

The Gospel
Colossians 1:5-8
Pastor John Miller

Go back to Colossians 1:1 because we've been away for a couple of weeks. It starts with, "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timotheus our brother,"—so Paul is the human instrument or author of this epistle, and he's writing—"To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ,"—and we talked a lot about what it means to be 'in Christ,'—"which are at Colosse: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Notice verse 3, "We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, 4 Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints, 5 For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven,"—and now we come to our text tonight—"whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel,"—there's our theme—"Which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth: 7 As ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellowservant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ; 8 Who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit."

I want to draw your attention to verse 3 where Paul the Apostle says, "We give thanks," he uses the plural "we" because he is evidently including Timothy, from verse 1, who was with Paul there in prison at this time as he writes to the believers in Colossae, "We give thanks." Paul was a man who had an attitude of gratitude. I wish I had just a little bit of Paul in me that I could thank the Lord and rejoice in the Lord and be grateful to the Lord. I want you to remember where Paul was when he wrote these words—in jail, in prison. Technically, again, as I remind you, he was under house arrest, so he was in a hired house but was in chains. Here's Paul with chains on his wrists, probably making noise as he wrote, and he's writing, "We give thanks." What was he thankful for for the Colossians? Verse 4, " . . . your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints, 5 For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven," so faith, hope, and love.

This is a reminder to them that they were true believers. He's writing to the Colossians who were under attack by false teachers who were telling them that Christ was not enough, that if they really wanted to be spiritual, they needed a little Jewish legalism, a little eastern mysticism, and a little Greek philosophy, and if you threw that into their Christianity, they'd be really spiritual. Paul wanted them to know that your faith, your hope, and your love are evidence of a genuinely regenerated heart, and that they're true believers. This is the Christian life: It involves faith in Christ Jesus, it involves love to others reaching out to the saints, and a hope which looks up, "...laid up for you in heaven." Paul was doing this because as I said to remind the Colossians that they were true believers, so Paul wants to reassure them that they heard the true gospel. The true gospel is the source of their heavenly hope.

Robert G. Gromacki, in his excellent commentary on Colossians, says, "The gospel message is that which joins the hope in the heart with the hope of heaven." I love that. The gospel is that

which joins the hope in my heart with the hope of heaven. When we read about hope for the believer, it's not that you're crossing your fingers and holding onto your rabbit's foot, hoping that there's life after death or that I'll go to heaven when I die, but it means a steady, settled assurance. It's a confident assurance. It's not hope, "I think it may be, if I'm lucky, it will happen," it's a steadfast assurance. As a believer, we have the hope of heaven.

All this took place, verse 5, " . . . whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel," and that's the theme I want to focus on tonight is that they heard the truth of the gospel, the good news. We should never outgrow the gospel of Jesus Christ. You say, "Well, I want to get into the deeper things of God." I don't know how you can get any deeper than the gospel of Jesus Christ, and we should be a gospel-preaching church, we should be gospel-sharing, preaching believers.

Let me give you the five facts from this section of Scripture, verses 5-8, about the gospel. Fact one, the gospel is true. Look with me at verse 5. He says, " . . . ye heard before in the word of the truth,"—there it is—"of the gospel." Paul mentions this truth twice. Peek down at the next verse, verse 6, he mentions, " . . . the grace of God in truth," so he mentions, " . . . the word of the truth of the gospel," verse 5; then in verse 6, he mentions, " . . . the grace of God in truth." The gospel is good news, not good views. Write that down. The gospel is good news, not good views. It's not a philosophy. It's not man's ideas. It's not something man concocts or creates, it's based on historic fact of the incarnation, the crucifixion, the resurrection, the ascension, exaltation of Jesus Christ. Christianity is based on historic fact. It's not a philosophy. It's not a religion created by man, it's an actual historically rooted and grounded in fact gospel, good news truth about Jesus Christ. The gospel is good news, not good views.

The good news about what? Well, I believe that the good news centers in the Person and work of Jesus Christ. If you want to be effective in sharing the gospel, you need to understand who Jesus is. Let me give you just a little quick synopsis. Jesus is the second Person of the triune Godhead. The Bible teaches there's one God. Christianity is monotheistic. But it also teaches that that one God is made up of three Persons, not three gods, that's tritheism, one God, three Persons. In essence, we have a Father who's God, a Son who's God, and a Spirit who is God. Now, I understand if you're saying, "I don't quite comprehend that." Welcome to the club. God transcends our understanding. We believe it because it's revealed clearly in Scriptures, but we don't fathom or comprehend it because God is above us and beyond us.

