

Thankful for Christ's Gospel that Can't be Locked Down

Colossians 1:3-8

Pastor/Elder Phil Layton, GCBC, April 26, 2020

Lord's prayer? Turn to Col. chap 1. This is a text that speaks to frustrations or grumbling I sense in others and in me. I have to fight to have gratitude. A *Mountain Democrat* newspaper article said:

“Research from various sources tells us that gratitude not only makes us feel better in the moment, it also:

- Reduces aches and pains and enhances our overall feeling of health.
- Improves the length and quality of our sleep.
- Enhances our psychological health and reduces negative emotions.
- Boosts our empathy and trims our aggressiveness.
- Renders us stronger and more resilient in the face of stress and trauma.

We can use all of that right now. Regularly counting our blessings can help us deal with our worries over the virus' effect, not only on our health and that of our loved ones, but also our economy. There's a lot to be worried about, but we also have so much to be thankful for... go through the alphabet and, for each letter, think of one or two things you're grateful for.”¹

I don't know if the lady writing that in our newspaper is a Christian, but I do know some of the biblical psalms go through the alphabet to **give thanks to God from A-Z** (Aleph-to-Tau). Psalms say things like this: *‘Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits... I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart; I will recount all of your wonderful deeds... Many, O Lord my God, are the wonders which You have done... too numerous to count... How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I should count them, they would outnumber the sand.’*²

Col 1:3-8 is about gospel gratitude in our precious preeminent Christ

Paul wrote from prison how he learned to be content and to count all else as loss compared to the surpassing blessings he counted in knowing Jesus.³ He writes Colossians under government orders to stay in a house in literal lock-down in chains but he thanks God for free grace in the gospel. He can't be in church a long time, he awaits govt. words on his future, but gives thanks. I've heard a lot of complaints from us who don't have it as bad as Paul did.

But look at Col 1, v. 3: *We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, ⁴ since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, ⁵ because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, ⁶ which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth, ⁷ just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf ⁸ and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.*

Big idea: Thankful for Christ's gospel that can't be locked down

1) context of gospel gratitude

2) concepts to be thankful for

3) constant application for us [leave on screen awhile to write]

#1 The context of gospel gratitude is Paul in prison in Rome, locked in chains as he says in ch 4, probably linked to a Roman soldier. No quarantine pass to go out like you heard last Sunday one of our missionaries is one in his family who can go outside their home. Whatever shelter or place Paul was in was a long-term house arrest, and in his case, he wasn't sure whether he would live or die. It wasn't just inconvenience for him, it was real injustice. How easily we give complaints about our state! Paul said I always give thanks! We have it much better than Paul, or other missionaries you've heard about with Satanists in their government, or presidents that can't go to the capitol in assassination attempts, or borders shut down so stores shutting down, 3rd world lockdown

One of our missionaries told us in his country anyone going out of a home after 2 PM will be arrested and caned (beat with rod). Some have far worse.

How often do you complain vs. give God thanks? Look at v. 3 in context:

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray...

That's the same phrase and way Paul starts 2 Corinthians, to a church with a lot more problems than we've faced, serious issues wrong in Corinth, but he starts '*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort...*' that's part of a broader context of what Paul means by talking about God as the Father of our Lord. He's the all-compassionate Father, like Ps 103 as a father has compassion on his kids

Let's remember the Paul who always gave thanks also suffered great pains. Later in the same letter, 2 Cor 11, '*far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I received...the forty lashes less one [that was flogging or flesh-ripping whipping]. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea...danger from robbers...danger in the city, danger in the wilderness...many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak?... [he adds] The God and Father of the Lord Jesus... knows...'*

Whatever danger in the city or anxiety, He knows, His grace is sufficient.

This is who writes: '*We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus...*'

*My heart is filled with thankfulness To Him who walks beside;
Who floods my weaknesses with strength And causes fears to fly;
Whose every promise is enough For every step I take,
Sustaining me with arms of love And crowning me with grace.*

We haven't gone through what Paul did, but in our weakness, daily pressure - join Eph 1: *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.*

That's where giving thanks and praise starts, with everything good we have from above, from the Father, as James 1 says. And Col 1:5 goes to heavenly realms, look at v. 5 *'...because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, ⁶ which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing...'*

I see that. Earthly roots are being loosened to heavenly hope, gospel fruit. We'll talk more about that hope later, but this centers on the gospel and how it keeps growing and going rapidly across the globe. Today we say 'going viral,' in a good sense, some translations say the truth was spreading. Even while Paul is bound in a house, God's message is not bound, as Paul told Timothy.⁴ He's locked down but Christ's Word can't be! The unstoppable gospel kept increasing. Paul's guards became his captive audience. In 2 Tim 2:9 Paul says I'm *'chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained!'*⁵

Paul used the analogy of his chains to declare the Word, and so can we. God's truth is never on lock down! There's no quarantining or containing the gospel! Its healing message is increasing. This spreads person to person globally as it's shared. Christ's good news is contagious in a good sense, a gracious life-giving antidote to the sin problem we're all infected with. No government can save us, but look to Him who Isaiah said has government on His shoulder, the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. He died to bring us peace and by His wounds we are healed.

v. 3 calls Him "our Lord Jesus" – If He's not your Lord, bow in faith!

