

The transforming gospel of Christ

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[0 : 00] Colossians chapter 1. 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 growing, as it also does among you since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth, just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow servant.

He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf and has made known to us your love in the Spirit. And 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, 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.

May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, 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, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Good morning, everyone. Do keep that page open, page 1183, and you'll also find, as usual, an outline of the sermon at the back of the service sheet, so do use that for taking notes, if that would be helpful.

[1 : 59] Shall I lead us in prayer as we begin? Colossians begins. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God.

Father, we thank you that what we're looking at this morning isn't simply the words of men, but that it has the authority of the Lord Jesus. And we pray, therefore, that we would, as we've just been singing, meet the Lord Jesus in his word and approach it with reverence and awe.

Amen. Well, according to a recent survey, almost two-thirds of Britons are on some form of diet most of the time.

While apparently the American weight loss industry is worth \$70 billion. They're staggering figures. But the quest for physical perfection is such that people will, of course, resort to all kinds of weird and wacky calorie plans, diets, and exercise regimes, desperate to find that quick fix that will provide them with the perfect figure that I'm displaying for you today.

Don't know what you're laughing at. Whether it's dieting, anti-aging creams, or hair loss treatments, people are readily taken in by products that offer an easy solution to their physical flaws.

[3 : 26] But, of course, it's not just in the physical realm, but also the spiritual realm where we can be taken in or led astray by those offering a quick fix. I guess all of us here who are Christian believers are on some level dissatisfied with our Christian lives.

The battle with sin, which includes many failures along the way. The inconsistency of our emotions so that one day we feel great enthusiasm about the Christian life and the next day spiritually flat. And the fact that as Christians in this world we don't yet experience the intimacy with Christ that will one day be ours means we can be tempted to think that we need something else in the Christian life.

The quest for spiritual perfection is such that we can easily be attracted by all kinds of weird and wacky ideas or ministries that promise us greater power, greater victory, or closer encounters with God.

Perhaps it's a church down the road that, yes, teaches the Bible, but also claims to hear from God in a variety of other ways. Or the Roman Catholic priest offering tangible assurance of forgiveness through the rituals he performs after confession.

[4 : 41] Or the book we read that promises us triumph over habitual sin through some form of spiritual deliverance from evil. And when we come across such things, the question we might ask is, do I need more?

Is there something else, something extra, that's required to make progress in the Christian life or to be a truly spiritual Christian? Perhaps the kind of ministry we have here at Grace Church focused on the gospel about Jesus is sufficient to become a Christian and to start off in the Christian life. But maybe we're missing a trick if that's all we offer. And some additional experience, encounter, or higher spiritual plane needs to be attained if we're to reach maturity or conquer sin or enjoy all that's on offer for the Christian believer in this world.

What are we to make of such questions? Do I need more? Well, Paul's lesson to the Colossians, which we'll be studying over the next few weeks, is addressed to Christians who seem to have been asking precisely these kinds of questions.

People slightly differ over what false teaching, if any, was seeping into the church of Colossae. But it seems likely there were those in the Colossian church telling the young Christians there the kind of Christianity offered by the Apostle Paul, the message that you heard from his mate Epaphras when you first became Christians.

[6 : 08] Yes, it's all well and good, but it's only part of the story. There's more that you need if you're to grow as a Christian and reach spiritual maturity, perhaps some kind of angelic worship, or a deliverance ministry to overcome demonic powers, or receiving visions, or the observance of Jewish rituals and festivals, or ascetic practices, all of which get a mention in the letter.

If the false teaching that Paul condemns in Galatians was that we need more faith in Jesus to be saved, the error Paul responds to in Colossians is that we need more than faith in Jesus to keep going and reach maturity in the Christian life.

And as we've seen, while the particular form of this kind of teaching may be different in every generation, by and large we're probably unlikely to think that we need to get circumcised or to participate in angelic worship, the desire for something more in the Christian life is very contemporary and will be a temptation for us all.

But Paul would warn us against it. Just flick on to chapter 2 and verses 6 and 7, which are, I think, a good summary of the whole letter.

