

Gospel Thankfulness

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[0:00] Colossians 1, 1-14. That spring from that 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.

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. 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.

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way, bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might, so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.

For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

[1:58] For he has rescued us from the kingdom of the Lord.

In the Christian's life. Donald Barnhouse said, How strange that the Lord must plead with those whom he saved from the pit to show gratitude to him.

How strange that must be. He saved us from the pit, and yet he has to plead with us to say thank you. It's ugly, and it's also dangerous.

Ungrateful people go deeper into sin. But thankfulness keeps us from sin. A grateful wife is not going to cheat on her husband.

A grateful teenage daughter is not going to storm out and live with some dude she met. A grateful government employee is not going to become a spy.

[3:18] And a grateful Christian is not going to skip out on Jesus Christ. Is not going to wander away from full devotion to him.

So thankfulness keeps us in Christ. Thankfulness keeps us where we need to be. And the gospel gives us every reason to be thankful.

And that's what we're going to see in verses 3 through 6 of Colossians chapter 1. Look at what we have in the gospel. That's what Paul is saying.

This is what he's so thankful for. What God has done for them. What they have experienced because of the gospel. We're going to have three points this evening. Three reasons to be thankful. And the first is that the gospel is the proclamation of life-giving hope. It's the proclamation of life-giving hope. It's the power of a new creation.

[4:15] And it is the perfection of grace. So it's a proclamation of hope, power of new creation, and the perfection of grace. Now you see the first, the proclamation of a life-giving hope in verses 3 through 5.

Look at those verses again. We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you. Because we have heard of your faith in Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints.

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. So what is the gospel?

Well, Paul calls it a proclamation of hope. He says, in the gospel that you've heard about this hope, it's a hope stored up for you in heaven. Now, I don't think we're used to thinking about the gospel in that way.

But Paul calls it a proclamation, a word of hope, of something that is already stored up for you in heaven. Now, hope. What is Paul talking about? Paul isn't here talking about the feeling of hope. [5:22] Of hopefulness. He's not talking about something that is experienced in our own heart so much. As he's talking about something that is actually hoped for.

It's the thing that we set our hope upon. That's our hope. So high school seniors, graduation is coming up in a month. I guess we only have one here, don't we, Georgie? High school, graduation coming up. And I don't think Georgie is hoping that she's going to graduate. She knows it's ahead. It's coming down.

The arrival, it isn't here, but it is ahead. It's a sure thing, provided the Lord doesn't return. The Bible doesn't use hope to mean something uncertain. Instead, it uses the word as something that is definite, that just hasn't arrived yet. So that's the word of hope that Paul is talking about here. It's not a word about things that may be, but a thing that will be.

[6:22] Things that are. In Titus, he calls it the hope of eternal life. Eternal life. We're going to experience it. Peter says it's an inheritance that can never spoil or fade.

Kept in heaven for you. So there's your hope. And it's kept in heaven. God is keeping it. God is storing it up for you. And when you get there, you'll have it.

So the hope of the gospel, it's all the good things waiting for us in heaven. It's all the good things waiting for us to experience. So life with God, fellowship with Jesus Christ forever and ever, fellowship with one another, all of these things, living without sin.

That is the hope that the gospel calls us to. It's a real hope. And that hope is so real and so powerful, it was able to go back in time, travel in time, backward to where they are now, and change them.

You see that. And look at verse 4. What does hope produce now? What does that hope, when it gets into our hearts, what does it do?

[7:34] It's faith and love. It produces faith and love. Faith and love spring from the hope that is stored up for you. Now, can future things change the way we live today?

Well, ask an engaged couple. Their hope is marriage. It's ahead. It's out there. The day is coming. So we happen to have an engaged couple with us.

And June 6th is coming. It's coming. Now, Colin and Casey, does that have any effect on your life today? Does that change what you're going to do?

I'm sure it's changing what you're spending your money on, isn't it? Do you see the power of hope? It comes in and affects us today.

Hope is powerful. And Paul says it produces faith. Now, who keeps trusting in God? Who keeps persevering through trials and through difficulties, through sicknesses, through persecution?

