

At the Heart of Thanksgiving

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[0 : 00] If you would open up your Bibles to Colossians chapter 1 verses 3 through 8, it's on page 1168 in your pew Bible, which is in your pew.

Now, if you're new to a Christian service like this, what I'm about to do is I'm going to preach from the Bible. And so I'm going to read this passage, and then I'm going to proclaim it and explain it and apply it to our lives.

So that's what I'll be doing for the next several minutes. Let me read Colossians 1, 3 through 8.

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, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of this you have heard before in the word of truth, the gospel which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing, as it always does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God and truth, just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow servant.

He is a faithful minister of God on your behalf, and has made known to us your love in the Spirit. May God bless the hearing of His word.

[1 : 29] Now if I were to ask you this question, if you were to describe what I just read, in terms of darkness or brightness, how would you describe it?

Is verses 3 through 8 dark? Or is it bright? And I'm guessing you all would say something like, it's bright. It's bright because it's full of thanksgiving to God.

And the Colossian church, the group of Christians 20 centuries ago who first received this, they would have been encouraged by this. They would have been assured by this.

But could you imagine if the Apostle Paul started off with a little something more dark? Like this. Saints in Colossae, it's Paul. You all are such a headache.

If what Epaphras told us is true, you all can't seem to recognize a basic false teaching that is distracting you from the centrality of Christ. Seriously? You all need to get your act together because I'm starting to wonder if you all are worth my time and suffering.

[2 : 46] Lovesies. T-A-P. The Apostle Paul. Now could you imagine if you were in the room when this letter starting that way was first read?

If you were in that church, I'm guessing you'd be like, oh man. Discouraged. Devastated perhaps. Doubtful even. This is not a dark start to Colossians.

This is a bright start of thanksgiving to God. And these verses are extraordinary because of the thankfulness of them, because of the brightness.

Throughout the week, you're inundated with messages that are not bright with thanksgiving, but are dark with hopelessness. And what makes this even more extraordinary is when you realize where Paul is writing from.

He's writing from a prison in Rome. Just feet from him is a Praetorian guard. He's waiting on whether he is going to die or not.

[3 : 50] And in the depths of that darkness of circumstance comes this bright thanksgiving.

How can somebody under these circumstances be so thankful? Have you heard the hymn, Prone to Wander?

Prone to grumble. Lord, I feel it. Prone to grumble against the God I love.

Brothers and sisters, what's at the heart of thanksgiving? What's at the heart of Christian thanksgiving? Because I don't know about you, but I need it. Do you need it?

Yes and amen. We all need it. And in this passage, what is going to become clear is at the heart of the Apostle Paul's thanksgiving in brightness is a Christ centrality that makes him others focused.

[5 : 06] Christ. And we're going to see that played out as he gives us three reasons for his thanksgiving. Reason number one is going to be this.

God's proofs of purchase. Reason number two is God's global work. And the third reason for this thankfulness is a particular faithful servant of Jesus.

What's at the center of all is a Christ-centered others orientation that makes this apostle pray this way.

And I find it super compelling. At the center of it all is Christ. Christ. So let's get into this. The reason one for Paul's thanksgiving.

Why he would say, we always thank God when we pray for you. That's extraordinary. Why?

Reason number one is in verses four through five. God's proofs of purchase.

[6 : 05] And I'm using proofs because there's more than one proof. The first proof of purchase is in verse four. We always thank God when we pray for you since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus.

Faith, of course, is an active trust. Last month I was talking about faith as an exercise of like stepping out onto ice. And that ice is the object of your faith.

What you're putting your faith in. When it comes to Christianity, we are putting our faith, not in ourselves. We're not putting our faith in our faith.

We're putting our faith in Christ Jesus. And so what Paul is saying here is he's giving thanks to God whenever he prays for these Colossians because of their faith in Christ Jesus.

That he's totally God, totally man. That Jesus has hung on a cross for six hours on a particular Friday to bear all of God's wrath for all who would ever believe.

[7 : 18] Salvation is in no one else. You know, the result of this kind of saving faith, you read it in Colossians chapter one, verses 13 and 14.

For those who believe, he's delivered 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.

You get flipped by God's grace. So the first thing that fuels Paul's thanksgiving, the first proof here, is their actual faith in Christ.

Now, I find it interesting that the Apostle Paul gives thanks to God for the Colossians' faith in Christ. Now, don't you find that interesting? The second proof is found in verse four, and of the love that you have for all the saints.

The love that Paul is talking about is a distinct love among Christians.

