

Thanksgiving and Prayer

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[0 : 0 0] Father, we do thank you again for your word, and we pray again that you would help us to understand it and to live in light of it. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, as I said, we're starting a new series in the letter of Colossians, and Paul today begins the letter with a prayer, a thanksgiving and a prayer. So I thought I'd begin this morning with a few prayers that children have made.

In fact, one of them is one of my own children. A little while ago, Michelle was visiting her brother in Sweden, and so I was left to hold the fort at home. It's not that one yet. I'll let you know when.

And anyway, some people very kindly offered us some meals, but occasionally I had to cook. And one night what I cooked, well, let's just say it tasted better than it looked.

And so when my child said grace, they prayed, dear God, please help this food not kill us. Amen. Thank you. Thank you for that.

[1 : 0 5] And prayers, though, you see, often highlight what's important to us at the time, at least. And for them, they wanted to live. But I've got some other prayers here from other children they've made.

We'll skip over that one, Andre, the next one. This next one. So the next slide. This one is from Joy. She writes, thank you, God, for the baby brother, but what I really wanted was a puppy.

Or on the next slide, Pete writes, dear God, please send Dennis Clark to a different holiday camp this year. Obviously, things have not gone well for poor Peter.

And now, apart from being mildly amusing, as I said, these prayers actually show us what mattered to these children at the time, don't they? Whether it was a puppy or sending Dennis Clark away. But that's often the way with prayer, isn't it?

We often pray for the things that matter most to us, the things that concern us. And as we look at Paul's thanksgiving and prayer for the Colossians this morning, we'll see something of Paul's concern for the Colossians.

[2 : 1 1] What he thinks matters to them or for them. And it's not just Paul's concern or Paul's priority for them. It's actually God's priority for them. For as you know, these words are the inspired words of God.

But before we get to Paul's thanksgiving and prayer, let me give you some brief background. So on the slide there is a map of Turkey and Colossae is where the red dot is.

So it's in modern day Turkey. It's next door to another city called Laodicea. And it's about 150 kilometers away from the city of Ephesus. Now, Ephesus, Acts 19 tells us, is where Paul spent two years speaking the gospel news about Jesus.

And it seems a man called Epaphras, who was originally from Colossae, had traveled either to Ephesus or near around there, heard the gospel, became a Christian and then went back home to Colossae.

And then told others in his home city. And they, too, became Christians. And so began the Colossian church. Now, some time has since passed and Epaphras is now with Paul again, who is under house arrest in Rome.

[3 : 20] And Epaphras tells Paul that his home church back in Colossae is being pressured to follow not just Jesus, but plus other teachings, other traditions, other philosophies.

As though Jesus is not enough. And so Paul writes this letter so that the Colossians may know the truth, that if you have Jesus, you have everything you need to be right with God.

So they are to stick with Christ Jesus and not be carried away by these other philosophies and so on. And so I think if you've got your Bibles there, turn to chapter 2, verse 6. In fact, you don't have to turn to some just on the right hand side of the page there.

I think these verses are really the summary verses for the whole letter to 6 to 10. He says, So then, just as you receive Christ Jesus as Lord, just as you heard the gospel and became Christians, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him.

Strengthen the faith as you were taught and overflowing with thankfulness. See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world, rather than on Christ.

[4 : 34] Because, verse 9, in Christ, the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form. And in Christ you have been brought to fullness, he says. And on he goes.

Do you see what he's getting at? Just as you receive Christ and when you became a Christian, so stick with Christ. Or literally, continue to walk in him, which is hence the graphic for our series, Walking in Christ.

And don't be carried away by this other teaching because you've been given fullness in Christ. You don't need anything else to be right with God, which is very encouraging when you think about it. And we will think about it in the coming weeks.

But this morning, I want you to come back to chapter 1 with me and we'll start with Paul's thanksgiving. So point 1 in your outlines in verse 1 in your Bibles. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God and Timothy, our brother.

To God's holy people in Colossae, the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ. Grace and peace to you from God our Father. And then he begins with thanks. He says, we always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you.

[5 : 42] Why? Well, verse 4, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people. Paul begins by thanking God that the Colossians are Christians.