Remember when we did the baptism of Jesus on Sunday morning (and I'm excited to get back to Luke this Sunday morning), and Jesus was baptized, God the Son. The heavens opened and the Holy Spirit descended in the form of a dove, God the Holy Spirit, and then the Father spoke from Heaven and said, "This is My Beloved Son in whom My soul delights and whom I'm well pleased." That's the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

I don't believe in what is called modalism, that there's three Persons but they are taking on different modes—the Father became the Son, and the Son became the Spirit. That's a heretical false teaching that is popularized by apostolic Christians today and Oneness

Pentecostals. They're called Oneness Pentecostals because they believe that there's no doctrine of the trinity—that the Father becomes the Son, the Son becomes the Spirit. That's heretical and not orthodox Christianity. When we're preaching Christ, we're preaching God the Son. Amen? It's so important to know that.

Now, that second Person of Christ came from heaven to earth. He was conceived in the womb of a virgin named Mary. This is what's called the incarnation. It means that God took on flesh, not just flesh but humanity—truly man, truly God. No one ever before was God-Man, no one ever after will ever be God-Man. There's only one God-Man, Jesus Christ. This is why He's so unique. This is why He's the Savior, so we speak of His incarnation. He lived a sinless life. He voluntarily died on the cross, a substitutionary death, for the sins of the world. His death was the substitution for sin. He was buried, and we have it just in a few weeks when we celebrate Easter, what happened? He rose from the dead. Amen? What a glorious truth that is! Christ rose from the dead and for a period of forty days He appeared and disappeared, commissioned His disciples to preach the gospel, then He ascended back up into heaven and He is seated at the right hand of God the Father, which is the place of authority, and reigns supreme on His throne, and whoever believes in Him will never perish but will have everlasting life. That's the gospel. What I just shared, I think every Christian should say in your own way, but you ought to be able to memorize and package that and be able to communicate that to others.

Let me give you, kind of somewhat rapid fire, some verses that summarize the gospel, John 3:16. You're all familiar with that, right? "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son,"—by the way, that 'begotten' means unique. It doesn't mean He was generated, it means He's unique—His only unique Son—"that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Years ago I was sitting out on the patio at—yes, I must confess—In-N-Out. I'm enjoying a hamburger, I had a drink, and I'm sitting there. The table not far from me, a whole bunch of businessmen in their suits are having a lunch break. One of them lifted up his cup and said, "John 3:16. I wonder what that means." I was the only one sitting next to them, no one else on the patio, and I'm thinking, This is too good to be true! I didn't climb up on the table, but I did say, "I know what it says," and I just launched right into quoting John 3:16. They looked at me like, "Who is this guy? Does he think he's a preacher or something?" Then, I gave them a little exposition on that verse and talked about the gospel and shared with them. What a great opportunity. If you're looking for an opportunity to witness, just walk around with your cup at In-N-Out saying, "Do you know what this verse says?" and share the good news of Christ.

The whole gospel is found in one verse. All you need to do is memorize John 3:16. Put it to memory. Hide it in your heart, and tell other people. Quote that Scripture. There's a reason why it's so popular. Some call it the whole Bible in one verse—God sent His Son, He died on the cross, believe on Him will never perish but have everlasting life. That's good news.

Here's another verse to memorize, 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 where Paul says, "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel,"—there it is—"which I preached unto you, which also ye have

received, and wherein ye stand,”—so you receive it, you’re standing in it—“By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. 3 For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received,”—this is 1 Corinthians 15:3-4—“how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; 4 And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.” That’s the simple gospel of Jesus Christ that Paul preached. “ . . . Christ died for,”—notice that, in the place of, substitutionarily—“our sins.” He didn’t just come to give us a good example and give us teachings and tell us to love one another and lay your life down in service for others, He actually came to literally die as a sacrificial lamb on the cross for the sins of the world.

Why does Paul, in mentioning the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15, mention the fact that He was buried? Because he wants us to know He literally, physically died. When I preach the Easter message, I’m always emphasizing He actually died. He didn’t swoon, didn’t pass out, didn’t just faint and then revive, He physically died. He was dead for three days, and then He rose again from the dead. You don’t bury people who are alive, right? At least we shouldn’t do that. You bury dead people, so “ . . . he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.” It’s the good news about Jesus.