Chapter 2 and verses 6 and 7. Paul tells the Colossians there, verse 6, Therefore, in view of what he's written so far in the letter about both the sufficiency of Jesus and the sufficiency of his own ministry about Jesus, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

[7 : 56] Paul assures the Colossians that the way in in the Christian life is also the way on. That to move on from the gospel they first heard to something extra is actually to move away from the gospel.

Rather, they're to continue in the Christian life by sticking to the same Jesus they received and in the same faith they were taught.

Nothing more is needed for revelation, knowing what God is like, redemption, being saved from sin, or reaching spiritual maturity, because Jesus is sufficient.

So I think a good summary of the letter, although I think we may want to sharpen this in a couple of weeks' time, could be, stick with Jesus because Jesus is all you need.

That's Colossians in a nutshell. Stick with Jesus because Jesus is all you need. Well, that's a little introduction to the letter. And this morning, we're going to be looking at the first 14 verses.

[9 : 00] At a first glance, they look like two prayers. Paul telling the Colossian Christians what he's thanking God for them and what he's asking God for them.

But as is almost always the case with Paul's prayers, they actually introduce the key themes of the letter. And we find that right at the beginning, Paul is praying for the Colossians what he wants them to understand from his letter.

In other words, his prayers at the start of his letters give us the application of how he wants his readers to respond to what follows. And we're going to look at these prayers together this morning under two headings.

Here's the first. A true gospel. A true gospel. Seems the Colossians were perhaps wondering if the gospel they'd been taught wasn't the genuine article or at least was only half the story.

But Paul wants them to know otherwise. And so thanks God that not only had they received the true gospel, but that the truth of that gospel had also been demonstrated in the way it had changed them and others.

[10:08] He's already assured the Colossians in verse two that they were saints. That is, they had been made holy in God's sight and faithful brothers in Christ and that they'd received God's grace and peace.

And then have a look down with me at verse three. 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 the truth, the gospel, which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and growing, as it also does among you since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth.

Just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf and has made known to us your love in the spirit.

Verses four and five, Paul thanks God that the Colossians display the three great hallmarks of authentic Christianity in the New Testament. Faith in Christ Jesus, love for all the saints, and a heavenly hope from which that faith and love spring.

[11:22] They really were genuine Christians. But notice why it was that they had that hope from which a genuine faith had sprung. Verse five, 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.

Do you see the point? Paul's making? The gospel they heard wasn't insufficient or only part of the story, but it had given them a certain future hope and led to their genuine Christian faith and love. And notice how he calls the gospel the word of truth. The gospel they were perhaps beginning to doubt was the true gospel. He makes the same point at the end of verse six if you look on, when he reminds the Colossians of the day you heard the gospel and understood the grace of God in truth. You see, Paul is at pains to emphasize that what they'd heard really was the true gospel message, which is why I think he emphasizes in verse seven that Epaphras, who it seems had first told the Colossians the gospel and who we learn in chapter four was himself from Colossae, is a faithful minister of Christ.

The Colossians weren't to think that Epaphras had only given them grade one gospel truth and they needed some new teaching or spiritual guru to reach grade eight in Christian maturity.

[12:55] So Paul wanted the Colossians to know that the gospel they'd heard from Epaphras was the true gospel. I guess it's a bit like if one of you JAM members here sought a shortcut in revising for your A-levels through scouring the internet and you find all kinds of novel ideas online that disagree with what your teacher has been saying to you, ideas that seem exciting and intriguing expressed by people expressed by people with her fake degrees and her thousands of Instagram followers and you begin to wonder if your teacher really knows what she's talking about.

Perhaps she's only taught you half the syllabus or doesn't understand the subject fully herself. But then the head of department who wrote the definitive textbook on the subject comes along and assures you that what your teacher has taught you is true.

It's the same as what he teaches and can be trusted. And not only that but he also points to the fruit of this teaching. The straight A's and A stars that the class had got the year before from this same material and how well they're all now doing at university.

Because have a look at the further evidence Paul gives the Colossians in verse 6 for the truth of the gospel Epaphras had passed on to them. He writes at the end of verse 5 the word of truth the gospel which has come to you as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and growing as it also does among you since the day you heard it.

From the first day the Colossians had heard and responded to the gospel it had borne fruit among them and was also doing so all over the world. They could be confident this gospel was the true gospel because it was changing lives everywhere it was being taught.