He thanks them for their faith in Christ and love for God's people. It's interesting, he doesn't just thank God for their faith. After all, faith is what makes us a Christian, you know, believing or having faith in Jesus.

So why does he include love here? Well, I take it it's because it shows their faith in Jesus is genuine. As Jesus himself said, by this shall all people know that you are my disciples if you love one another.

And so their love shows their faith is genuine, that they are true disciples of Christ. Which is why it's great to see people here at Holy Trinity loving one another, whether it's through showing care or hospitality towards one another in some other way.

It shows your faith is genuine, just as the Colossians showed their faith was genuine. And so Paul thanks God for their faith and love. But how have they come to faith?

[6 : 58] How has this happened? We know from verse seven that it had something to do with Epaphras. So was it because Epaphras was a great preacher? Is that why they became Christians? Well, no.

Rather, verse five. He says the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven. And about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel that has come to you.

In verse five, Paul says that their faith and love spring from the hope that the gospel gives. In other words, it's not about Epaphras. It's about the true message of the gospel, which offers hope as opposed to any other deceptive philosophy.

It's the gospel and the hope it offers that has borne the fruit of faith and love in their lives. Hope here refers to our heavenly inheritance.

As verse five says, this hope is stored up for you in heaven. In verse 12, it will be called an inheritance. And so what seems to have happened is they've heard this gospel message about Jesus, how by God's grace, Jesus died to pay for their sins, rose again, and offers the hope of heaven for those who believe.

[8 : 09] And as they heard that message and understood God's grace, it prompted them to believe. It led them to faith and love. They decided to trust in Jesus.

This is how the message of the gospel with its offer of hope has produced the fruit of faith and love in their lives. In fact, it's what happened to me growing up, actually. I grew up in a Christian family and I went to church and Sunday school.

My favorite part of church, the end. I didn't really like it at all. And so while I had some sort of, you know, fear of God, I suppose, I wasn't really interested in God.

I didn't particularly believe. And I thought that all preachers were boring and went on forever. God obviously has a sense of humor now that I'm, anyway, not boring and going on forever.

Anyway. One day, a guest preacher came to our church and asked a question that I didn't like my answer to. And he said, if you die tonight, are you certain you'd go to heaven? And I thought I should be.

[9 : 10] I've been going to church forever. But I wasn't. I wasn't sure. I didn't know. And so I actually sat up and listened, really, for the first time, about how Jesus took the punishment for my sin and offered me the hope, the certain hope of heaven.

If I believed. And so I remember going home. My brother was asleep on the bunk below and I prayed. I said, oh, I want to believe. I'm following you. And I did. I believed that night. I even tried to love my little brother more.

Not always successfully. You see, that's how faith and love spring from the hope held out in the gospel. This is how the gospel has borne the fruit of faith and love in the lives of the Colossians.

And it's not just in their lives. It's in the lives of people all over the world that the gospel is doing this. You see verse six. He says in the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God's grace.

You learned it from a path for us, our dear fellow servant, who is a fellow faithful minister of Christ on our behalf. And who also told us of your love in the spirit. You see, it's not as though there was something in the water at Colossae that caused these people to become Christians.

[10 : 27] It's not as though Epaphras was a particularly great preacher. No, it was the gospel. It was hearing the gospel, the news about Jesus. That caused the Colossians and people all over the world to come to faith in Christ, to grow and bear fruit in their lives for Christ.

And it's the same gospel that continues to bear fruit in the lives of people around the world today. I mean, a few weeks ago, I mentioned at this service to pray for the 15 people from the Chinese service who were being baptized that day, who heard the gospel and believed.

But I got that wrong. I'm sorry. It was 30 people. And some of them went back to China to share the gospel. Or take Greg Sheridan, who writes for the Australian newspaper.

Last month in June, he admitted that while churches in Australia are facing a rise in secularism, he said, and I quote, all over Africa, Asia and much of South America, religion, Christianity is booming.

Take Andrew and Helen, some of our link missionaries. We prayed not long ago for some Muslims who, or a Muslim man in particular, who became a Christian in the Middle East. Or the Knights in Port Hedland, our other link missionaries.

[11 : 38] Again, we prayed and gave thanks for a man, a husband who became a Christian recently after meeting up and hearing the gospel. You see, whether it's Asia, Africa, South America, the Middle East or far northwestern Australia, the gospel message about Jesus is bearing fruit.