When you share the gospel, share Christ. It’s not just, “Hey, you wanna be happy?” “Hey, you wanna feel better about yourself?” Sometimes even the health and wealth prosperity gospel, “Hey, you wanna be healed? You wanna be wealthy? You wanna be healthy?” They’re not preaching that Christ died for our sins. To be truly saved you must see yourself a sinner coming to a Savior and that you can’t save yourself.

All of this to say this, it’s true factual history. If you could’ve been at Calvary when Jesus was dying and reached up and touched His cross, you would’ve had slivers in your hand. If you could get close enough to the cross, you would’ve seen the blood, seen the suffering, seen the agony, that Jesus physically died for you in your place—He died my death; He paid my debt. He actually died. It’s physical truth. On that first Resurrection Day, the tomb was literally empty with grave clothes lying in the shape of a body, and Christ physically rose.

I’ve had the blessed privilege of preaching the gospel now for 51 years. That’s a lot of Easter Sundays, and I never get tired of it. Every time I preach it, it thrills my heart. I think, Up from the grave he arose; with a mighty triumph o’er his foes; he arose a victor from the dark domain, and he lives forever, with his saints to reign. Hallelujah! Christ arose! Amen? All through the book of Acts when they were preaching, it centered on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and that’s what preaching the gospel should do today—center on Christ and the historical fact of His death and resurrection.

Do you know that God cannot lie? Years ago I heard Billy Graham preach a sermon called, “The Things That God Cannot Do.” That’s a catchy title, right? We think God can do anything. God is omnipotent. God can do anything. But there are things that God cannot do, and one of them is He cannot lie. He actually cannot lie because God is holy, and God will never violate His own nature or character. He won’t do anything contrary to who He is. His Word is true.

The gospel is the truth about God, and it's not a human invention, it's a divine revelation.

Here's fact two, the gospel is for everyone. Look at verse 6. Paul says, "Which is come unto you, as it is in all the world," I love that. It came to you, and it came to all the world. Now, what does Paul mean by, ". . . all the world"? Some believe that he's speaking hyperbole and that he doesn't literally mean the entire world. That's possible, the Bible uses figures of speech. But it's also true that he's speaking just of the Roman world. The point that I think he's trying to make is the gospel is for the entire world. The gospel of Jesus Christ is universal—we take it to every corner, every hidden people group, every tribe, every kindred, every tongue, every nation needs to hear the gospel. There's only one gospel, one saving message. It does not change wherever you go, anywhere in the world. Christianity is not a western religion. It's not just for the western world. It's not just for white folks, not just for black folks, not just for brown folks, not just for red folks. It's for, Red and yellow, black and white, They are precious in His sight, Jesus loves the people of the world. Amen?

We should be motivated to missions—our own family, our own neighborhoods, our own community, our own state, our own nation, our own world. All around the world, wherever we go, we should be taking the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ. It's not for a select few. Remember the Gnostics were a deeper life club. They were a secluded, secret society. Beware of secret societies. Beware of groups that have hidden handshakes and secret things that you can't share with anyone else. Everything about Christ and Christianity we want to proclaim from the rooftops, and anyone can come into the doors of our church and hear the preaching of the gospel. We're not a secret society. We're not a mutually exclusive club, "Us four, no more; shut the door," deeper life kind of a club. Forgive us. Some churches act that way.

William Carey, the great missionary, wanted to go to India and preach the gospel. He was told in a meeting to sit down, to be quiet, if God wants to save the heathen, He'll do it fine without you. He wouldn't be deterred, and God used him wonderfully to preach the gospel. We should not be deterred. We should realize that God wants us to go to the whole world, again John 3:16 says, "For God so loved,"—who? Do you know what that word 'world' means? It means the world. Isn't that profound? Not just the elect world, not just the chosen world, all mankind, the world.

Just before His ascension, Jesus commissioned His disciples, Mark 16:15, saying, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel,"—the good news to everyone everywhere—"to every creature." It's a commission that we should be serious about.

The word "preach," by the way, in the Great Commission (I preached on preaching in Texas) is the Greek word κηρύσσειν which means to proclaim, to herald. When they wanted to get news out in the ancient world, they had a herald that would say, "Hear ye, hear ye. Thus saith the king," and he would proclaim the message given to him. He wouldn't invent it or create it, he would just proclaim it. He would just be a messenger. It wasn't his ideas. If someone tried to stop or deter him, he wouldn't stop, "No, no. Here's the king's message." We are all called to preach the gospel—all of us—not just those who stand in a pulpit. We should be proclaiming the good

news.

