

Thankfulness

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[0:00] I've got to have it. And real thanks only comes when the needs that I have are totally met.! It's not like you say to someone, thanks a bunch, thanks for nothing.

You know, you could have helped me more, couldn't you? It's when someone meets your need totally. That's when you're really thankful, isn't it? Further, I think we're really only genuinely thankful for something.

When someone gives help to us, gives us aid, gives us what we need out of sheer grace, they give to us as a gift. We couldn't manipulate them into helping us.

We couldn't say, oh, I owe you one, buddy. We couldn't try and earn it. They've given to us. They've helped us at our moment of need when they didn't have to.

That, I think, is when we are thankful in life today. Of course, in part, this is quite a narrow view of thankfulness, isn't it? That actually, we're really only thankful because, if we're honest, in some ways, we're quite selfish and individualistic.

[1:05] We're thankful when my needs have been met, right? That's when we're thankful. So, in some ways, our thankfulness, or sometimes our lack of thankfulness, is down to us.

And sometimes, it's just our culture. It's the air we breathe. Everyone thinks in these sorts of ways. And so, it's no surprise in our culture that people should be surprised when we say that we are thankful for Christ and that we have all that we need in him.

See, this is the central message of Colossians. That when you have Christ, you need more of him, but you don't need anything else. As Christians, we don't need more religious experience to grow as Christians.

We don't need more traditions. We don't need extra rules given to us. We don't need extra festivals or conferences to attend.

We don't even need extra special spiritual knowledge. No, we have all we need in Christ. The central message is there in chapter 2 and verses 6 and 7.

[2:19] Here's what the Apostle Paul writes. So then, just as you receive Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

And it is in precisely that way, overflowing in thankfulness, that Paul starts his letter to the church in Colossae.

And what is so surprising about this Thanksgiving is that the church in Colossae is a church that Paul has never met. He has never met them.

He says nothing about ever planning to go and meet them. It is not one of his churches. He didn't plant the church in Colossae. He's had little involvement to do with it.

And only his friend Epaphras has been involved in Colossae. So why on earth is Paul thankful for this church above all? Why should he care enough to write to the church in Colossae and care enough to be thankful for them?

[3:24] Well, perhaps his introduction gives us a few clues. Look with me at verses 1 and 2. Do you notice how Paul introduced himself there?

He states himself with his authority. He is an apostle. He is a man sent by God on a mission. And in his mission, all that he writes is inspired by God.

It is intelligible, divine communication from God. So as Paul writes this letter, he widens the scope. He shows us the authority of all he's going to write. And he draws us into this message.

And did you notice how he described his recipients, the Colossians? The church in Colossae are in Christ at Colossae. But he adds two extra words that we don't often see in Paul.

He calls them faithful brothers, verse 2. It makes us think, why does he call them faithful brothers? I mean, he doesn't really know them.

[4:36] So how does he know that they're faithful? What does he really know about them anyway? And come to that, in what way are these Colossian Christians actually faithful?

You see, faith in the Bible is not blind faith versus reason, as our world would have it. But no, faith in the Bible is an instrument.

It is something that does something. It grasps onto something. Faith trusts. Faith grasps and holds onto something. And Paul is saying at the outset, this church is faithful.

They have got their grasp on something or someone, and they are holding on tightly. That is what the church in Colossae are doing. And so it raises for us what will be an important theme in the whole of the letter, which is, are the Colossians really secure in their faith in Christ?

Or are they listening to those people who might tell them that they need something more? So what is it that makes Paul so thankful for the Colossians? That's what we're going to be spending our time on this evening.

[5:36] Why is Paul thankful for the Colossians? What are his grounds for thankfulness? And we see this evening our first point, that Paul is thankful because Paul has heard of their faith and love.

Point number one, Paul has heard of their faith and love, verses three to five. Look with me again at those verses. Paul writes, Did you notice Paul's persistence in his prayers there?

He says, We always thank God the Father, our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you. He's persistently praying. He says, I've made a plan to pray, and every time I come to pray for you, I'm always overflowing with thankfulness.

Now, did you spot who he is addressing these prayers to? He addresses them to God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And the funny thing about fathers and sons is that to know someone as a father, you need to know a son.

