

## Fourth Sunday after Pentecost – June 17, 2018

### Colossians 1:3-8

3 We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, 4 because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints— 5 the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel 6 that has come to you. 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. 7 You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, 8 and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.

When you go out shopping for a car, whether new or used, you're hoping not to end up with a lemon—a car that has all sorts of problems and is in constant need of fixing and will need to be replaced sooner rather than later. Instead you want a car that will be reliable and that will last, getting you where you need to go for a long time to come. At the same time you know that even when you find such a car your car shopping days are not done. One car is not enough to last for a lifetime. While there are stories out there of cars that have been on the road for over a million miles, unless you're a master mechanic with unlimited time and funds, every car will break down at some point and need to be replaced. In addition there are always newer models that come along with the improved features that may make driving around an old car just not worth it anymore. In a way that was the problem that was facing the Colossian congregation. They were being told that what they were believing was not enough, they would need to have it replaced with something better. And so Paul wrote this letter to explain that there was nothing wrong with what they were believing. The Gospel message about Jesus was more than enough, it was more than sufficient for their lives. And so this morning/evening as we look at Paul's words we will see that **The Gospel is Enough**, both for the situation in Colosse and for our lives today.

This letter to the Colossians is a bit unique among the New Testament letters that Paul addressed to congregations. Of those nine letters only two (this and Romans) were written to congregations that Paul had neither started nor visited on his missionary journeys at that point. In chapter 2 he mentioned not having met many of them personally. But there were still some connections. He knew their pastor, Epaphras. He knew Philemon, to whom he would also be writing a letter about his runaway slave, Onesimus. Colosse was in the province of Asia, about 125 miles east of Ephesus, the province capital. Paul had spent three years in Ephesus preaching and teaching people from all over the province. And so that was probably how this congregation had started. Epaphras or others may have heard Paul and brought the gospel message back to Colosse.

Paul was in prison in Rome as he wrote this letter. Epaphras had come to visit Paul, bringing some concerns about a false teaching that his congregation was facing. We don't know the exact nature of this "Colossian heresy" because Paul does not dignify it enough to describe it in detail. But from piecing things together in the letter, it would seem that it was a mixture of other false teachings that were facing the early church, from the Judaizers who wanted to bring back the Jewish laws to the Gnostics who wanted to claim a secret higher knowledge to the basic work righteousness that affects every man-made religion. The Colossians were being told that the gospel message they had heard was a good start, but not enough. This false teaching

acknowledged Jesus Christ, but said he was not enough, you had to do your part as well. And so Paul wrote this letter to assure these Colossian Christians that Christ and the gospel was all that they needed for their faith and lives.

Verse 3: “We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you.” As Paul often did in his letters he gave thanks for what he was hearing about this congregation and reminded them that he was praying for them. But already here he was starting his battle against this false teaching, addressing “God, the Father our Lord Jesus Christ.” Jesus was more than just a great man or a great teacher. He was all that they needed because he was also the Son of God.

Verse 4: “because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints.” Paul was giving thanks because he had heard of their faith, a faith which still believed in Christ Jesus and nothing else. He had heard of their love for all the saints—all their fellow Christians. Such a love is only possible when the gospel is at work, as verse 5 went on to mention.

Verse 5: “the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel that has come to you.” The gospel message was true and was all that they needed. It had brought them to faith and created that love in their hearts. The gospel had given them the sure hope of what was waiting for them in heaven. This hope was not because of anything that they had done, but because of what Jesus had done for them.

Verse 6 continues: “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.” The gospel message that they had received was the same one that others around the world had received as many people were coming to faith. Nothing had changed. The gospel was still all about coming to know and understand God’s grace—that as sinners they were forgiven only because of God’s undeserved love.

Verses 7 & 8: “You learned it from Epaphras, 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.” No matter what new voices the Colossians were hearing, what they learned from Epaphras was still true. He was a faithful minister because his message was no different than Paul’s. On his visit to Rome, Paul had been able to discuss all of this with Epaphras firsthand.

Paul would go on throughout the four chapters of this letter to emphasize the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ. The gospel message about what he had done for them was all that they needed for their lives, despite what others might try to teach.

The Colossian heresy, like most ancient attacks on the gospel, is still alive and well in our world today. The ideas of free forgiveness by grace and a Savior dying on a cross seem foolish to the wisdom of this world. The removal of any human participation or merit does not sit well with human nature. Even in so called Christian churches the gospel and Christ are downplayed or not mentioned at all as the focus turns to self-improvement or making this world a better place.

But we’re not here just to talk about the world out there; we also need to evaluate ourselves and do a self-check—is the gospel enough for us in our lives? So we check our faith—do we believe in Christ Jesus, trusting in him for everything in our lives, or do we believe in ourselves and our own ability to get things done and manage our lives? So we check our love—do we show love for both our fellow saints as well as our neighbors, or are we too focused on ourselves to look out much for the needs of others? So we check our hope—is our hope centered

on what is waiting for us in heaven or do focus our hopes and dreams on the things of this world? In all of these areas, the gospel becomes not enough when our focus turns inward and away from Jesus.

When we see that our focus is shifting, we go back to the gospel, to knowing and understanding God's grace in all its truth. Without God's grace we would be facing an eternity in hell for all of our sins, all the times that our focus in life turns to ourselves. But because of that grace all of our sins are forgiven—that is the gospel message that we need, the gospel message that is enough. Through that gospel we have faith in Christ Jesus and what he has done for us. Through that gospel we show love for all the saints because we know that we are at peace with God and so now we can use our lives to serve him. Through that gospel we have the sure hope of the eternal life waiting for us in heaven and so with that as our end goal all the worries of this life fade away. The gospel is more than enough for our lives because our Lord Christ Jesus is all that we need.

Paul mentioned in verse 6 that all over the world the gospel was bearing fruit and growing and that is still true today. The work of the gospel is booming in places like Africa and Asia where it had been at work centuries before and now has returned to bring people faith, love and hope. Like Paul we thank God when we hear of these successes and pray that the gospel continue to spread. And we also continue to share the gospel in our own lives. Whether it's by talking about faith and what we believe or showing the love of Christ to those around us or sharing our hope and the confidence we have, we want others to know that the gospel is enough, that Jesus is all they need. It's not about our efforts to change people's hearts, it's still the gospel that is at work. May the Holy Spirit continue to use us to plant those seeds so that the gospel can bear fruit and grow. Amen.