

Colossians 1:3-14. Steve Harden. 8/23/20.

It's good to see you this evening. If you would, turn in your Bibles to Colossians 1. We started our look at Colossians a week ago today and we're going to make a quick pass through it. I trust that it will bless us and that the Lord will bless us in our time together. I would like to read Colossians 1 to you, you might keep your Bibles open because we're going to be referring back time and time again to this passage. Colossians 1, beginning in verse 3:

“³We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, ⁴since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, ⁵because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, ⁶which 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, ⁷just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf ⁸and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

⁹And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; ¹¹being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; ¹²giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. ¹³He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” This is the word of God.

In our passage tonight, here in Colossians, we see that Paul says that he prays for the church at Colossae. Prayer was a huge part of Paul's ministry. From New Testament evidence, it seems like he prayed for a whole lot of people, and a whole lot of the churches he prayed for were places he had never been and where he didn't know anyone at that church. He prayed. He believed that prayer changes things. He did not see prayer as an empty or futile spiritual discipline but a means by which God advances His kingdom and cares for His people. Paul knew prayer changes things.

As I've looked at this text over this last week, it's challenged me to reexamine my prayer life. What do I believe to be true about prayer? Do I truly believe that prayer changes things? I mean, more than on an academic level, do I *really* believe that prayer changes things? Do I believe that God, the Creator of the universe, cares whether or I pray and indeed is pleased when I do pray? That it brings Him pleasure when I ask Him to move on our behalf, and on behalf of those I care about? Do I really believe this? Yes, I do. Although my actions sometimes don't show it, I truly believe this. I think though, that one of the things that hinders my prayer life is knowing what to pray. What is it that I pray for you or for those who I'm not involved with in day to day living? Far too often I feel like I pray very general prayers. “Lord, bless Mike.” And that's a good prayer, right? I want that for Mike. I want that, but I trust also that the Holy Spirit will somehow interpret that “God Bless Mike” to be what he needs at the proper time, but something about that is not very satisfying because it's too general. How do I know that God specifically answers the prayer that I prayed if I my prayer is very, very general like that? How can I praise Him and thank Him for answering my prayer?

Well, as I consider Paul and his relationship to this church at Colossae, I see that he didn't know very many people there and he certainly didn't know a lot of specifics around what is happening in their lives, but it doesn't stop him from praying very specifically, in this passage, for these people he's never met. So, where I go from that is if he can pray for people that he's never met this specifically, certainly I could pray the same things that he prays, for those who I already know. So, I really can pray specifically and trust that the Lord is going to hear my prayer and that I will see the fruit of those prayers in your lives and we can praise him together, does that make sense? I hope so. Just nod your heads like this, I can't see your faces. Okay.

So, I want to spend our time tonight looking at how Paul prays for these people. In verse 3-8 he says he thanks God for them and then in 9-14 he appeals to God for them. Okay, two different kinds of prayers, he thanks God and then he appeals to God for them. So, we can thank God for those whom we pray for.

Over the last several months I've come to believe that many of my own and our corporate mental and emotional struggles, those things that we endure, and we've endured a lot the last six months or so, are because we forget to be grateful for the blessings that we do have! When all this started and our staff started meeting over Zoom, I started our meetings by asking, "What are you grateful for?" And it's been an interesting dynamic, I hope y'all agree that, at first, when we started talking about it and thinking about it all we saw was a bunch of blank stares saying, 'um.' Because we were just starting into the pandemic and all the race stuff started happening and I mean, it was filling our minds and I won't speak for anyone else but for me it made me recognize that I was focusing so much on the things that were wrong or the things that were not going the way that I thought that they should go, that thankfulness was not on my mind and for a believer that shouldn't be.