And to know a son, you need to know that they have a father. Fathers reveal sons, and sons reveal fathers. And so Paul is flagging up for us early in the letter that there's going to be something very important in Colossians about the fact that Jesus is a son.

[7:04] And I hope at the end you'll go away wanting to read more of Colossians, and we'll go and find out what is so significant about that. But hold that thought. So Paul is praying a prayer of thanks, and he's thankful for the church in Colossae, because he's heard a report from Epaphras.

And he's heard that their faith really is in Christ. They really are trusting and holding on to Christ. And furthermore, they're demonstrating this in acts of love.

They love the whole church. They are serving and caring for one another. Now this is the ultimate rebuttal to those people who would say that these Christians need more.

Paul is giving thanks for what they've got. You don't give thanks for something if it's in some way deficient. Paul is thankful for this church. They've got everything they need.

And so often when Paul writes, his thanks leads him to praise and to worship. If he is thanking God for this, it's because he's thankful to God for it. He's not giving God half-hearted thanks and praise.

[8:07] He's absolute delighted for all they've got. They really are Christians. They've got the full package. They've got faith in Christ, and they love one another. They have received the gospel.

They have heard it. They have understood it. They've put it into practice. They don't need to add extra things to it. They don't need to make sure they go to that conference, otherwise they won't be Christians anymore.

None of that. No, he is thankful for them without reservation. And by implication, he says to us this evening, so should we.

We should be thankful too. If we know that our faith is in Christ, and we love our brothers and sisters in this church, then you really are a Christian. You've got the message, and you've got everything you need.

Oh, be thankful for it. Oh, be thankful. Now, I wonder whether you noticed all the connecting words here.

[9:12] He is thankful because he knows about their faith and love. I think probably verse 4 starts with the word because. It might be better if we read that as the word since.

So notice how the logic of it works. He says, we always pray. I always thank God for you when we pray for you. Since the implication. Since the time he heard the message.

So there are words of he's been praying ever since he's heard all about them. And then we get verse 5. Where he talks about the faith and love that spring from the hope held out in the gospel. And I think the idea here is that the faith and love these Christians have, it comes from their hope as Christians. But not only that is the case. Not only is that the case. But because Paul knows that they have faith and they have love.

He knows that he has good grounds for believing that they do have a hope stored up for them. I think verse 5 is about Paul saying, I know you've got the hope of heaven.

[10:16] I know you've got the hope of glory ahead of you. Elsewhere in Colossians, he says that he knows in chapter 1 verse 23. He knows that they're holding on to the hope held out in the gospel.

They've got that hope. In 1 verse 27, he knows that they're trusting in Christ who is for them the hope of glory. In other words, I think he's talking about hope here and saying, I know that there is a hope for you.

I know there's a hope for you. Not only does your life spring from the hope you've got, but I know that you're going to make it to eternity. You're on the road to eternity.

You see, as Paul casts his eyes at this one individual church that he knows nothing about, he's thankful for them. They really have got it. They really are Christians. And Paul says to us, when someone comes along to you and says, you need something more to be a Christian, he says, you should be so thankful.

You should prize so highly what you already have in Jesus that it just sounds absurd. I think it's a bit like this. Do you know those moments in films where the intrepid voyager is on a journey and there's that climax moment where they know what they've got to do.

[11:25] And everyone's cheering. Finally, they've got it. They know what they've got to do. Has anyone seen here the film Lion? This is maybe a terrible illustration. One per two people have seen Lion.

Three people have seen Lion. Lion is a film about a young Indian boy whose name is Midlion. And at the age of three, he gets separated from his parents, put on a train that takes him to the other side of India.

There he gets adopted by an Australian family from the streets. And the story is all about, can he find his way home? And I won't spoil it for you, but there's a moment in the film where he works out how he's going to get home.

And everyone is cheering. You are cheering because you know if he carries on, if he sticks to that, he is going to make it. He is going to find his mum who he hasn't seen for 25 years.

He's going to get home. And it's like Paul here is saying, we're at that bit here. You have faith in Christ and love for the brothers. And if you keep with him, you keep going to eternity.