[8:38] Well, it's someone who has hope. Who has faith? Who exercises faith? It's someone that knows that hope is out there. It's ahead of me. And I'm going to it. So I'm not going to forsake the Lord.

I'm going to keep believing in Jesus. I'm going to keep entrusting myself to him. And I'm going to persevere through the end. So we have this hope. And so we don't lose heart.

We know what's ahead. So we go on believing. So hope. It calls forth faith. Hope calls faith into exercise. It says go on believing in Jesus.

It produces faith. But you also see that it produces love. Produces love. In 1 Corinthians 13, it says love produces hope.

Love hopes all things. In that place, love is the mother of hope. But here, it's the reverse.

[9:38] It's the opposite. Here, love is not the mother of hope. But love is the daughter of hope. And you notice it's a particular kind of love.

It's love for all the saints. And that makes it a little bit trickier. Because it's easy to think about how hope would encourage us to love God.

But how is it that love produces, or how does hope produce love for all the saints? And that is an important question. There's probably very few questions more important than that one.

Because love is, after all, the whole sum of the law. It's the whole sum of the law. Love, Paul says, it's the most excellent way.

He says, without love, I'm nothing but a clanging cymbal. Without love for you. Without love for those people around you. Without love for the saints. I can give my body to the flames.

[10:39] And I gain nothing without love. So tell me, how does future hope produce love? How does that thing that God is keeping for me, storing up for me, going to give me, how does that produce love for me, love for you, now?

How? I need to love. I want to love. So how does future hope produce love? Well, the answer, let me ask you a series of other questions.

Some other questions. Let me ask you. Who is going to get angry and impatient with people when they don't get what they want? Who is going to use people and manipulate people?

Who is going to boast and be proud? Who is going to keep a record of wrongs and then make sure that all of those wrongs are avenged? Won't it be the person that only has this life?

Won't it be the person that only has this life? If all I have is this life, if this is my best life now, then I am going to get angry and I'm going to get impatient when you keep happiness from me.

[11:54] If things don't go right this time, they aren't going to go right. So I have to do something about it. And if I don't have a future coming Savior to deliver me, to render justice, then I'm going to have to dish out justice now.

Or I'm going to have to complain and fight until someone else makes it right. I just can't let go of anything. If I don't have a loving God who's going to bless me forever and ever, then somehow or other, I have to get people to bless me now.

Do you see what I'm getting at? Hopelessness produces lovelessness.

Hopelessness produces lovelessness. And the reverse is true. Hope produces love. It's only the soul feasting by faith on that future hope, by that future enjoyment of God, Jesus Christ, that is coming to me.

It's only that soul that's feasting by faith on our coming Lord, who is my Savior, that can love, who will love these imperfect, these sinful people around me.

[13:09] See, love doesn't grow just by wishing it. Love doesn't grow out of my heart just by trying really hard. Love is the fruit of faith and hope.

Love is the end of the gospel. That's why there is no use of saying, you must love, you must love. That actually does not produce love. It's commanded.

But the law is not able to do what it says we are to do. The law is not able to produce in us what is good. It can tell us what is good. It can tell us the right way to go.

It can tell us what God expects of us. It can tell us what God wants from us. It can tell us how we can love God and man. But it can't actually produce in us what is good.

The gospel must come in. Hope must come in before anyone can ever love. And that's why the world's efforts are so sadly comedic.

[14:14] And they're such a farce. They say on one hand that this is the only life you have. You only live once. But then on the other hand, they say they want us to all love each other.

Well, I'm not in a nice, happy world. I'm in a dog-eat-dog world where people are sinful. I am sinful. And if this world is all I have, then I don't have the time, I don't have the energy to selflessly give to you. Because I myself am so desperate, poor, and needy, I have to grasp for everything I can get now because this is my last time around.

See, love only grows in the soil of hope. Worldliness, worldly thinking, living for this world, hopelessness, it chokes love out.

Chokes love. So do you want love to grow in your heart? Then you must feed on that hope that is coming to you. Feed on heaven.

[15:23] Feed on Jesus Christ who is there, seated at the right hand of the Father. And where do you hear about heaven? Where do you get the assurance that, you know what, one day I am going to be there?