[8 : 27] It is the hallmark virtue of all Christians. It's what we're to be known most for, our love for one another. It's the sticky love.

Not sticky gross, sticky good. That Jesus commands us to in John 13. Let me read you this. This is the new commandment that he gives us.

A new commandment I give to you that you love one another just as I have loved you. You also are to love one another. By this, all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.

A sacrificial love. A love that goes beyond stereotypes. A love that goes beyond gender. A love that goes beyond race. A love that goes beyond economic background.

What baggage you got. It's I love you the way that Christ loves me, and that is a furious love. And the Colossians were loving each other that way.

[9 : 42] All the saints. Now I find it interesting that Paul is actually thanking God for the way that these Colossians are loving one another.

Don't you? The third proof is in verse 5. Because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. What is this hope that the Apostle Paul is writing about from his prison cell?

Look at chapter 3, verses 1 and 2. We don't need to speculate. We just look in the context. If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above.

Huh. Hope. You know, up in heaven. Where Christ is. Seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on the things that are above, not on the things that are on earth.

The hope that Paul is talking about that's stored up for these Colossians is none other than the risen and reigning Jesus Christ. Are you following this?

[10 : 48] Faith in Christ. Love like Christ. Hope in Christ. The hope that Jesus is not just risen, but He's reigning.

All things have been put under His feet. And He's bringing His reign to bear all across the world today. He is our hope.

There's something interesting in verses 4 and 5. There's an interesting relationship between the Colossians' love for all the saints and their hope that is laid up for them in heaven.

Look at the first word of verse 5. It's the word because. Do you know what the Apostle Paul is saying? Do you know what the Apostle Paul is saying? That this church loves all the saints because of this hope laid up for them in heaven.

Because Jesus is risen and reigning, they love each other furiously. It's interesting though, that Paul is thanking God for their hope.

[12:08] He's not thanking the Colossians. He's not thanking Colossians, thank you so much for being so full of faith towards Jesus. Colossians, thank you so much for your love for one another.

Thank you so much for the hope laid up for you in heaven. Do you know why Paul is thanking God for these things that he sees, he's heard of in the Colossians?

Because it's all God's grace. This is all God's grace in the Colossian church. Their faith in Christ is a result of God's grace in their life.

Their love for one another is a result of God's grace in their life. Their hope laid up for them in heaven is God's grace to them. Nothing they earned in their three proofs of purchase.

Do you know what a proof of purchase is? Let me give you an example. I walk into Piggly Wiggly. I walk three miles to the dairy department because they always put in the back of the room.

[13:11] I grab a gallon of milk. I walk up to the checkout aisle. The checkout person checks me out. And then they put an orange sticker on the milk gallon with a smiley, piggly, wiggly face.

Do you know what I'm talking about? Do you know what that is? It's a proof of purchase. So when I'm leaving the building and someone stops me as a potential thief, I hold up my milk jug and say, proof of purchase!

I've never done that. I'm being a little dramatic. But what Paul is saying here is this.

Your love for one another, your faith in Christ, your hope in Jesus risen and reigning, proofs of purchase. You've been bought by the blood of Jesus.

That's what he's saying. That's what he's thankful for. And there's a beauty to it, isn't there? They've been flipped by God's grace. You know, when the Colossians heard this read to them for the first time, you know what the effect of them would be?

[14:34] All glory to God. Thank you, God, for what you're doing in our midst. It's Godward. It's Christ-centered. It's others-oriented.

Now, the question that I want to ask for us right now before we move on to the second reason for this Thanksgiving is ask this question, so what?

What difference does this make 20 centuries later? Well, here's the first difference.

Does anybody have a lagging prayer life? This will jumpstart your prayer life. When you start praying Christ-centered, God-thanking prayers that are focused on others, you know what I've been doing for the last, several hours, last few days, I've been thanking God.

We were down outside Chicago for my dad's birthday yesterday, and I've been thanking God for the faith of my father, for the love my dad has shown the saints, for the hope he has that's in heaven.

[15:55] Thank you, God, for your work of grace and Steve Salvati. Man, that jumpstarts your prayer life. Christ-centered, God-thanking, others-oriented.

The second thing that I just want to point out, this, there's a kingdom priority going on here.

I find it really interesting what Paul chooses to focus on in his thanksgiving in verses 4 and 5. He could have said this, I give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, whenever I pray for you, for all of the speaking in tongues you're doing, for all the prophecies being given, for all the healings that have been being made.

I thank God for all the really personal and meaningful worship experiences you've been having on a Sunday morning. He doesn't do that.