If you reject Christ's grace, you have a greater invisible enemy. God is your enemy if you reject His Son, but Paul says in Rom 5 while we are enemies, God reconciles those who believe through His Son's death. Death spread to all because all sin, but there's a cure in Christ: repent, trust Him alone. The gospel calls you to turn from sin and trust His death for it and risen life. The heart of unsaved man is incurably sick, but the regenerated get a new heart. If you beat your breast and beg *'Lord have mercy on me, a sinner,'* He will.

If our heart beats by the gospel we can always be thankful for Christ's work. The heart of Christian gratitude is the Christian gospel. This is timely for us.

*My heart is filled with thankfulness To Him who bore my pain;
Who plumbed the depths of my disgrace And gave me life again.
Who crushed my curse of sinfulness, And clothed me with His light,
And wrote His law of righteousness With power upon my heart.*

The gospel is the power of God to save and also the power for our thanks.

Turn back just a few pages to Phil 1, the book right before, also a prison epistle.

1:12 *I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, ¹³ so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. ¹⁴ And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear...*

I've seen that. Not all, but many have been more boldly speaking of Christ, and I encourage you on social media if you want to be controversial, make it about the gospel. Don't share fear about our government. Share faith, gospel grace boldly, because no one can stop that, unless they distract us from the preached word to the political world. We need to know what's happened to us has really served to advance the gospel beyond our walls and usual reach.

We all have concerns in all this, let's keep Christ preeminent over all!

How are we to present ourselves outside these walls or online? v. 27 *'let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel...'*

This is not the time to start fighting against fellow Christians, it's the time to be striving together in this battle that's not against flesh and blood. You may feel like you can't stand all this much longer, or can't stand others for stands they take or don't take in response, but stand firm side by side (6 feet or so:)

Look at Phil 4:4 **Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.** ⁵ *Let your reasonableness [or 'gentleness'] be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; ⁶ do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.*

So thanksgiving isn't in liking your circumstances, it's in the Lord that we rejoice. If you lack peace in v. 7 in your heart and mind, go back to v. 4-7. Gratitude is in God, not good circumstances or government (Paul had it far worse for both). But in v. 11-12 Paul learned the secret of being content:

¹³ *I can do all things through him who strengthens me...* ¹⁹ *And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.*

Our glorious Christ's supremacy and sufficiency is the theme of Colossians.

We need to guard our heart and mind in Christ. v. 8 *'brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.'* Meditate on these, set your mind on these things, on what's worthy of praise to thank God for.

One last praise in v. 22: there's saints, believers in Caesar's household. It says there were Christians in the pagan Emperor's administration. Paul's confinement in Rome actually led to the gospel reaching the heart of it!

Even a Christian-killing government can't stop the church, and when Paul couldn't preach in synagogues he kept preaching, and so will we! When he's isolated from church, he keeps the gospel going forth in other ways, and so will we!

These Philippians knew the story of when Paul came to their town and the jailer in their town who put Paul in lockdown got saved by Paul's witness.

Acts 16 says persecutors '*attack[ed] them... and gave orders to beat them with rods. And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison... into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God...*'

That's the witness that makes the unsaved ask what must I do to be saved? The world can give complaints, but thanks, hope within us, that's different.

In Col 1 we get to hear Paul praying from another prison and praising God.

That's the context of gospel gratitude, #2. Concepts to be thankful for

Col 1:4 '*since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, ⁵ because of the hope laid up for you in heaven...*'

Right after Paul says he always gives thanks, he gives

3 concepts/categories to help:

hearing of other's faith in Christ, love for believers, heavenly hope

- a) **Faith in Christ**—this is what saves us and sustains us. Paul heard about the faith of these believers he'd never met. Paul was 1,000 miles away from this church in Colossae (a small town in area of modern Turkey). We miss face to face fellowship, Paul never had that with this church (2:1). But he had a fellowship of faith.

