

To Rescue Us from Darkness

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[0 : 01] Lord, may you open our eyes to see your mystery that is being revealed in Christ Jesus. May your spirit teach, guide, and inspire us to know the truth and to live within it.

Amen. Please be seated. I feel strange standing here this morning. The reason is because the last sermon that I prepared was two and a half months ago.

It was just before Christmas. This morning is strange for me to jump from Christmas to Good Friday's message, from the beginning of Jesus' earthly life to its ending.

However, as I dig deeper and look at the significance of these two events in Jesus' life, it's not so strange after all. As the famous 20th century theologian Karl Barth has described it, Jesus' life is surrounded by two amazing miracles.

On one end, the miracle of Christmas, while on the other end, the miracle of Easter. These miracles have set Jesus' life totally apart from every other human being.

[1 : 20] Furthermore, this also shows that the life of Jesus, including his birth, teaching, death, and coming to life again is neither a coincidence nor a surprise.

There is God's higher will and prearrangement behind it. As Wayne has expounded in the last few weeks, there are divine reasons why Jesus came to die for us on the cross, in order to share God's love to us, to enable us to belong to him, and for him to be worthy to judge the world.

And today we shall continue this series of sermons on why Jesus came to die. We shall look at another reason. That is, Jesus came to rescue us from darkness.

It is very clear from Paul's words in Colossians 1, verses 13-14, that God has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

But before we look at these two verses in detail, let us look at the context in which these verses are found. These words indeed formed part of Paul's thanksgiving prayer for the Colossians.

[2 : 46] In verse 3, Paul says, along with Timothy, In our prayers for you, we always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Also verse 9, For this reason, since the day we heard it, there is news about Colossians. We have not ceased praying for you.

In these words, we see Paul, as the founder of this church, has grabbed burden for the church. Though he was not with them physically, he continues to be united with them through prayer.

But on the other hand, we also see the uniqueness of this church. The Colossian church was a very special church. Whenever Paul and Timothy thought of them and prayed for them, it always resulted in thanksgiving prayer.

This morning, the questions we want to ask are, What are the reasons for Paul and Timothy to give thanks to God for the Colossians? What is so special about this church?

[3 : 48] And what can we learn from them? First, verses 4 to 12, They are fruit-bearing faith. The first reason for Paul and Timothy to rejoice and give thanks for Colossians is given in verse 4.

For we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love that you have for all the saints. In this verse, we see that Colossians not only have had knowledge of salvation in Christ, they also practice what they know.

On one hand, they have strong faith in Jesus, while on the other hand, they have love for their fellow Christians. It seems that here Paul deliberately speaks of their faith in Jesus, and then their love for others, which hymns us that their faith in Christ has served as a foundation for them to love others.

In other words, their loving acts grow directly out of their faith in Christ. This means that the brotherly love the Colossians are displaying is not mere human work of ethical virtue, as for instance, we find in certain loving people.

Rather, what Paul is saying here is that no matter how loving or unloving the Colossians were, because of their transforming faith in Christ, they have become loving people.

[5 : 20] Christ's love is now evident in their life. This is indeed the gospel message that we find throughout the New Testament. We are saved, not because of how good or how loving we are.

We are saved because of what Christ has done for us. And in accepting Christ to be the Savior and Lord of our lives, we are being transformed by His Spirit to be like Him.

I remember more than once, our daughter came to us and said, I doubt whether I'm a born-again Christian. She is 10 now, going to be 11.

This is a very worrying question to us, especially for us to be in ministry. So we often respond with, what made you say that? And her answer was, sometimes when I do bad things, I feel that I do not belong to God.

I believe sometimes we may feel the same way, especially when we do not live out to God's standards. We feel bad about ourselves and doubt whether we are good enough for God.

[6 : 36] At the same time, we also question whether God has made us into a new creation as He promised us. However, the message here in Colossians affirms us that Christ's acceptance of us is not dependent on how good you are, but whether you continue to put your trust in Him.

whether you continue to let the Holy Spirit to work in your life. That's why in verse 5, Paul further clarifies the foundation of their faith and love.

It is because of the hope laid out for you in heaven. Here once again we see Paul's famous triad, faith, love, and hope.

These three are closely interconnected. The reason for the Colossians who have faith in Christ and love for fellow Christians is due to their hope in Christ.

And the foundation of their hope is the gospel. As Paul says in verses 5 to 6, This means that when the gospel came to Colossians, And when they heard and fully comprehended it, it began to transform their lives.

[8 : 12] This transformation is evident in the spiritual fruits that they are bearing. And this transformation and bearing of spiritual fruits are not only true among the Colossians.

To Paul it is always the case in everywhere when the gospel is being preached and accepted. Therefore, Paul along with Timothy, When they heard of Colossians' faith, love, and hope to have a phrase, They just couldn't stop praying and giving thanks to God for them.

However, this is not saying that the Colossians have achieved the perfection. Rather, they still need to press on. And sometimes they even need to learn to endure despite all the setbacks and challenges.

There's like Paul further prays that the Colossians will continue to bear even more fruits. In verses 9 to 12, Always give thanks to God and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him.

As you bear fruit in every good work, and as you grow in the knowledge of God, may you be made strong, and as you continue to grow, as you grow in the knowledge of God, may you be made strong with all the strength that comes from His glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light.

[9 : 49] What a great prayer. I believe we can also use this prayer to pray for ourselves and for others. The second reason, which is also the ultimate reason for Paul and Timothy to give thanks to God for the Colossians, is due to the saving work of Christ, verses 13 to 14.