[14:55] Now I love a glass of coke but just imagine that you came along and tried to sell me an imitation that you told me was better and that you tried to get me to doubt that a Coca-Cola tastes good enough and argue that it needs an extra ingredient to improve it.

Well it'd be absurd wouldn't it? Because not only could I testify myself of how nice coke tastes but I could also point to the fact that it's a global product which is popular all over the world.

No extra ingredients are needed to make it successful. And so it was for the Colossians with Paul's gospel. They had tasted the product and it had changed their lives and it was doing the same all over the world.

It was the real deal. And of course we can have the same confidence today when it comes to that same gospel message Epaphras taught and which we find in the Bible.

Maybe some of us grew up in churches like Grace Church and have never known anything else and we sometimes worry that perhaps we're missing something that the true gospel requires an extra ingredient that's more exciting or tangible or that other Christians at different kinds of churches experience something more than us.

[16:15] Or perhaps those of us at JAM go to school Christian unions where others talk about having experiences we haven't had and we feel like we're missing out. Or when you head up to university you wonder if you should try out a different type of church to explore what else might be on offer.

Well if the gospel we have received is the same gospel we find in the New Testament if it's the gospel the Colossians had learned from Epaphras in which Paul taught for reasons that we'll see over the next couple of weeks then we can be confident it's the true gospel.

After all it's a gospel which has and continues to bear fruit all over the world in places like Naples and Zambia and Ireland where we have mission partners and which has saved us.

So we don't need to look elsewhere but to continue in and be rooted and built up in that same gospel. It's a true gospel. So Paul begins his letter by thanking God for the Colossians genuine faith in the true gospel.

But although he wanted to assure them that there wasn't something more they needed beyond what they'd already received that didn't mean he wanted them to stand still in the Christian life or that they shouldn't expect or strive for more when it came to making progress in that gospel they'd heard.

[17:40] And that leads us on to Paul's second prayer for the Colossians in these verses and our second heading a totally transformed life a totally transformed life.

Let me read from verse 9 And 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 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 may you be strengthened with all power according to his glorious might for all endurance and patience with joy 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 in whom we have redemption the forgiveness of sins now as many of us will know one of the tools that often helps us work out the emphasis of a bible book is the repeated words or phrases that appear and in Colossians there's a family of words that crops up all the way through the book and which is absolutely fundamental to Paul's message in it and that family includes words like all every or everyone or everything fullness or filled whole always and the word that's translated mature which is literally complete so has the same idea in other words words which express comprehensiveness and totality remember what we said earlier was the message of the letter stick with Jesus because Jesus is all you need and that's why these words appear again and again to make the point that Jesus is all we need he offers everything necessary for us to live the Christian life in its entirety now we've already seen some of these words appear in the opening verses so for example in verse 4 we learn that the gospel the Colossians heard was sufficient to give them a love for all the saints and in verse 6 it was sufficient to bear fruit in the whole world we'll see a lot more of them next week too but here in verses 9 to 14 we see that the gospel is sufficient to produce a totally transformed life in every way let me read from verse 9 again but this time

I'll emphasize these words that speak of comprehensiveness have a look down verse 9 and 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 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 may you be strengthened with all power according to his glorious might for all endurance and patience with joy giving thanks to the Father notice how Paul picks up on the language of verses 3 to 8 here in verses 3 to 8 we learn that the gospel was bearing fruit and growing among the Colossians and that they'd understood God's grace in truth but Paul wants this to continue and so

verse 9 he prays that they'd have all spiritual wisdom and understanding and verse 10 that they'd be bearing fruit in every good work and increasing or growing it's the same word as in verse 6 in the knowledge of God

Paul did want more for the Colossians when it came to their Christian maturity he wanted them to keep growing in both knowledge and godliness but the key thing to grasp is that that growth would happen through the very same message about Jesus that had borne fruit in them so far I don't know about you but I long for the kinds of things that Paul lists in verses 10 to 12 to be true of my Christian life I long to walk in a manner worthy of Jesus to be fully pleasing to him to bear fruit in every good work to increase in my knowledge of God to be strengthened with all power to have all endurance and patience and joy and thankfulness but how will those things come what will lead me to live a totally transformed life what will be sufficient for me to live out the Christian life completely well notice where all those things verses 10 to 12 is one long sentence in the Greek there's no full stop after verse 10 so notice where all those things come from verse 9 have a look they come from being filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding now I don't want to do too much jumping ahead in the letter but remember