Well, it's in the gospel. So test yourself. Ask yourself, am I growing in love? Am I growing in selflessness?

Where I am having outgoing, selfless, self-denying love for men? For the people that are around me, for my family members, for those people at work.

Do you have a love that is growing out and going out to other people? If not, could it be that your biggest problem is hopelessness? You aren't very hopeful about the future, and so you're caught up in the present.

Caught up with yourself. Test yourself. Well, the gospel, it gives me life-giving hope. It has what the world doesn't have, and it gives what the world can't give.

[16:32] Secondly, the gospel is the power of a new creation. Remember, we're talking about all the reasons that we have to be thankful. Well, here the gospel comes in, and it gives us something to look forward to.

It gives us a bright future, a hope that is surely coming to us. And secondly, it does something even now. Now, that hope that is ahead of us actually begins to go back in time and work in us to form, to create a new creation.

So the gospel of Jesus Christ, it's the power of a new creation. Now, where do I see that in these verses? Well, look at it. It's hinted at in verse 6.

And he just alludes to it. All over the world, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing. You see that. All over the world, the 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 and all its truth.

So what is the gospel doing? Well, it's bearing fruit. It's growing. Where is it growing? All over the world.

[17:43] Now, it's bearing fruit and growing. That should sound familiar. It should sound familiar, especially today.

Because what is our memory verse today? Do you remember what it is? It's Genesis 128. God blessed them and said to them, Be fruitful and increase in number.

Fill the earth and subdue it. Be fruitful. Bear fruit. Increase. Grow. Wear. All over the world. You fill the earth. The commentators are pretty much all in agreement that here is Paul alluding to that first creation.

To Genesis 128. What? Colossians 1.6 is an echo of Genesis 128. And so what is Paul saying? What is Paul teaching?

Well, it's just this. That wherever the power and the grace of Jesus Christ goes in this world, in power, by the Spirit, a new creation comes up.

[18:47] A new creation grows. It bears fruit. It increases. So the gospel comes to dead sinners, to sinners in the dark, and it gives them life, and it gives them light.

It takes dead souls and makes them new. It takes old creations and makes new creations out of them. The gospel bears fruit, and it's bearing fruit everywhere, and it's bearing fruit here.

It's bearing fruit in our hearts. It's bearing fruit in our families. The gospel changes people. It takes them from one state, from being dead in darkness in the kingdom of Satan and into the kingdom of God's Son.

It changes people. It changes who they are. It changes what they are. And that is what God said would happen. Isaiah 55. Do you remember?

Maybe not. As the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so is my word that goes out from my mouth.

[19:53] It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. So, God's word is like the rain, and it comes and it makes whatever it falls on bud and flourish.

It accomplishes what God desires, what God's purpose is. Now, what is God's desire and God's purpose? Isaiah 55 tells us.

What is God going to send his word to do? Isaiah 55, 13, instead of the thorn brush, will grow the pine tree, and instead of the briars, the myrtle will grow.

So, God's word is like the rain. It does what he wants it to do. It accomplishes the purpose. But in another way, God's word is nothing like the rain.

It's so much more powerful than the rain. See, the rain makes whatever plant is there to grow. So, if you have a fruit tree there, it will make the fruit tree grow.

[20:55] And if you have a thorn bush there, it will make the thorn bush grow. But God's word changes the thorn bush into the fruit tree.

God's word changes the briars into the myrtle. See, it comes with power that rain does not have. It comes with power to change the creation, to make it a new creation. And so, we never bore fruit before, but now we do.

Now we bear the fruits of repentance and faith. And this new creation, it isn't just localized to us.

This isn't just something experienced in this zip code, in this place.

But all over the world, Paul says. It's doing so among you, but it's going wherever the gospel is heard. It's bearing fruit and increasing. See, God blessed Adam and said, fill the earth and subdue

it.

But Adam sinned. Adam failed. But what Adam failed to do, Jesus Christ, by the Spirit, is doing presently.

[21 : 57] So, he's sending the Spirit to the ends of the earth. And everywhere the gospel goes, men are saved. Men are changed. Men are transformed. The gospel bears fruit. And the glory of God fills the earth.