In Acts 1:8, Jesus said, “. . . ye shall be,”—My—“witnesses . . . in Jerusalem . . . Judea . . . Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” Someone said, “Jesus wants us to go to the guttermost, not just the uttermost,” to reach out with His good news.

I heard the story of a church that had the church building structure catch fire, and there was a beautiful painting of Christ in the foyer. Someone ran into the fire, risking their own life, to grab the painting of Christ and brought it out into the street where people were gathered to watch the church burn. Everyone was gathering around and all enamored to the picture of Christ, and someone said, “When the church caught fire, it moved Christ into the streets where the people could see Him. They then were interested in Him.” Would to God that the church would catch fire—Amen?—and take Christ to the streets where people could see Him. That’s great that we congregate here in our church, but we also should be going out into the world around us with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Let me give you the third fact about the gospel, the gospel produces fruit. I love this. The gospel produces fruit, verse 6, “. . . and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard.” In the New Living Translation it has, “It is bearing fruit everywhere by changing lives, just as it changed your lives.” The Word of God is powerful and alive, and it changes and transforms lives. If we were to have a testimonial service here tonight, and you were to stand up and say, “I once was blind, now I see,” you would describe your BC, before Christ, some people would start scooting down from the pew and think, Wow, I didn’t know I was really sitting next to someone like that. But now you’re washed, now you’re forgiven, now you’re restored, what changed your life? The gospel—believing the gospel, putting your faith and trust in Jesus Christ—His death, burial, resurrection. Your life wasn’t transformed because you became religious, your life was transformed because you now have a relationship with Jesus Christ, and I’ve seen that kind of fruit in people’s lives over the years.

If you want to change society, preach the gospel. This is one of the things that convicts me I think more than anything else that our greatest impact on our culture is going to be evangelism and preaching the gospel—discipleship, yes, but also evangelism. In 2 Timothy 4, when Paul told Timothy to preach the Word, he said, “. . . do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry,”—fulfill your ministry. It doesn’t mean you are an evangelist, but it means we should seek to evangelize; and if we want to change the world, we should be preaching the gospel.

In the parable of the sower and the seed in Mark 4, there’s the sower, there’s the seed, and there’s the soil. The parable is not about the sower, it’s not so much about the seed, it’s about the soil. The seed is the Word of God, and the four kinds of soil are the hard soil, the shallow soil, the crowded soil, and then the fourth category is the good soil. The hard soil is the hard heart of man. The gospel’s preached, and Satan steals away the seed and it doesn’t have any fruit. The shallow heart is that which is the emotional hearer. They maybe say, “I believe in Jesus,” but there’s no repentance, no true faith. They’re not really saved, and when trials come

they fall away. The crowded heart are those who seem to receive the seed, but it lacks depth or root and the weeds choke it out, and it bears no fruit. I'm not here to teach on the parable of the sower and the seed, but the first three soils don't produce any fruit. My view is, and I could be wrong but I don't think I'm wrong, that's why it's my view, none of the three first soils represent salvation. People can hear the gospel and not be saved. They could have a hard heart, a shallow heart, or a crowded heart.

The fourth heart—and only the fourth heart—represents true salvation. They received the seed, the Word of God. Salvation takes place when the Spirit of God and the Word of God come together, and it generates new life. It's like when a seed and an egg come together and generates a new human life, so that work of God's Spirit in the heart, and it brings forth fruit, “. . . hundredfold . . . sixtyfold, some thirtyfold,” different degrees of fruitfulness.

I want to give you another verse about the gospel, Romans 1:13-16. Write it down. Let me read it quickly. Paul says, “Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren,”—Paul's always saying, “I don't want you ignorant,”—“that oftentimes, I purposed to come unto you,”—writing to the Romans—“that I might have some fruit,”—there it is, our word fruit—“among you also, even as among other Gentiles. 14 I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. 15 So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. 16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one,”—it's universal—“that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek,”—or the Gentile.

Now, that's a whole sermon in itself, but Paul says, “I am debtor . . . I am ready . . . I am not ashamed.” We should all have the same heart and attitude. The gospel is God's power. It brings salvation. It's to everyone that believes. How marvelous that is!

Here's fact four, the gospel is rooted in grace, verse 6. It's rooted in the grace of God, and it's tied to the grace of God. It says, “. . . since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth,” stop right there. No single word accurately, completely defines the true gospel as does the word ‘grace,’ charis. You've heard it defined—and I think it's fine, it's good—unearned, undeserved, unmerited favor.