It's good for us to hear the Christian faith of those thousands of miles away, that's why we're putting missions spotlights out for you. I don't know about you but when I hear of the faith in Jesus of those on a Congo compound 2 hours a day, praying, studying Revelation, that moves my thanksgiving and it's also convicting.

- b) **Love for all Christians**—It's been said true vertical faith always leads to horizontal love. Paul heard of the love that this church had for all saints (NT term for the saved). Some Christians are harder to love than others, but these loved all fellow believers.

I'm so thankful to see people in our church seeking to show love to all the saints in our church, older, younger, and to each other.

Col 1:8 says Epaphras '*made known to us your love in the Spirit*' -it reminds us the fruit of the Spirit is love. And Rom 5 says the love of God is poured out in our hearts through His Spirit. I like that image of being poured out into us so like a vessel we pour it out to others. Filled with the Spirit, we overflow with His love, which leads to another text '*overflowing in many thanksgivings*'⁶

3rd concept or category to be thankful for is:

c) Heavenly hope

v. 5 mentions the hope laid up in heaven they heard in the gospel (think of the gospel words of Jesus about great reward in heaven, storing up treasures in heaven, seeking first kingdom of heaven). Eph 1 talks about our eyes being opened to see the hope of our calling and the riches of the glory of our inheritance in heavenly places. Biblical hope isn't wishful, it trusts what isn't yet visible.

The end of v. 27 says 'Christ in you' is '*the hope of glory.*' Col 3 says '*seek the things that are above, where Christ is...Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.*'

That's such an important theme and so next week Pastor Corey's going to take us deeper into the hope of heaven before we continue in Colossians.

Gospel Transformation Study Bible says 'the grace of the Father, the gospel of the Son, and the love of the Spirit [are given] so that they can experience and exemplify the faith, love, and hope of the Christ-centered life... Paul calls on the Colossians Christians to remember *who they are* and *what they have* because of,, the gospel itself that causes fruit to be borne in the lives of God's people (v. 6). We do not "graduate" from the gospel of grace; rather, we move more deeply into it over time, as we continue to see how profoundly sinful we are, yet how much more profoundly gracious God is.'⁷

Paul starts this letter with 'grace to you,' but he's thankful for grace *in* you. We need to see evidences of grace in others to thank God, encourage them.

Spurgeon:⁸ For the church that was at Colosse Paul gave hearty thanks to God for many most important blessings, especially for their faith, their love, and their hope. It would be a very useful exercise to our hearts if we would often give thanks to God for the gifts and graces which we discover in our Christian brethren. I am afraid we are more inclined to spy out their faults, and to suppose that we deplore them, than we are to discern the work of the Holy Spirit in them and from the bottom of our hearts to give thanks to God

That takes us from **thankful concepts** to
#3. The constant application for us

Col 1: ⁶ which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth, ⁷ just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf...

In the **1st century** starting with Pentecost **all the known world had seeds of the gospel being spread, and bearing fruit and increasing, and that continues.** The grammar emphasizes this is **the constant pattern in lives of Christians.** Jesus talked about the seed of the Word sown, praying for harvest laborers. Paul's reminding this small town to think much bigger, to missions, even as Paul's missionary journey converted **Epaphras** who was their church planter

He probably heard the gospel in Ephesus, Acts 19:11 says **all Asia heard** as Paul taught there 2 years. Epaphras is a mutually beloved fellow servant of Paul who in the book of Philemon became a prisoner, too (Philemon 25). It encourages me to know from our small town the gospel message is going out, as **our sermon audio page** had downloads from **quarantined listeners in China, Spain** (21 downloads), **France** (53), **Japan** (68), and **Arab countries!**

And let's be thankful for **in person missionaries** like v. 7, faithful ministers of Christ on behalf of our church around the globe. Beloved fellow servants make known God's grace, including to unreached peoples. We need to be thankful for them and their labors or love and also prayerful for more fruit as opportunities increase for the word of truth to be heard and understood.

Thank God for **Oliver and Karissa in Africa**, their electricity had been out for a month. They had option to come home on furlough but stayed in love for the people there. I thank God for creative ways the **Clark's** seek to reach African Muslims there. I thank God for **Seth in Asia** where police patrol and anyone after 2 PM who leaves their home will be physically beat. He loves all those people and wants them to hear the gospel translated to their tongue. Thank God for **Bob and Maria Hill**, 50 years of faithful service **in Greece**. I pray their Bible institute will help those in the works-based Greek Orthodox church to understand in truth God's grace alone, faith alone in Christ alone.