He's not denying that. But he's prioritizing something. Faith. Love. Hope.

[17:11] This is the holy triad. We see it showing up in 1 Corinthians 13, 13. The greatest of which is love. Because love never ends.

I find that very instructive in terms of what we must be prioritizing, what we must be valuing, what we're looking for when we're looking on our brothers and sisters and we're looking to spy God's grace at work.

We're looking for faith in Christ. We're looking for love for the saints. We're looking for hope in the risen and reigning and soon to be returning Jesus. God's grace at us. It's instructive.

It's helpful. Now I don't know about you but I want to be like that. I want to pray like that. I want to prioritize like that.

I want to be Christ-centered others oriented. Do you? Reason one, God's proofs of purchase.

Reason two, God's global work.

[18:16] work. In verse five, we read this, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of this, it's a reference to the hope laid up for them in heaven, of this hope laid up for you in heaven, you heard before in the word of truth the gospel.

That word gospel, it's a word that many of us hear often but back in antiquity when that word is being used more generally, it was being used to talk about the announcement of any good thing. The good news of a birth. The good news of a military victory. The good news of a job promotion. The gospel. Oh yeah, I got gospel news.

You know, my niece has been born. The Christian gospel is good news announcing who Jesus is and what he's done.

It's a gospel unlike any other gospel. There's no good news like it because God became a man, he lived a perfect life, died on the cross for sinners, was raised from the dead, he's risen and reigning at the right hand of God on high and he's one day closer to his return and it's all good news.

[19:51] The gospel puts Jesus at the center of everything. The gospel of Jesus Christ. And did you notice that little phrase, the word of truth?

You heard about the risen and reigning Christ from the word of truth, the gospel. That phrase, the word of truth and the gospel are being used synonymously. The word of truth is the gospel, the gospel is the word of truth, but the word of truth has a little different nuance to it.

It's like this. Think about the word of truth, that phrase, as this. God's claim on reality. This is the way things are.

The word of truth. God's saying, this is what is true. And what he's saying is true is that Jesus Christ is the center of everything.

Christ central. You know, if everything was a solar system, Jesus Christ is the son of that solar system.

[21:10] Everything orbits Jesus. We're going to see in a couple weeks, he's the creator of all and the sustainer of all. He is the savior of all. All things orbit him.

Which means this, when someone believes in the gospel and they are delivered from the domain of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of the beloved son, they are being put in right orbit.

They are being brought into reality. The way things truly are. Christ central. So what we see going on here in verse five is the apostle Paul starts talking about this gospel gospel.

Now look at it in verse six. The gospel which has come to you. The which is a reference to the gospel. The gospel has come to you, Colossians. As indeed in the whole world, it, the gospel, is bearing fruit and increasing.

As it, the gospel, also does among you since the day you heard it, the gospel, and understood the grace of God and truth. Another reference to the gospel. Just as you learned it, the gospel, verse seven, from Epaphras, our beloved fellow servant.

[22:24] The gospel is all over the place in five, six, and seven. The gospel of Jesus Christ. Did you notice the global scope going on here?

As indeed the whole world. God, through the gospel of Jesus Christ, is seeking to do something throughout all of creation, all of fallen creation, all the earth, the whole world, all people, all time, every place.

It's a big plan for the fullness of time. It's a global work. And did you notice the filling effect of the gospel? Not only is it global in its scope, it's looking to fill the world.

Which has come to you indeed in the whole world. It is bearing fruit and increasing as it also does among you. Whole world, bearing fruit, increasing, filling the world.

I'm indebted to a theologian named G.K. Beal who helped me see over the last about month or so that this is an allusion to Genesis chapter 128.

[23:47] Maybe you're familiar with it. Do you remember Adam and Eve? God says to them, be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth.

Remember that? Do you know what's going on here? The apostle Paul is talking about the spread of the gospel as a new creation work.

A Jesus centering that bears fruit and multiplies all around the world. He has gone from being localized in Colossi to now talking, going panorama and talking about the whole world.

A global work of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ resulting in bearing fruit and multiplying and worshippers being made. The singing of God's praises throughout the earth.

You can see why he's thankful about that. Being Christ centered and others oriented. He's so thankful at what God is doing globally.

[25 : 00] Not just in Colossi, globally through the good news of Jesus Christ. God's praises to the good world. So, how do we apply this to our lives today?

Anybody familiar with C.S. Lewis? Any familiar with the Narnia series? The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe? There are two characters that I love. Mr. and Mrs.

