and heaven work. You know, heart work is that inner communion with God, making sure our hearts are right before God. But that phrase, "heaven work," J. I. Packer says, signified a discipline, of which Baxter himself was a promoter, namely the practice of daily motivational meditation on the prospect of finally being with Christ in heaven. The purpose of this discipline was to keep the energy level of one's discipleship as high as possible. "As one continued living," Packer's words, "the forward tilted life, with the eyes of one's heart fixed on the ultimate destination."

So, how is faith and love sustained? Well, it's by that forward tilting life, that future orientation. It's why Colossians 1:27 will teach us so well, "To whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." See, the message of the gospel unites us with Christ. It makes us one with Christ. It identifies us with His death and burial and resurrection. It makes His destiny our destiny. He takes our sin and gives us His righteousness in the gospel. That transaction is transformative, and it makes us aimed towards heaven, longing for heaven, hoping for glory, aware of our need of final salvation of glorification and the perfect blessedness that will be ours in the eternal state. And this is practical and important and helpful to live the forward tilting life. Philippians 3:20-21 likewise says, "Our citizenship is in heaven." And so we can throw off the earthly things.

You see, hope in this passage is portrayed as being the basis, the reason for our faith and love. A gospel that is only concerned with this world and priorities in the here and now forsakes the main reality that will occupy the vast majority of our lives, because if we live to be a hundred years old here but we live for ten million years and counting in eternity, what matters more. That forward tilting, heaven bound, hope filled life is not the kind of

hope the world has, where there's a chance this could take place, and we have some kind of reasonable expectation. No, no. Biblical hope is assuredness. Biblical hope is a confidence that we know what the future holds, because God has told us. So faith and love come from hope, and all of this shows us the power of the gospel.

Will you also note just one more thing in this first section, that these are tangible things. Verse 4, "We heard of your faith and love and hope." The apostle Paul doesn't know these people. He didn't found this church, Epaphras did. He has a connection to them through Epaphras, he has affection for them as an apostle, but their faith and their love for each other and their hope that they have laid up, or stored up, or guarded up in heaven is well-known to the apostle Paul, because faith, love and hope, Christian virtues, are not privatized. You live those things out.

Your faith, though it is your faith, and you think of it as my personal faith, is anything but personal. Your faith is public, intentionally so. Your faith is to be known. Your love for the saints is to be seen. The hope that you have laid up in heaven that motivates your faith in love is observable, recordable, and reportable to the apostle Paul. And so he heard about this. It's a good reminder that the power of the gospel has a transformative effect on your life, and orients you at its outset towards the destiny of heaven to be with God, to know God.

Well, why heaven? Well, the reason why heaven is because what makes heaven heaven is that Christ is there. And so if the thought of heaven overwhelms you, if the thought of heaven is too difficult for you to grasp, or if eternity sounds frightening to you, I would encourage you to look to Christ, learn of Christ in His word, because heaven is where Christ is; and when He went to prepare a place for us, it's to dwell with Him forever. And so if you want to know the glories of heaven, you must learn the glories of Christ. That's the power of the gospel that we're thankful for, this reorientation of our souls because of the announcement of the gospel message. That makes us thank God for faith and love that's rooted and grounded in hope. We thank God for the power of the gospel.

Point Two: We thank God for the progress of the gospel, and I get this from the second half of verse 5 and from verse 6, "We thank God for the progress of the gospel," - verse 5 and verse 6; second half of verse 5 says - "which you first heard" - there's that word *akousantes* again, just a normal word for hearing - "in the word of truth, the gospel." Verse 6, "This gospel has come to you, just as in the whole world it is bearing fruit and growing" - so it has been implied, bearing fruit and growing - "among you from the day you heard and understood the grace of God and truth."

This little passage, verses 5 and 6 are framed by two concepts repeated: the idea of "hearing" in verse 5 and in verse 6, and then the idea of "the grace of God in truth" in verse 6, and "the word of truth, the gospel" in verse 5. His point as he continues his prayer is that this gospel of faith, hope and love that transformed the Colossians has come to them through their hearing of it, as it has in the entire world. Paul is encouraging them with some apostolic perspective from his vantage point and his role as an apostle, overseeing the missionary campaigns of the apostle Paul, over seeing the churches, and discipling young men, establishing Timothy and Titus and Epaphras, and doing all that the apostle Paul did gave him a vantage point to kind of see from outside of just a single local church what God was doing all over the world, as the gospel went forth from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria. That kind of perspective is supposed to strengthen the Colossians that this same gospel that changed their our lives in their little town is changing lives all over God's world.