That was Adam's original purpose, wasn't it? To shine the glory of God. To be an image of God. Everywhere he went. But Adam fell.

Adam failed. But in the gospel, Jesus does what Adam failed to do. So, the gospel bears fruit in rich and poor. It bears fruit in whatever skin color it comes to.

It bears fruit in every kind of culture. Western cultures. Eastern cultures. It doesn't matter. The gospel is the power of a new creation.

And that power has come to you. It found you. And it turned your world upside down. You were doing all sorts of religious things.

[22 : 59] Maybe. But the gospel changed you. That power came to Colossae. That power came to Bremen. And it wasn't more of the same old stuff.

It wasn't more of what the world can offer. It wasn't more of human wisdom and human power. The gospel came here with God's power. And God's Spirit attended it. And it changed our lives.

Think about the drastic difference that God and the gospel made in your life. Where would you be if he would have never intervened and came and taken you out of the path that you were on?

Where would you be if you were still on that path? The gospel didn't change us. Or the government didn't change us. Schools didn't change our hearts.

Yes, those things can be good. They can be bad. But they left us as they found us. They left us as they found us.

[24 : 01] Dead in our trespasses and sins. Cut off from God without hope in this world. But the gospel made us new. And now all things are new. New desires. New thoughts.

New abilities. A new way of living. We're new creations. New things. Do you see why we should be so thankful? Do you see why we don't need anything but the gospel of Jesus Christ?

What other power? What other plan? Whatever program is out there that could do what the gospel did for you? We don't need anything better because we already have the best.

We already have the second Adam. We already have Jesus Christ. The living one. The one who rose from the dead. He's the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead.

And so why leave him? Why leave him for a moment? Why take your faith away from him for a moment? What is there to gain?

[25 : 06] No, in him everything is mine. Life, death, it's all mine. Life, grace, power, everything is mine. I'm new because of him.

And so let's be thankful. Let's rejoice in the Lord for what he's done for us. Now third, why should we be thankful? What do we have in the gospel? Well, we have the perfection of God's grace.

And that's the second part of verse six. All over the world, the gospel is bearing fruit as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace and all its truth.

To have your eyes open to the gospel, is to have your eyes opened to God's grace and all of its truth. Why should we be thankful?

Because what the gospel is, it's God's grace and all its truth. It's the full manifestation of God's grace. It's the perfection, the completion of God's mercy and love.

[26 : 11] For it is by grace you have been saved. Not by works. Listen, any man should boast. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

God loved this world. This is how God showed his love among us. How did God show his love among us? What does John say? He sent his one and only son into the world that we might live through him.

That's the gospel. This is love, John goes on. This is what love is. Not that we love God, but that he loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

And this is how we know what love is. Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. So where do you see the greatness of God's grace?

Where do you see the greatness of God's love? It's in the gospel. The gospel is the revelation. It's the opening, the unfolding, the unveiling of God's grace and his mercy.

[27 : 20] And it's a full revelation. There's nothing more to see of God's love than what we can see at the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Here's how we see the glory of God.

It's the cross. It's the cross that is the revelation of God. Nobody knows God, really knows God, until he knows God in Jesus Christ at the cross.

Nobody understands God. Nobody understands grace. Nobody understands theology until he lives and breathes the air of the cross. All those verses that I said, it was showing us something.

God is saying, do you want to know where my love is most clearly seen? Do you want to know where I must come out and I am seen? It's through my son dying that you see me, that you can understand me, that you can come to me and live with me.

So at the cross, God steps out of the shadows and into the light. Everything up to that was just pointing forward.

[28 : 34] Everything up to that were shadows, was pointers ahead. So not in creation, not in the old covenant, not in the prophets. Those are all true. They are all real.

There's nothing false or misleading about any of them, but they are shadows. They point forward to Jesus Christ, to the gospel. They're light bulbs compared to the sun.

And so God steps out of the shadows and into the light at the cross of Jesus Christ. And so at the cross, we see a God of grace.

So here are dead people. Hopeless. Because dead people are hopeless. Helpless.

Because dead people are helpless. Hating and being hated. And these people are enemies of God. And we look and it's us.