Beaver. Man, he's snotty. Well, Mr. and Mrs. Beaver, I think it was from them first that you start hearing about something.

It's spoken in kind of hushed terms. And then you start hearing different characters say it. Do you know Aslan's on the move?

Aslan's on the move. Do you hear the rumors? Aslan's on the move in Narnia. Something's happening. My cousin's neighbor said so.

[26 : 11] Something's up. And C.S. Lewis who wrote the Narnia series and Aslan in order to point people to Jesus, what he's saying is Jesus is on the move.

What the Apostle Paul is saying here in verses 5, 6, and 7 is that Jesus is on the move in the first century world. And he's on the move in the 21st century world.

In our world. In our day. Jesus is alive. He's reigning. All things are under his feet. He's spreading his kingdom today. He's on the move in our church.

People are being saved. People are being sanctified. They are growing in their faith in Christ. In their love for one another. In their hope in the risen and reigning Jesus. Other churches in Kenosha are proclaiming Jesus and making disciples.

I've got a lunch appointment with a brother in just a couple weeks. He's part of the Evangelical Free Church of America. Our family of churches. And there's a work underway in Union Grove to plant a church.

[27 : 26] The gospel's bearing fruit and multiplying. Jesus is on the move. Kenosha Christian Academy is a church plant in its second year.

And it's seeking to make and sustain a gospel witness in our city. Jesus is on the move. The gospel's bearing fruit and multiplying.

John and Terry Tipman. You saw John up here with me just moments ago. He opened a service. He'll close the service. He and Terry are part of a ministry called Family Life. It's a ministry of crew. And they do a lot of planning for what's called a weekend to remember. It's a marriage conference. It's held throughout the nation, multiple places, multiple times. And we constantly get reports. Constantly get reports. It's actually a gospel ministry in disguise. Do you know how many people have been saved and brought to Jesus who got flipped by the grace of God at these marriage conferences?

[28 : 33] Jesus is on the move. The gospel's bearing fruit and multiplying. Paul Bandy, Kenya, mission partner. He's pastoring a church and he's ministering to pastors to proclaim Christ all throughout Kenya and Nairobi and into the bush.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is bearing fruit and multiplying today. Saji Lukos, he preached here just weeks ago with reaching Indians Ministries International in India, in Nepal.

They are planting churches and an extraordinary rate. Bearing fruit, multiplying in all the world. We have two dear friends, Jiwon and Caitlin Rye.

They were former members here at Christ the King. He's located in Nepal and he has this ministry to pastors in the villages at the base of Mount Everest. It's remarkable.

He's going to Hong Kong in just a couple weeks to preach. The gospel is bearing fruit and multiplying around the world. Today, Jesus is on the move.

[29 : 44] Our dear brother Eric Tully, one of the elders, is going back to Liberia this March to equip Liberian pastors at the Evangelical Seminary of West Africa.

Jesus is on the move. The gospel of Jesus Christ is bearing fruit and multiplying around the world. And you know what, gang? This is just what we know about.

What else is God doing? You're hearing rumors. Aslan's on the move. You can see why this becomes a reason in and of itself for Paul to give thanks.

Do you want your prayer life juiced? Start giving thanks to God for what he is doing around the world. Thank you, God, for Saji. Thank you so much for Paul.

Thank you for the Tipmans. God, would you prepare Eric? God, let your glory shine forth in the face of Jesus. Doesn't that do your heart good?

[30 : 56] It would have done the Colossians heart really good to hear what God is doing globally. The third reason is God's faithful servant.

The Apostle Paul gives one more reason in this passage for thanksgiving and it has to do with a guy named Epaphras. Just as you learned it, the gospel from Epaphras, our beloved fellow servant.

He's a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf and has made known to us your love in the spirit.

The gospel that came to Colossi didn't come through the Apostle Paul.

It came with Epaphras. We don't know the background. We don't know how he became a Christian.

We don't know how he got linked up with the Apostle Paul.

All we know is that at some point Epaphras was born again, God's grace flipped him, and he started proclaiming Christ. And he's like, I got to go back to my hometown and tell everybody there.

[31 : 56] So he goes back to Colossi. He starts proclaiming Christ. People start believing in Christ. They form a church. There are a number of descriptions of Epaphras that Paul makes.

And there's no question that Paul is commending Epaphras to this church. He's going to come back in chapter 4, verse 12, and commend him some more. But he's commending him in a spirit of thankfulness to God.

Paul's thankful for Epaphras' ministry to the Colossian church. Of all the different descriptions, I just want to point out one.