Fruit of faith and love. And so it's this gospel message we need to keep promoting. It's this gospel message we need to keep financially supporting. And speaking as we have opportunity.

It's the gospel ministry that is to be the priority for our church. Because it's the gospel of Jesus that bears fruit. It's interesting, by the way, that in Colossians, there are a number of echoes of Genesis.

So next week in chapter 1, verse 15 and following, we'll talk about the sun being the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over creation. And in verse 16, being the creator of things.

Later on in chapter 3, we'll also hear about being renewed ourselves in the image of our creator. And here today, we've got this language of the gospel being fruitful and increasing all over the world.

[12 : 44] You see, in Genesis, we were created in the image of God. And we were told to be fruitful and increase, to fill the earth, so that God's image would be reflected throughout the earth.

But as humanity was fruitful, so was our sin. And God's image was marred. But now the gospel is being fruitful and multiplying throughout the world, recreating us in the likeness of Christ, in the likeness of God, so that God's image is now going forth throughout the earth.

And that's why Paul thanks God, as he sees it happening in the lives of the Colossians. But now he prays that they might continue to be fruitful, that the gospel might continue to bear fruit in their lives, so that they might live lives worthy of the Lord Jesus.

Point to verse 9. He says, For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will, through all wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way.

Paul prays that they might be filled, immersed, saturated, with the knowledge of God's will, his wisdom and understanding. Now when Paul speaks about the knowledge of God's will here, he's not so much talking about knowing God's will for how much super we need to retire, or what school the grandkids should go to, or where to go on holidays, which footy team will win the premiership.

[14 : 22] As nice as those things would be nice to know. Though I suspect even if God told us specifics, we'd still try and negotiate something different. Not Collingwood again, Father, please.

No, the knowledge of God's will is really about knowing what God has done and is doing through Christ. For God's will and plans have always had Jesus at the centre.

And so take on the next slide, Ephesians chapter 1, 9 and 10. It says, God made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure, which he set forth in Christ.

And what is this plan and will? Well, it's to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, Christ. That's God's will. That's God's plan. You see, Jesus is at the centre of it too, isn't he?

Also in Jesus, elsewhere in scripture, read that in Jesus we see a picture of God's will for our lives, that we had to be like him. And later in Colossians chapter 2, verse 3, we read that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are found in Christ.

[15 : 32] You see, God's will and wisdom and knowledge, it's all wrapped up in Jesus. That's who the Spirit points us to. And so to be filled with the knowledge of God's will, with all wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, well, it's to know more and more what God has done for us and is doing through Jesus, in saving us and helping us to live like him.

And put simply, it's being filled with this, saturated with scripture, because that's where we find God's will in Christ for us. And why does Paul pray this for them?

Well, verse 10 again, I was speaking with someone recently from our church who confessed to me that their Bible reading was pretty much non-existent at the moment and had been for a number of weeks.

And he had noticed that when his Bible reading had dropped off, so had his patience with his family and his worry about work actually increased.

Now, this person does a lot of driving for work, so he decided to listen to the Bible in the car. He said, brilliant, I think, if that's what you can do. Because as he did listen to scripture, as he was filled with the knowledge of God's will in Christ for him, he was reminded of what Jesus said about, you know, do not worry about tomorrow.

[17 : 01] Seek first Christ's kingdom. And he said it was really encouraging. And his wife even noticed when he got home. He started living a life that was more worthy of the Lord. And I know for many of you here, read the scriptures regularly, which is terrific, so that you can know God's will.

But I also know it's one of those things that can be hard and can be a struggle for some people. So if you need help with reading the Bible regularly, then please let me know or email me and I can recommend some resources or get some for you.

But Paul prayed that they will be filled with God's will in Christ, not just to have knowledge, but so that they can live a life worthy of the Lord Jesus who died for them.

And Paul unpacks what this life worthy of the Lord looks like. He mentions four things. First, it means bearing the fruit of good works. Verse 10. Second, it means continuing to grow in the knowledge of God.

We don't just learn a bit and then stop. We keep learning. And third, it means, verse 11, relying on God's strength to do it. Do you see there? Being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might, so that you may have great endurance and patience.