[29 : 36] The Bible does not paint a very cheery picture of who we were outside of Jesus Christ. And what chance do we have? Well, we were toiling away.

Trying to appease God. Trying to ignore God. Trying to keep the law. Trying to suppress the law. Trying to soothe the law. Or soothe our consciences by changing the law.

By making human rules that are far easier to keep. Pushing down the truth. Suppressing the truth. Truth. Why? Why are we trying so hard?

Why? Because we wanted to do it ourselves. We wanted to earn our own way. We wanted to keep our pride in place. We wanted the God of self to keep living.

I know a little girl who lost her tooth and her parents told her that she could put it under her pillow and the tooth fairy would come and give her money.

[30 : 38] And that little girl said, if I want money, I'll go get a job. Now, that's good. Isn't it? I like to see a girl that wants to work.

But it is also a picture of man's pride. The pride of the human heart. I don't want a gift. I'll do it myself.

Thank you. I'll work for it. And so we go to the cross and Jesus Christ is there dying for those people.

For proud people. Hateful people. Idolatrous people. People that are going their own way. And God sacrifices his own son for those kind of people.

His righteous son. His lovely son. His perfect son. The righteous for the unrighteous. Well, do you want to know, do you want to see God, God's grace in all its fullness and all of the perfect perfection, the perfect manifestation?

[31 : 51] Well, it's at the cross. It's in the gospel. And friends, the gospel has come to us. It's come to us and we heard it and God opened our ears and opened our minds and opened our eyes so that we could understand it.

And when he opened our eyes, without understanding, he poured out his love into our hearts.

Through the gospel, we not only see God's grace and see it out there, but it actually comes in and pours out into our hearts.

The gospel came in and convinced suspicious, suspicious, self-righteous sinners that God really did love them and that God really would save them.

And they fell into his arms and we fell into his arms and we realized that he loved us. That he loved us. And we're these ugly, wretched sinners.

He loved us. And he convinced us that he would save us, not by our works, but by his grace. And we came. And he came to us and he taught us.

[32 : 56] And he made the light shine into our hearts. Do you remember those first days when you were a Christian and you knew you were a Christian? Didn't the sun shine brighter?

Didn't food taste better? Didn't people seem kinder? The world seemed such a better place. God loves me.

God loves me. He's forgiven me of all my sin. All of it. We were like Christian in Pilgrim's Progress. Do you remember? He came to the cross and the burden rolled off his back and he jumped for joy. Friends, how thankful we should be. God saved us. God loved us. And he does love us. Well, how do we know? Well, it's here. It's in the gospel.

He tells us. It's the gospel of Jesus Christ. So let's remember. Let's be thankful. Thankful Christians are faithful Christians.

[34 : 01] They stay the course. They grow in love. They keep believing. They persevere. They have this hope. But ungrateful Christians, they're on the edge of falling away.

They're on the edge of turning back. They're on the edge of falling apart. And if that's you, wake up. Remember your first love.

Remember the things that you did at the beginning. Remember how much God has loved you. And remember what a precious gift you have in this gospel of Jesus Christ.

He's given it to you. Well, let's pray. Heavenly Father, thank you for all that we have in the gospel. All that you are doing for us. Giving us a hope and a future. Making us new. Making us these new creations.

[35 : 05] and then showing us how much you love us. Father, forgive us for being worldly. Forgive us for our small faith.

Will you please increase our faith? Motivate us to believe more. There's every reason to be thankful. There's every reason to believe. Will you please pour out your spirit in our hearts and work faith and repentance into us.

Help us to remember the things that we did at the beginning. To repent of our coldness. To repent of our ungrateful hearts. And to turn away from all of that and turn to you and faith and repentance and hope to find mercy at the foot of the cross.

Lord, I do pray for those who are lost here. Though they receive your gifts day after day, they neither acknowledge you nor thank you for what you have done.

Will you disturb their sleep of death? Wake them up. Open their eyes. Show them the ugliness of receiving your blessings and yet not saying thank you.

[36 : 29] we please make us to be a thankful people. We want to be pleasing to you. We want to walk worthy of you.

We please help us. In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen. Amen.