Paul's opening prayers often contain his application of everything that follows so just look on for now to a couple of verses which show us where we find this all spiritual wisdom and understanding which is sufficient for pleasing Jesus in every way and that is to chapter 2 and verses 2 and 3 chapter 2 verses 2 and 3 so in verse 2 Paul again expresses his desire if you look down that the Colossians would reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery but where will that understanding and knowledge be found well look how Paul goes on the knowledge of God's mystery which is Christ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge so Jesus is the source of all spiritual wisdom and understanding he's all the Colossians needed to live the Christian life in its totality the true gospel they'd heard was sufficient to produce a totally transformed life imagine that

[23 : 51] I plant a cherry tree in my garden and I water it and after a while it begins to blossom well what do I then need to do to make sure that that tree actually produces cherries that it bears fruit well I don't need to do something different do I I don't need to start spraying something else on it or to try to attach cherries that I've bought from the supermarket to the branches of the tree to make it look fruitful or to take it out and put it in a different soil no the tree simply needs to stay rooted in the same soil that first brought it to life and be watered in the same way it was at the beginning and so it is with the Christian life we need to stay rooted in the same Jesus who first brought a spiritual life and be watered by the same word about Jesus we first heard so I wonder if we can work out the application of verses 9 to 14 for us of course they're a great model for what we ought to be praying for one another but remember that the nearest equivalent to us in the prayer is not Paul the prayer but the Colossians the subject of the prayer and his prayer for them his application of the letter is that they and therefore we would be filled with the knowledge of God's will that we might live a totally transformed life and as we've seen that will happen as we get to know

Jesus better the one through whom all wisdom and understanding comes so if we want to please Jesus this week and bear fruit for him we don't need something extra but to get to know Jesus better if we want to increase in our knowledge of God and be strengthened with all power we don't need some new spiritual technique or experience but to get to know Jesus better through the same message the Colossians had heard from Paul if we're conscious we're struggling to endure to keep going in an area of the Christian life or we lack patience or joy or thankfulness at the moment we don't need to try harder or seek something more but simply to be filled with the knowledge of God's will that we of course find in the Bible there are no shortcuts in the Christian life we make progress by coming back again and again to the Jesus of the Bible but wonderfully that's all we need because he is sufficient for every good work and to give us all power and endurance but why is Jesus sufficient?

why can I be confident he's enough? well we'll see the answer to that more fully next week but just notice for now before we close what Jesus has done for us in that little summary of the gospel that we get in verses 12 to 14 we're told there that the father has qualified us 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 in whom we have redemption the forgiveness of sins the Colossians were tempted to think they needed more than Jesus but later in the letter they're actually told that the extra things they pursued would disqualify them whereas here God had qualified them already

to share in his inheritance and far from his needing to seek deliverance from evil through super spiritual means notice that through Jesus God has already delivered us from the domain of darkness and into the kingdom of his son through his redeeming work at the cross which we'll be remembering shortly when we share the Lord's Supper can I say that if any of us here are not followers of Jesus at the moment this is wonderfully liberating because Jesus is all we need for forgiveness through his death at the cross he's already done everything necessary for us to be forgiven nothing else is needed the gospel of Jesus that had come to the Colossians was the true gospel and it was and is sufficient to bring about a totally transformed life shall I lead us in prayer let's pray we thank you our heavenly father that the word of truth the gospel has come to us and we thank you that this gospel message is a message which has not only borne fruit in our own lives but continues to do so all over the world and we thank you that it is a message which is sufficient to enable us to live out every part of the Christian life and so we pray that you would help us to be those who have confidence in that gospel message and who continue to walk in the Lord Jesus in the same way that we received him and not to move on to anything else and we ask it for his name's sake

Amen Lord Jesus God bless you and thank you to keep you and h kits Loose and Tyler Matthew Problem at the church for most part of the healing and the kingdom in the Hebrew of the Holy Jesus and Philip and Rhonda and Mercy all through holding up the children and forever and forever