[12:25] You have the hope of glory ahead of you. He is cheering. I thank God for you. Paul says you've reached the climax of knowing where life is going.

And you're following Christ and you keep with him. Now, you may be saying this evening, well, Ollie, that all sounds a bit internal. You're talking about faith and hope and love.

Surely Paul needs something a bit more tangible, doesn't he? He's thanking God for this church. Doesn't he need a bit more evidence? Well, our second point this evening is precisely about that. Our second point, which covers the rest of the passages, that Paul is thankful for the Colossians because they have heard the true gospel. They have heard the true gospel. And he knows that because it's bearing fruit in their lives.

Verses 5 and 6. Look with me at those verses, please. Halfway through verse 5. You have already heard about the hope held out in the word of truth, the gospel, that has come to you.

[13:34] 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.

See, Paul is thankful because he knows that the pin, if you like, has gone in the map. In Colossae, there is a faithful church. There is a real Christian church. But he says not only that, not only has the pin gone in to Colossae, but there are churches and there are pins going in everywhere. The message of Christianity, the gospel, has got wings. And it has taken off. And wherever the gospel goes, it bears fruit. People have faith in Christ and they love their brothers and sisters in Christ.

He says, what has happened in your church is exactly what happens every time the gospel comes to town. Now, what's amazing here is that this imagery draws from the wider Bible story. In fact, this imagery draws all the way back to the Garden of Eden. You remember what God said to Adam in the Garden? Be fruitful and multiply.

[14:48] What has Paul seen in this church? You are bearing fruit. God commanded mankind to know him, to represent him, to represent his character in ever-increasing number and in ever-increasing depth.

And in Colossae, Paul here is saying, What humanity should have always been is happening in your church, in your town. Colossae is humanity rebooted.

You are seeing here a new creation in your church building. The beginning of the new creation is happening here. The church is growing and bearing fruit.

And your faith and your love and your hope are proclaiming that. In the Old Testament, the people of God failed to be that humanity that bore fruit.

In the Old Testament, in Isaiah, the people were so bad that the prophet Isaiah preached to the people and said, Be ever hearing and never understand.

[16:05] Notice the note at the end of verse 6. He says, You're bearing fruit, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth.

In other words, everything the Old Testament people of God were supposed to do to hear and understand that they never could do, that Isaiah showed they never did. It's happening where you are. Wow.

Paul looks at the church and he says, That pin has gone in and it is going in. Those pins are going in all over the place. The gospel is spreading. It is bearing fruit. And it's happening just with you like it does everywhere.

Now you may be a little cynical at this point and say, Well, Ollie, you know, we're a church in Brighton. And we know how secular it is here. And we know how hardened people are to the gospel.

Ollie, this doesn't make any sense to us. But don't you see, that is precisely the point Paul wants to make. His point is, don't have that tunnel vision. Get your heads up.

[17:10] Get your eyes looking around. All over the world, he says. All over the world, in China, in India, people are becoming Christians. The gospel is spreading. It is bearing fruit and growing.

The new creation has started. It is happening. It's not just you. The gospel is spreading further than Facebook can reach.

You know, those filtered photographs of the perfect life. The gospel reaches far deeper than that. And far wider than the digital world can even get.

Paul says, be thankful that you have heard the gospel. You've really heard it. Well, Paul's thankful that they heard the true gospel. Because it's bearing fruit. Kind of sub-point number one to my second point, if you like.

But he's also thankful they've heard the true gospel. Because he knows they've heard it from a faithful teacher. Verses seven and eight. They've heard it from a faithful teacher. Verses seven and eight. You learned it from Epaphras.

[18:12] Our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf. And who also told us of your love in the Spirit. The Colossians hadn't heard the gospel from Paul.

But they had learned it from someone who here receives a ringing endorsement from him. Paul describes Epaphras as a fellow servant. He's equal to the great apostle Paul. He's on a level playing field with Paul. It's a pretty high place to give Epaphras. But not only that, he is a faithful brother. He is holding on to Christ.

He says, you've received the gospel from a faithful man. Later in Colossians, chapter four and verse 12. The apostle Paul will say more about Epaphras. He says, let me read it. Here, four verse 12. Epaphras, who is one of you, and a servant of Christ Jesus sends greeting. He is always wrestling in prayer for you. That you may stand firm in all the will of God.