And that's a great encouragement for us. It's a point that brings our hearts to a further thanksgiving. We thank God for the progress of the gospel, to know and look around this church and to see the Lord adding to your number to bring people here who love the word of God and who want to exalt Christ and who want to reach this city for Jesus. You've experienced that in the last few years as God has blessed this church and grown this church and worked in this church in people's lives, and changed their hearts and their families; and God is working here.

Well, you can have every confidence that that's what's happening all over the world. The gospel makes progress. God's gospel cannot be defeated. It

will always be furthered. The church cannot be stopped. The gates of hell can't even prevail against her. And so the encouragement the apostle gives to these Colossians is, "The gospel has come to you." The one that they heard, this gospel of truth has brought about effects in their lives that look like, middle of this verse, "bearing fruit and growing." That's what it did in Colossae. Well, guess what it's doing around the world; it's bearing fruit, and it's growing. What a wonderful tribute to the power of the gospel of God.

And so he thanks God for this gospel power, that this is the word of truth. I think that's noteworthy how he emphasizes the trustworthiness and the truthfulness of the gospel in those two phrases: "the word of truth, the gospel" and "the grace of God in truth." Those are key phrases for us to understand this emphasis on the power and work of the Word, not only in our churches, but all around the world in hard places like China, or in Muslim countries where Christianity is illegal and persecuted. What's happening there is the gospel is still going forward.

The word of truth, the gospel: Paul portrays it as "bearing fruit and growing." That speaks of the activity of the gospel. Those are active words. Paul hasn't even been to this place. So it's not that it's dependent on Paul and his prowess as an evangelist or an apostle; what he's making note of is that in spite of all the obstacles that the gospel will face – and there's obstacles and Colossians of various heresies of paganism and syncretism and Jewish mysticism and a hundred other things – what he sees happening is progress; it's positive. And the reason it's that way is because it's true.

The gospel is not a fairy tale, the gospel is a verifiable reality. We believe something that is true and accurate. It's the word of truth. It's the grace of God in truth. When we believed, we didn't believe a fable, we didn't believe a lie. It wasn't a cunning person who duped us, or the arbitrary mystical experience that a person had when they were saved. You were saved because of a message. You were saved because of a word. Romans 10, "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ." It's that word of Christ that's powerful and faithful and able to accomplish all that God intends.

And God's word has always been this way. It's that way in Genesis, isn't it? God speaks, and the world is made by His words. It's that way in Isaiah's prophecy when he says - I love this passage in Isaiah 55:10, "For the rain and snow come down from heaven, and do not return there without watering the earth and making it bare and sprout, and furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it."

God's word continues to grow and bear fruit and increase among the Colossians and among the Thessalonians, among the whole wide world. That's his point. And so we join the apostle Paul in thanking God for the progress of the gospel; that includes its active growth and power and its truthfulness, because it's based in the word of God. God can't lie, so His gospel is true; and because God is all-powerful, His gospel has in it the powerful grace that is being revealed in every faithful gospel-preaching church. And so we love the progress of the gospel. We have confidence in the progress of the gospel.

Well, third and finally, and I see this from verse 7, we thank God not only for the power of the gospel and for the progress of the gospel, but in verses 7 and 8, "We thank God for the people who bring the gospel, the people who bring the gospel." And it's here we meet a friend, a new friend named Epaphras.

Epaphras is, here in this passage, brought to us as one who is a friend of the apostle Paul. The apostle Paul calls him "a beloved fellow slave." That's talking about their relationship to their Master, Christ; that he and Epaphras are far from being Christian celebrities, they present themselves as fellow slaves. Their responsibility only relates as to how they belong to Jesus and serve Jesus and live for Jesus. He is their Lord and Master. The Lord Jesus Christ of verse 3 is the one who is over the apostle Paul in every way.

And so he says, "as you learned it from Epaphras," he commends this excellent servant, this man who is remarkable and faithful. He says he's a

"faithful minister, or servant of Christ, slave of Christ on your behalf, and have made known to us your love in the Spirit. Epaphras who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you." This is from if Colossians 4:12. The end of the letter he says, "Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in the will of God. For I will bear witness that he has worked hard for you and those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis."