[18 : 15] See, just because we know someone's will for us doesn't mean it's always easy to do. Does it? But here we're told that we're not alone in our walk as Christians.

We have God's power to help us endure and be patient. And so we can pray and receive strength to persevere in living a life worthy of Jesus. Fourthly, though, it also means giving thanks for what God has done for us.

Do you see verse 12? And giving joyful thanks to the Father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people 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.

Now, these are extraordinary verses, aren't they? For they remind us of where we once were. To use the language of Star Wars, we were all once on the dark side of the force.

[19 : 16] And because of our sin, we had no right, no right to share in the heavenly inheritance with God's people. Instead, we were rightly headed for hell.

But God rescued us from that darkness and brought us in the kingdom of light. And God has now qualified us who are far away from him. He's now qualified us, given us the right to have a share of the kingdom as our heavenly inheritance.

How? Well, through Jesus. Verse 14. It's in him we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. Now, is that not all worth giving God thanks for?

And if you're here this morning and want to be qualified to share in the heavenly inheritance, then you need to do what the Colossians did. Have faith in Jesus. Trust in Christ.

And for us who have, well, I started this morning by saying that our prayers often reveal something of our priorities. What matters to us? What concerns us? I mean, some people say they don't have time to pray, but if something really is important to them, then they make time to pray, don't they?

[20 : 31] You see, our prayers often reflect our priorities. What matters most to us? And I wonder if our prayers reflect the same priorities as Paul or as God for these Christians.

You see, Paul could have prayed for the Colossians' health or financial situation. At this time in history, the city of Colossae was in decline and businesses were doing badly from what historians can work out.

But Paul did not pray for those things. Instead, he prayed that they might be saturated with Scripture, that they might know God's will in Christ so that they can live lives worthy of Christ.

Lives that bear fruit and grow in knowledge. Lives that rely on God's strength to persevere. Lives that give thanks to the Father who rescued us through the Son. Now, why did Paul pray for these things?

Well, because these things are the things that mattered most. Especially in a world which was pressuring them, as it pressures us today, to follow other things instead of Christ and Christ alone.

[21 : 34] So these things matter most. Because following Christ or not is the difference between a heavenly inheritance or not. So these are the things that matter most.

Now, of course, don't mishear me. The Bible tells us to pray for everything that concerns us. Jobs, family, health issues. I mentioned a number of weeks ago that my father might have cancer.

I prayed for him then. And he's all clear, praise God. But Paul's prayer reveals his priority, or rather God's priority for them, for us, for what matters most.

And that is being filled with the knowledge of God's will, saturated with Scripture, so that we can live lives worthy of Christ. And if this is God's priority for us in our world, then this is what we ought to include in our prayers.

For ourselves and each other. For our children and grandchildren. For our nieces and nephews and friends. And for our church. I'm greatly encouraged by many who pray for one another here at HCD.

[22 : 39] Please keep praying for one another. About the different issues we face in life, whether health or guidance and so on. But above all, please keep praying that we as a church will be filled with the knowledge of God's will in Christ.

Not just so that we know lots, and that we'll be known as the church that knows lots about the Bible. But so that we will live lives worthy of Christ. Because that's what matters most.

A while ago, a Christian man I knew of found out that he had an aggressive cancer. And he wrote an email to his young adult children. He said this. Please pray that if it's God's will, he will heal me.

But above all, please pray that I may continue to trust him and live whatever life I have left pleasing him. May I continually give thanks to him for his son and the heavenly inheritance I have to look forward to.

Love, Dad. He was a man whose priorities reflected Paul's or rather God's. And so while he rightly prayed for his health, and it's right to pray for that, he prayed above all for what matters most.

[23 : 55] To keep trusting in God and to keep living a life worthy of the Lord Jesus through whom God has rescued us. That even despite his cancer, he would keep giving God thanks for that.

Let's pray we would do the same. Let's pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we do thank you for this word from Colossians this morning.

We thank you that Paul's prayer reveals in itself something of your will for us. Father, we pray then that you would help us to work hard at being filled with the knowledge of your will.

That you would help us to live lives worthy of you. And that you would reflect these priorities in our own prayers for ourselves and for others.

Father, we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.