We have already noticed that the foundation of Colossians' faith, love, and hope is the gospel. Without the gospel and the understanding of it, there won't be any faith, hope, and love.

Therefore, the ultimate reason for Paul's thanksgiving is the gospel itself. And this gospel is God's saving work through Christ, which is stated very clearly in verses 13 to 14.

God has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

These verses mention two things that God has done for us through Christ. First, He rescued us from the power of darkness. And then He transferred us into the kingdom of His beloved Son.

[11 : 07] We shall look at this in detail. First of all, when Paul states that God has rescued us from the power of darkness, he is making a very important declaration.

It is a declaration that we human beings have a need. The need to be delivered from the power and bondage of sin and darkness.

If there is no bondage of sin and darkness, Jesus did not need to come into this world to rescue us. If human beings are free and they are capable of saving themselves, there is no need for the church and missionaries to give us so much and to travel long ways to share the good news of deliverance to the heathens.

Recently, I reconnected with one of my former Bible college students, which I have lost contact after graduation in 1993. For the last 12 years, Suzanne has spent her time in a rural town in North China.

In her recent published book, China Ramblings, which I would strongly recommend to you, she writes of her struggle to learn Mandarin. Let me read to you some of the things that she has written about her struggle to learn Chinese language.

[12 : 32] She says, Many Asian languages are tonal. Tones, imprints of torture for the uninitiated.

Can I ask you? Easily becomes, Can I kiss you? In fact, my daughter said, there is another meaning. Can I smell you? It only takes one tiny change of tone.

I know I have said it. I like to sleep. And I like dumplings. I also too close for comfort. Only tones separate them.

Though I enjoy both. Oh, the theory sounds simple enough. It's all about musical pitch. The first tone is high.

Ma, first tone, means mother. Ma, Ma, the second tone, has a rising inflation. Ma, second tone, means nam.

- [13 : 34] The third tone, Ma, Ma, Ma, is pronounced like your voice is galloping down the bottom of a deep, over a bridge, and a little way up the other side.

Ma, Ma, Ma, Ma, third tone, means horse. Fourth tone, I'm sorry, it's too difficult and too long to describe, so I jump over.

You can read it yourself in a book. Ma, Ma, Ma, Ma, Ma, fourth tone, means to score. So in the end, Suzanne has this sentence which I'll see on the wall.

If you read it without the tones, it means nothing. But if you put into these tones, the Chinese tones, it is very meaningful. Ma, Ma, Ma, Qi, Ma, Ma, Ma, Ma, Ma, Ma, Ma, Ma, is mother rides a horse.

Is the horse slow? Mother scores the horse. I think we can all see that it's very difficult to learn Mandarin.

- [14 : 49] It's just like, you know, for me to learn English as well. Other than language difficulty, which is quite apparent in what she has written, Suzanne also mentioned about her struggle with Chinese culture, even worse than language, and the living environment.

The struggle to leave the mission field to come home immediately was so real to her. These sacrifices missionaries made, which can only reflect part, minimal part, of the ultimate sacrifice God made, remind us of the important reality that we human beings are under the power and bondage of sin and darkness.

A bondage which we cannot break free to our own strength and needs. A bondage only the gospel, the power of God, can overcome.

However, God not only rescued us from the power of darkness, He also transfers us into the kingdom of His beloved Son in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

It's no use just to be delivered from sin, and then we are left alone so that we could slip easily into sin and under bondage again. Rather, what God has done is that He rescued us from the darkness, the power of darkness, and then transferred us into His own kingdom so that we can experience complete redemption.

- [16 : 27] That is the forgiveness of sin. This means that as we are transferred into God's kingdom, we are being given a new identity. We become a new person in Christ.

Everything all has passed away. Everything has become new. So from now on, I'm a free person. Not freedom to sin, but freedom to reflect God's glory and to manifest His love and grace.

It's a complete deliverance, a complete salvation. from the beginning to the end is God who works for us and in us.

It's nothing we can do or achieve. Unlike becoming Australian citizen, it depends on whether you are skilled, whether you have good English, whether you understand the local culture, whether you are able to pass the citizenship test, even though it's only 20 of them, 20 questions.

It's all about you and what you have and what you can do. But it's totally different with heavenly citizenship. It's nothing that you can do.

- [17 : 47] As John Stott has described, on the cross of Christ, we have nothing to contribute except our sins. God and it is from them that we need to be delivered from.

Therefore, there is every reason for Paul and Timothy to give thanks to God as they clearly see how the gospel has manifested itself powerfully on Colossians.

As we look at Colossians 1 this morning, we are grateful to God as well. This gospel is powerful to save anyone who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ and to transform one's life to best crucial fruits.

If you have already accepted Christ as your personal Savior and Lord, may you be reminded that you have been rescued from the power of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of God's beloved Son.

At the same time, let us remember those around us and those further a few who are still outside of God's kingdom. If you are still considering to accept Christ, I will encourage you to do so.

[19 : 03] Remember that to be rescued from the power of darkness and transferred into God's kingdom is not dependent upon what you can do. In today's culture, we emphasize so much on what we can do.

You need to prove yourself. Your worth is dependent on what you can do, your ability. But in terms of the gospel, it's what God can do for you.

What you need is to believe in the gospel, in what God has done for you. God knows you. So you do not need to prove yourself.

Let's come before the Lord and ask him to help us. Let's close today's message with this great prayer from verses 9 to 12. Let's pray.

Lord, I pray that we may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all's spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that we may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to you, as we bear fruit in every good work, and as we grow in the knowledge of God.

[20 : 17] May we be made strong with all the strength that comes from your glorious power, and may we be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled us to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light.

Amen.