By our POM love offering, may the gospel bear fruit and increase in Athens
[If you give to that online, just put Greece offering in memo]

I thank God for Takis in Greece on a small island in a small town much like the small town of Colossae Paul's writing to. **Takis** faithfully ministers with those who speak the language of the NT, only a few saved on his island, but his radio ministry has increased his gospel reach and I know he's seen many Iranian refugees come to Christ as they pass through Greece in the mainland

I thank Jesus for **Joyce** also on the **island of Guam** and her faithfulness to go back to the field after losing her husband last year. She's a beloved servant making known love to the Micronesians. We're grateful for **Matt and Marla** in the **island of Taiwan** and how faithful they've been for so many years. In the whole world, as v. 6 says, the gospel is bearing fruit. In those islands, we pray Isa 42, that in Christ's teaching *'the islands will put their hope.'* ... *Let them give glory to the Lord and proclaim his praise in the islands.'* (NIV).

Isa 66 prophesies God's witnesses would be sent to Africa, *'and Greece, and to the distant islands that have not heard of my fame or seen my glory. They will proclaim my glory among the nations'* (v. 19). We should always thank God as we pray for those like Paul and Epaphras and our missionaries

I'm so thankful for **Didier in Africa** and seeing those growing churches they planted and how one of the men in my preaching program at TMS has been part of the ongoing training of those pastors. **Didier's video** is on **our YT page**, too, and God is growing their hope laid up in heaven in Revelation.

I think of **Grace and Carol**, single missionaries like Paul, who **served in the islands** for decades and are **now in South Africa** still teaching women and children the gospel as elderly evangelists. Or **Bob** whose **wife Sharon** went to be with Jesus not many months ago but he's faithfully ministering still.

I think of **Carole** and **Al and Linda** who can't travel to other nations but still help teaching to go forth to those nations. I think of my hero, **my beloved dad** at his age who went to the **Philippines** this year to teach with **Alan Luciano** who we support. I'm so grateful to hear enhanced quarantines aren't stopping God's message

On our behalf we also have **in the States: Brian and Aimee** helping young people honor their Creator, and **Tim Thompson** as a chaplain for our local law enforcement and more recently in Marshall Hospital despite his own health struggles. We're also thankful **for Frank Erb** and what he's doing in the state capitol building and how even there the gospel is bearing fruit! I bring that up to keep missions before us but also the context of Colossians.

Look at Col 4 for **application of 1st point: gratitude connected to the gospel.**
4:2: *Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with **thanksgiving**.* ³ *At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison—* ⁴ *that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.* ⁵ *Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time.* ⁶ *Let your speech always be gracious...* This isn't a time for grumbling speech about our leaders, it's a time for gracious speech, seasoned words, flavored with giving thanks. As I got a smog check this week, I tried to make good use of that conversation on what's going on to where's he at with church and to invite him to join us. Are you opening your mouth? **Pray for open doors**, make use of this time.

Will you join me trying to be more thankful and purposeful in our families?

I want to close with what **my mom** sent me:

'One thing I have appreciated about this time is that the crisis has stripped away a lot of unnecessary busy-ness that cluttered our lives. People are available to chat on the phone or to go on a socially-distanced walk together outdoors. We've met more of our neighbors in the past month than we had met in the previous 20 years!

'I'm also thankful we have ample time and no excuses not to practice good habits in the home, such as morning Bible reading/prayer, regular chores, and family meals. We are also finally getting around to a lot of home/garden projects...And the icing on the cake is that we also get to spend a lot of quality time together playing games, reading books, taking walks, doing puzzles, etc...it feels like a home again.

'I do look forward to being together with people in person again, but I don't look forward to going back to the hectic pace of our pre-pandemic lifestyle. I hope we will all continue to appreciate the simple pleasures of life that we are enjoying now. Finally, I'm thankful for the technology that allows us to stay connected with our family, friends, and church, and that also allows [my husband] to work from home, [kids] classes from home, and me to buy supplies for delivery or pick-up.'

We have much to be thankful for, amen? As we close, **application questions** will again be online, but **let me encourage** if you're with family, before you get up and get on with your day, continue that by **talking about what you've been thankful for** in all this, and **be prayerful for the gospel** here and abroad.

¹ <https://www.mtdemocrat.com/opinion/the-rural-life-abcs-of-gratitude-in-the-age-of-coronavirus/>

² Psalm 103:2 & 9:1 ESV, Ps 40:5 & 139:17-18 NASB.

³ Philippians 3-4.

⁴ 2 Timothy 2:9.

⁵ NIV.

⁶ 2 Corinthians 9:12.

⁷ *Gospel Transformation Bible*, Crossway, 1607.

⁸ Charles Spurgeon, "Spiritual Knowledge and Its Practical Results," *Metropolitan Tabernacle Sermons*, Volume 29, p. 529.