You see, this faithful servant is one of the ones who brought the gospel, who likely planted this church in Colossae. He's the one who would have told the apostle Paul that these people needed further help in shepherding because of the onset and threat of various heresies. He's the one who would have reported on their great faith and love and hope that brought such encouragement and prayerfulness to the apostle Paul. This is a man who ought to be honored.

Look at Philippians 2:25. This is a different, likely – most scholars believe this is a different Epaphras. This is Epaphroditus, kind of a miniature Epaphras: "But I thought it necessary to send you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister to my need, because he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick." Verse 27, "For indeed he was sick to the point of death, but God had mercy on him, and not only on him but also on me, so that I would not have sorrow upon sorrow." So here's another character with a similar name – lots of people had that name in the ancient world – who is equally valiant, equally faithful, a fellow slave of Christ.

Look what verse 28 says: "Therefore I have sent him all the more eagerly, so that when you see him again you may rejoice and I'd be less concerned about you. Receive him then in the Lord with all joy, and hold men like him in high regard, because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me."

Who do you hold in high regard? Do you hold your spiritual leaders, your pastors, your disciplers in high regard? Who is well-regarded in your mind? This world holds in high regard stupid people on TikTok, right? That's who's regarded, that's who's clicked, that's who's viewed, that's who's famous. But in heaven's perspective, who's to be honored, and who's to be regarded and appreciated and valued are people who bring the gospel: missionaries, evangelists, a faithful Christian mother who teaches her kids, a faithful Christian father who leads his home in the truth of the gospel.

Well, Epaphras was the planter of this church, and he is commended by the apostle Paul for being "beloved fellow slave of Christ, a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf, and the one who reported of the love they have because of the work in the Spirit." This remarkable man was an evangelist. He was a faithful teacher. He was a faithful servant or minister. And I love the balance that this commendation brings to this passage, because we said in verse 4 in Point One, the only one who gets thanked for the gospel is God, right? He's the reason you have faith. Well, that's not to completely remove human means and human effort.

Again, Romans 10, "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ. And how will they hear if there's not a preacher? Blessed are the feet, beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel," is what Paul tells the Romans. And here's some lovely feet here. Epaphras was precious to these saints because he explained to them the way of salvation. He showed them the gospel. He lived it out in front of them; and he didn't just announce it and leave, he actually taught them. It says, "They heard it and then" - verse 6 - "understood the grace of God in truth," - Well, that requires teaching, doesn't it? And verse 7 - "as you learned it from Epaphras." And so a faithful teacher of the Bible who shares the gospel with you, explains the gospel with you, answers your questions, ministers to your life, this is a man who's worthy of regard.

So I'd ask you, "Who are your Epaphrases?" Did I say that right? "And who are you an Epaphras to?" because we all need to be about the work of the gospel. We don't just leave that to the pastors or leave that to those who are most gifted in evangelism. But we all have people in our lives who need



Christ, and we need to be an Epaphras to them. And we need to thank God for the Epaphrases that came into our lives – Sunday school teacher, a faithful grandparent, whoever it was that taught you the gospel, brought you into a further understanding of it. And all of this geared around a thankfulness directed towards God, because the gospel displays His power, it's making progress in the world; and we thank God for the people that bring the gospel to us.

And so we finish where we started. Would you rather be robbed or be a robber? Well, if it wasn't for the gospel that we thank God for, we would be robbers and a whole lot worse. Paul says to the Corinthians, "Such were some of you." And if it wasn't for God's grace, we would be lost, and we wouldn't know the power of the gospel, we wouldn't see its progress in our church and around the world, and we wouldn't be able to express thanksgiving and joy and gratitude, as we see the Epaphrases in our life, and we seek to be Epaphrases who share the gospel with those in need. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, thank You for Your Word and for these precious people. I'm grateful for the gospel on display in this passage that shows us Your glorious grace. So, Father, will You reinforce these truths in our minds even as we go from here today. Be with us as we seek to bring glory and honor to Christ and to Christ alone. Thank You for this letter that shows us the glory of our Savior, that reminds us that we've been chosen of God, holy and beloved. And help us to put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, and gentleness. Help us to savor and have a sense of gratitude of the grace of God and truth. And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. [End]