I was thinking about this simple, but simply profound, truth the other day, and that is, it's either grace or works. There are a lot of people that like to combine grace and works for salvation. “You can't just believe, you can't just say, ‘I trust Jesus.’ You have to work as well, you have to have a life change.” They're combining grace and works, and they're mutually exclusive. Paul makes it clear in Romans, you're either saved by grace or you're saved by works, you can't be saved by both. True salvation will change your life and produce fruit, but that's not a merit or deserving or working to be saved, it's the fruit not the root of your salvation. You and I are saved completely, totally by God's grace. I don't know about you, but that's good news to me! Amen? The gospel is believe, it's not behave. Once you believe and you've been born again, it'll change your behavior, but you don't behave in order to be saved. Let's not get that confused.

We all know the song, "Amazing Grace." It was written by John Newton. John Newton was also a preacher. In 1807 John Newton said, "My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things: that I am a great sinner, and that Christ is the great Savior." I love that. I love the story of John Newton, "My memory is almost gone, but there's two things I remember—I'm a great sinner and He's a great Savior." He never got beyond that.

In Ephesians 2:8-9, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves,"—which is referring to salvation—"it is the gift of God: 9 Not of works, lest any man should boast." We are going to be most effective in preaching the gospel when we realize that we offer it by God's grace, through faith—grace alone, faith alone, in Christ alone.

There's one last fact I want to point out. By the way, only Christianity preaches saved by grace, period—grace alone, not plus works or plus anything. Praise the Lord! Here's fact five, the gospel is transmitted by people. It's transmitted by people. Look at verses 7-8. Now about the gospel, "As ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellowservant,"—you heard the gospel from Epaphras. You know, Paul had never been to Colossae. Paul hadn't preached the gospel to the Colossians. The people who came to Christ under Paul's ministry took the gospel to Colossae, but not Paul. "As ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellowservant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ; 8 Who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit,"—which, again, is a fruit of genuine salvation. God uses people to transmit His gospel. I picked that word purposely and carefully. God uses people like you and me to be conduits or transmitters of His gospel message. God doesn't send angels, God sends people.

Remember when Cornelius in Acts 10 had an angel show up, and I can't get bogged down here but this story is so cool. The first Gentiles that come to Christ, and this religious, devoted, devout Gentile, probably following Judaism, had an angel show up at his house and say, "Send men to Joppa and inquire there for a man called Simon Peter, and he will come to you and tell you all the words of life," or the gospel. Why didn't the angel just tell him right then and there? He's already there, why didn't he just say, "Repent and get saved?" No, God's chosen to use human beings. I just think about, I don't know what God's thinking. It would've been much more effective to use Gabriel or Michael or some of these angels who have their act together, yet God has chosen to use us. He goes all the way to Simon's house, the tanner. He was up on the roof, got the vision, the whole story, and he had to go to Joppa and share the gospel, and they got saved! God uses human instruments. God uses human individuals. God wants to use us to share the gospel.

This man was not an apostle, Epaphras. He's called a fellow servant. The Greek word is *doulos*, which we get our word bondsman. It means a slave. ". . . a faithful minister," there is the word *diákonos*. We get our word deacon from it. Do you know what the etymology of the word *diákonos* means? This is cool. It means to stir up dust. You say, "What? Stir up dust?" Yeah, because they were running around serving so much, they just stirred up dust wherever they went. They were just running around serving people. Everywhere they went, they're just stirring up dust, so they're called *diákonos*, deacon, to stir up dust. He wasn't an apostle. He wasn't one of the chosen twelve. He was just a layman, so to speak, that God called to preach

the gospel. Remember, God wants to use us. We're debtors. We should be ready, and we should not be ashamed. Amen?

Jesus died for our sins, Jesus rose from the dead, and you must believe and receive and trust in Christ. Whenever I'm preaching evangelistically, I often write down, as I've written down in my notes before me, three words, if you want to use them. The first word is "realize." The second word is "repent." The third word is "receive." Realize, repent, and receive. Realize what? You are a sinner, and you need Jesus Christ. "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." "There is none righteous, no, not one." Before the good news, you have to share the bad news.

The second word is "repent," which means change your mind, turn from sin to Christ the Savior. The third word is "receive." Believe, trust, receive. "But as many as received him, to them gave he the power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." That's the gospel, and God wants to use us. Let's pray.