Our Father is so pleased when we thank Him and express our gratefulness to Him. This morning I was reading the Psalms and over and over and over again it spoke about how He inhabits the praise of His people and He is glorified when we simply thank Him. Do we not all have lots of reasons to be grateful to our Father? Let me ask you, I'll get personal and kind of up in your business here, are your prayers saturated with thankfulness? If you were going to guess a percentage, and I don't want an answer, please don't, how much of your prayers are spent in thankfulness? For me, it's not enough, I'll just tell you. I tend to jump right on into the petition part, "Lord, I need this." But perhaps, the reason why I feel some of the things that I feel is because I'm not actively thanking Him.

In our text, He highlights three areas where he's thankful regarding the Colossians. First of all, here in the first part of verse 4, he says he thanks God for their faith in Jesus. One of the things that we can pray for each other is simply, 'Thank You for saving them! Thank you for rescuing them! Thank you that they are Christ followers!' I know my personal example is when I pray for my kids, "Lord thank you for saving them and rescuing them from their sins!" So, first of all we can thank God that He has saved us and saved our friends.

Right, secondly, Paul thanks God for their love for one another. Faith never exists alone. It just doesn't exist alone. If faith is present it will produce love for one another! Love for the saints is evidence that faith is in the heart of a person. I can look for evidence of love in you and thank God for that! And I see that over and over again. Bethany's accident was a little over a year ago if you remember and it was tragic. But I saw such great love being poured out from God's community on her and for her. I simply rejoiced. And so, if we are open and we have eyes to see, we can see the spirit of God moving amongst us by just watching people share their love for one another. So, Paul thanks God for the church at Colossae's love for one another. And

thirdly, He thanks God for the hope that is laid up for them in heaven. Laid up here means waiting for you, so there is something laid up for them in heaven, being stored and reserved for them in heaven. What is it? Well that is their inheritance! In 1 Peter 1:3-5 it says, “³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,” Now listen carefully, “⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.” That existence is being stored up for us and it’s waiting for us to get there! So, whatever the world throws at us, whatever it is, we can face it with hope and joy and courage because we have a place at the table that’s already set in heaven to come. So helpful when we experience pain and grief, as so many of us have here in recent days. There are many things to be grateful for, this is just a start, but Paul says I can be grateful for your faith, for your love, and for your hope. Does that sound familiar? Maybe 1 Corinthians 15. He’s thankful.

But not only does he thank God for them, but he prays for them. He says, ‘I make petitions on your behalf. I intercede for you.’ Let me highlight two ways. If Paul prays these things, certainly I can be praying for these things, right? Two things: be filled and be strengthened. He prays that the Colossians would be filled and be strengthened. Let’s dive in. In verses 9-10 he says, “may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,¹⁰ so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.” Let’s unpack that a little bit, that’s a lot of words there. He says I pray that you would be overwhelmed, that you would experience knowledge overflowing, so that you can understand what God has for you, so that you could be filled with the knowledge of His will.

Then he goes on and says, in spiritual wisdom, spiritual, that comes from the Holy Spirit, right? Wisdom that comes from the Holy Spirit. Wisdom here is a word that describes elemental, fundamental truths. Those things of most, highest importance, okay? The big picture truths like who God is and what He requires of us and who we are in light of who He is. That He’s sovereign and He’s good and He’s righteous and He’s merciful. Paul prays that you might have wisdom to understand these elemental, these fundamental truths of the faith and in wisdom and understanding, and I love this word because it means how you put them all together. You take the wisdom of these individual pieces, say God’s sovereignty and His mercy and His righteousness, and they’re not stand alone silos, but understanding here means that you take all of these and you’re able to put them all together, to put the pieces of the puzzle together, and understand then how to apply these rich truths to your life. And that’s a beautiful thing.

It’s been a long time, but I still remember taking semester tests. Now I won’t say that I enjoyed semester tests, but even back then I saw the value in them because I worked really hard at school. I didn’t get ahead but I seldom got behind. I really focused on exactly what I had to do today and then I focused really hard on exactly what I really had to do tomorrow and I worked through the semester that way. But it wasn’t until I got to the end of the semester and I had to study the whole that the pieces of the puzzle came together for me. I thought, ‘This is all tied together! This is why we did this and that,’ and so there was great value. Again, I won’t say I enjoyed them, but there was value there because I was able to stand back a little bit and look and see the bigger picture.