[19:16] Mature and fully assured. You see that? Epaphras, who is one of you. They receive the gospel from a faithful brother. But someone who is a Colossian. He's one of them.

And a faithful brother. And Paul says, be grateful you've received the gospel from a faithful source. Now, it strikes me we're a little bit inconsistent with the sources that we go to for help in life.

So let's say you're going to buy a car. And it's an important purchase for you. You tend to go and want to buy the Ford car from the Ford garage, if you can. That's deemed to be safer.

Or the expensive laptop from a good seller who will give it to you with a warranty. An expensive purchase requires that you get that item from a good source. But, get an illness.

A funny problem with your elbow. What is the first thing you do? Google. My elbow hurts. Twice a month, on a Thursday, I get a weird pain in my elbow.

[20:18] Google. In it goes into Google. And it comes up with all these chat rooms. And I look through and it says, you need drug X, Y and Z. And I go to the doctor and I said, I need drug X, Y, Z. Now, who on the internet told you that?

What source did that information come from? Did it come from a reputable source? No, it didn't. And your doctor's probably going to tell you, I'm not giving you that drug. You don't need it. Right? Paul says, it matters where you get information from in life.

And it is critically important that you get the gospel, the good news, from a faithful source. You know, you chat to friends who aren't Christians and they go through a hard time in life.

And you come out with these little, people come out with these little proverbs, don't they? They've had a hard time in life and they say, oh, well, you win some and you lose some. You say, really?

Who told you that? Why is that a good thing to base your life on? Why are you resting your, how you get through this trouble on this little proverb? Where did that come from? Who told you that?

[21:23] Paul says, you have heard the gospel from a faithful source. I trust that you rejoice that you hear the gospel from faithful ministers here at Calvary Church.

I trust that that is something that you greatly thank God for. So there's a pin that's gone into the map. They really are Christians in Colossae.

But not only that, that pin has gone in just as the pins are going in everywhere. And not only that, the pin has been put in place by a faithful minister, by Epaphras, a trusted man.

So this prayer of thanks blows out of the water any idea that we should need anything more in the Christian life.

There is so much to give thanks for here, isn't there? For this church. We don't need any more than the Lord Jesus has already given us. We are part of a community that is the new creation.

[22:25] And we heard about that glorious good news from a faithful source. But as we started this evening, we also spoke of how selfish we often are with our thanks.

How we often only think about ourselves. And we noticed how Paul is thankful for a church that's got nothing to do with him. You see, we tend only to be thankful for things in life because we think the world revolves around us.

That what happens to me most of all matters. That's what's most important. But what if the world didn't revolve around you? What if the world revolved around someone else?

Would you be thankful then only for things that affected you? This prayer continues. Paul prays for the Colossians.

He prays for them to grow in Christ, to know more of him. And as he gets to the end of his prayer, verse 12, he says, I'm praying that you'd be giving thanks to the Father who has qualified you to

share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of life.

[23:37] For he has rescued us. He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have the redemption, the forgiveness of sin.

You see, as Paul prays this prayer of thanks, the world does not revolve around him anymore. He has been moved from one domain to another. Verse 13, he has been rescued from the dominion of darkness and brought into the kingdom of the Son.

The world does not revolve around Paul anymore. So he doesn't give thanks for things that only affect him. He gives thanks for those things that promote the kingdom of the Son.

He has been rescued from the domain of darkness. He has been rescued for the world revolving around him, from thinking only of himself. Paul is thankful because he knows he's part of a new creation and he follows the Lord Jesus, the firstborn, the ruler, the heir of all things.

And he longs and praises God and thanks God every time that kingdom grows. Because it's not something he's distant from. It's something he's part of.

[24:56] Paul is thankful for the church in Colossae because of their faith and love. Because they've heard the true gospel, just as he did.

Brothers and sisters, will you give thanks that your faith is in Christ, that you love one another, that you heard the gospel from a reliable source, that you are part of a rebooted humanity, and you have been moved from the domain of darkness and brought into the kingdom of the Son.

Let's pray, shall we? Let's pray.