It's the word faithful. He's a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf. Faithful. Faithfulness is reliability.

Faithfulness is trustworthiness of dependability. It is a confidence that you have in someone that they're going to get it done. And it's a faithfulness as a minister of Christ.

[33 : 10] They're going to be faithful to serving Jesus even if they're having their fingernails pulled out. going to be faithful to Jesus.

Faithfulness is a highly valued kingdom character trait. In fact, Jesus spoke of it. Do you remember in Matthew 25 the parable of the talents?

Jesus talks about this story of a master who's going on a long journey. He gives different sums of money to three servants. He comes back after a long time. He comes to one of the servants the first one.

He gave five talents which was a load of money. And that servant said, yeah, I doubled it for you.

And the master says to him, well done, good and faithful servant.

You were faithful in a little. Now I'm going to give you much. Enter the joy of your master. Second servant, he just gave two talents. He doubled it.

[34 : 09] The master says to him, well done, good and faithful servant. You've been faithful with a little. I'm going to entrust you with much. Welcome. Come on into the joy of your master.

That third servant, he squandered it, sat on it, was sheepish and shameful and when the master holds him to account, he reprimands him and casts him out.

Faithfulness is a kingdom value. Faithfulness to Jesus. We see it in Colossians chapter 1 verse 27.

To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. It's faithfulness to him. He says in 28, him, Jesus we proclaim warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

For this I toil faithfully struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me. Faithfulness to Christ. Paul is thanking God for this brother's faithfulness not just to Jesus but to the church.

[35 : 27] This morning I sent a text out to Zach and Josiah from 2 Corinthians chapter 4 verses 5, 6, and 7 gets at this faithfulness.

For what we proclaim is not ourselves but Jesus Christ as Lord with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God who said let light shine out of darkness has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

A new gospel creation. But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. Faithfulness.

Do you know why kingdom faithfulness is highly valued? Because God is faithful. Fully dependable. Always true to his promises.

Always true to his character. Have you guys heard of Crossway Community Church? It's about 8 miles due west. Crossway planted our church about 10 years ago and the senior pastor there is a man named Mike Bullmore.

[36 : 43] I served with Mike for 10 years as an associate pastor of youth ministry over there for a long time. Today is Mike's last day serving as the senior pastor of Crossway Community Church.

A couple weeks ago there was a gathering at Crossway where we were expressing our thanks to God for this man's faithfulness.

He's not perfect. He'd be the first to admit but faithful. Faithfully proclaiming Christ. Faithfully walking personally with Christ.

It's good to be thankful to God for faithful brothers and sisters. Here's how this applies to us. We value faithfulness to Christ in those who minister.

We value faithfulness to God. Faithfulness to his word. Faithfulness to our master in King Jesus. So this spring we're going to have a nomination process for elders and deacons.

[37 : 58] Do you know what we should be looking for? Faithfulness. If we get down the line and we need to hire more staff people do you know what we're looking for?

Faithfulness. Faithfulness. reliable. Trustworthy. Dependable. Confidence in representing Jesus in all things.

When you see God's grace at work like that you're thankful to God for it. Okay. Three reasons for Paul's thankfulness to God. God's proofs of purchase. God's global work.

God's faithful servant. And do you know what they all have in common? A Christ centrality. Think of the proofs.

Faith in Christ. Christ like love. Hope in Christ. Think of the global work. Spreading the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Think of the faithful servant Epaphras.

[38 : 58] He was a faithful minister of Christ. At the heart of Paul's thankfulness is Christ. Christ.

So when Christ is central to who you are not only will you grow in your faith not only will you grow in your love for all the saints not only will you grow in your knowledge and delight in the risen and reigning Jesus our hope not only will you grow in participating in God's global work not only will you grow in your own faithfulness to serving Jesus yourself you're also going to grow in thanking God for what he's doing in our midst because of Christ.

Brothers and sisters do you want to grow in thankfulness? Grow in Christ centeredness and be thankful to God.

Let's pray together. God in heaven you are all glorious we are so grateful for what you are doing God we would ask that you would pour out your spirit more and more upon us your church that Christ would be exalted more and more that Christ would be spotlighted and magnified that more and more people will see Jesus lifted and say he is my everything God would you do a work in the city in the city of Kenosha causing the gospel of Jesus Christ to be fruitful and multiply would you do a work in our state and in our country and around the world in which the gospel of Jesus Christ bears more and more fruit and there is the multiplying of witnesses globally of your glory all for the sake of Jesus name amen and

Center the and here all we come here now and that our Well and I have I married and have and them