When Paul prays that they might understand, be filled with the knowledge of spiritual wisdom and understanding, he is saying, ‘I want you to see the big picture. I want you to be able to put all these pieces together and then apply it to your lives.’ I believe with all of my heart that

one of the greatest needs that we have as Jesus followers is to be able to put the pieces of the puzzle together, to ask ourselves in every situation, what is true? What is true?

That's what it means, I believe, when he says that he prays that they might walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him and bearing fruit in every good work! When you put those pieces together, you will bear fruit that is pleasing to Him. God-honoring, God-oriented obedience flows from wisdom and understanding. So we pray, we pray that the one we pray for might have spiritual wisdom, wisdom taught by the Holy Spirit, and understanding to put the pieces together, that they might understand how the faith plays out in day to day life and then in verse 10 it says, 'increasing in the knowledge of God,' and I love this picture, because the picture here of truth is growing, as a child grows in knowledge and understanding. As parents, we know that our children understand a lot of things, but we also know that as they grow up, they understand the same things in a deeper manner, the same truths, but they understand it more comprehensively and deeply.

Karl Bart was a theologian and philosopher of great renown and a student asked one day in class, he said, "Dr. Bart, what is the greatest truth that has ever crossed your mind?" And oh, they thought, this is a good one, you could almost see, I'm told, that they got on the edge of their chairs and they leaned forward waiting for this deep, profound, complicated, integrated theological truth, and it's said that he raised his gray head and he said, "The greatest truth that has ever crossed my mind: Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so." There's not a one of our children that does not know that to be true, but an army of theologians cannot plunge the depths of that one great truth. So when Paul prays that they might increase in the knowledge of God, he's saying, I know these truths, you know these truths, but I want you to take them deeper and deeper and deeper and become more mature as you know these fundamental, essential truths of the faith.

But not only does he say be filled, but he says be strengthened. Look at verse 11, he says, "being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy." So Paul prays for the Colossians, that they may be strengthened in proportion to God's might and God's ability, His strength, which is limitless, that they might be strengthened by God, Himself. Why is that? Because He knew they were facing difficulties and struggles and pain, and they would need endurance and they would need perseverance, but he didn't want them to just grit their teeth and bear it. This is where Christianity is different. That's not what the text says. What does it say? That they might have endurance and patience with what? With joy! That's weird! Patience and endurance in difficult times, with joy! That's supernatural. That comes from God. So how do they endure and have patience with joy?

Look at verse 12: "giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." So see here, he returns to this idea around inheritance. We can have hope because this world is not all there is. What we can see and feel and touch right now is not all there is. We have a home, a home where there is no pain, no grief, no tears, no injustice, no hate, and we have a place there. In enduring and in patience with joy we pray, 'may Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven,' knowing that the only place and only time when that prayer will truly be answered is when He returns again. We endure now, we endure whatever this world has to give us because our hope is not here, our hope is in our home.

I read about John Patton this week. I don't know if you've heard about John Patton, but he was a tremendous missionary back in the 1800s in the New Hebrides in the South Pacific and

he spent 50 years of his life working with cannibals. Now when he said, as a young man, that he was going to work with cannibals, there were elders in his church that tried to discourage him and said, "Don't go! You'll be eaten!" To these elders he replied, "Mr. Dixon, you are advanced in years now and your own prospect is soon to be laid in the grave, there to be eaten by worms. I confess to you that if I can but live and die serving and honoring the Lord Jesus it will make no difference to me if I am eaten by cannibals or by worms and in that great day my resurrection body will rise as fair as yours in the likeness of our risen Redeemer." Now I wish I could come up with things like that on the spur of the moment.

Why did he feel that kind of courage and grit with joy? It's because he knew that one day he would be with His Savior. He was emboldened to live for Jesus because His hope was beyond the grave. It gave him the courage to spend his life and to lay it down declaring the gospel of Jesus Christ to those who might well kill him and eat him. His biography says he was in constant danger, I mean, constant danger, daily danger, of being killed by these tribes he was with. This is what he wrote, "I assured them," talking of those who were threatening him, "I assured them that I was not afraid to die, for at death my Savior would take me to be with Himself in heaven and to be far happier than I had ever been on the earth. In Jesus I felt invulnerable and immortal so long as I was doing His work. I then lifted up my hands and eyes to the heavens and prayed aloud for Jesus either to protect me or take me home to glory as He saw to be for the best."

How do you persevere? How do you have courage in the midst of difficult days? You know you have an inheritance in heaven. Without the promise of inheritance, if this earth is all there is, you can't know that kind of courage with joy. Knowing you have an inheritance allows you to suffer with joy. Now, can I pray for my friend that they might know and take heart that there is hope? I can pray that. That they would know it's all true and get it at a gut level that their inheritance is in heaven and they can stand courageous. I can pray that.

Verse 13, we have this inheritance because we have been "delivered from the domain of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of his beloved Son." The word transferred here means deported. Back in Biblical days, like when Babylon overtook Judah, they rounded everybody up and carried them off to Babylon. They deported them from their homeland to Babylon for 70 years, right? That's what this text is talking about, this transfer from one kingdom or one place to another.

What Paul is saying is that we have an inheritance because Jesus, when He came to this earth, died to pay a ransom to redeem us and transfer us from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. He ransomed us. He redeemed us from the domain of darkness and put us in His own kingdom. We have that inheritance, my friends, but our redemption was not free. There was a price to be paid and He paid that price on Calvary. Because He redeemed me and because He has transferred me from this kingdom to His own kingdom, there are certain things to be true. Everything is changed. I am no longer under the bondage of the father of lies but I have been transferred into the kingdom of light and truth. I am no longer blinded to the beauty of the gospel of Jesus Christ by the king of this domain, but now I see, I am in the kingdom of light and I can see and I am free to live as a child of the King, a son or daughter of the King with freedom and liberty in light. Can I pray that for my friend? Of course I can. I can pray that they might have and know that identity that they are no longer here in the domain of darkness, but they've been rescued and are in the kingdom of light.

So, last week, when we introduced the letter to the Colossians, we saw that the theme is the supremacy and the sufficiency of Jesus. You'll see this throughout. It was written to expose the error of both the Judaizers and the Gnostics who felt like they had special knowledge that

everyone else didn't have, and if you really wanted to be spiritual you needed their special knowledge. Even from the outset of this letter, you see that Paul says, 'That's not true.' The knowledge is here for you, for everyone. It's here. You may be filled with the knowledge of God. You can know these truths. All of us! There is nothing secret here. Jesus came to reveal the will of God to us! It's not a secret. In knowing and understanding this knowledge of God, we can put the pieces together and then we can live accordingly. We need to ask ourselves again and again, what is true in light of what I know about God's sovereignty and His mercy and my position? And we can bring all this together in truth, in knowing and understanding these truths we can live a life that is fruitful and pleasing to our Savior. This is what Paul prayed for the Colossians. This is what he wanted so this is what he prayed for. It's what I pray for you. That you might be able to put the pieces together and that you can pray for those when you don't know what to pray for. Let's pray.

Father in heaven, You are so good to us. You reveal Your Son to us. Would you do that right now? Help us to put the pieces together. I don't know what to pray for everyone in this room. There are pains that I know nothing about. There is grief that I don't know about and even the ones that I do know about, I don't know how to pray, except the way Paul prayed. Would you fill them with spiritual wisdom and understanding? Would you fill each one of us so that we might bear fruit and grow in grace and walk in a manner pleasing to our King? I pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.