Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Gospel Truth
Scripture: Colossians 1:3-8
Code: 2131

As we come to Colossians chapter 1, I want us to look at verses 3 to 8 ... Colossians 1:3 to 8. We're continuing our study of Colossians tonight and this is still kind of in the introduction, this is really very, very common to Paul's letters. He begins with a simple salutation and then moves right in to a thanksgiving which is what he does in verse 3: "We give thanks to God." This is a normal pattern for him. First he greets them and then he thanks God for whatever salient qualities there are about them and then he proceeds into his message.

And what he really gets into here is a discussion of the gospel. You will notice in verse 5, it says: "For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven for which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel." In the word of the truth of the gospel ... it could literally be translated "The message of the truth which is the gospel," or "The message of the truth namely the gospel."

Now, he says that he is thankful for what the gospel has accomplished and he calls the gospel the truth. I often hear people say when they want to emphasize their honesty - "And that's the gospel truth!" Ever hear that? Some people say it who don't even know what the gospel truth is. I wonder where that comes from. Why do people, when they want something to be believed, say - And that's the gospel truth? Why? Because for all time, the gospel has been associated with the truth ... they're synonymous. It is the truth. And that's why people say that. Even unwitting people who don't even know what they mean try to emphasize the veracity of their statements by calling them "The gospel truth."

Well, what is the gospel truth? We who are Christians, we ought to use the term in its right sense.-, When we talk about the gospel truth, what are we saying? Well, the word gospel, as it appears in verse 5, is the word euangelionfrom which we get evangelize, or evangel, it simply, really, is a technical term for "good news." And it originally was a term used in relationship to a battle. We find that in some non-biblical records of the past, there would be occasions when a certain city would fight another city, and in Greece particularly the country was divided into city-states and each city-state would maintain its own army and everything like that. So, they would be in battles. And frequently there would be a great battle and everybody in the city would be waiting to hear news from the battlefield. There weren't any telegraphs so there had to be messengers. All of a sudden, on the horizon, the messenger would appear, returning from the city from the battlefield. He would come flying into the city and usually by his appearance it would become very, very obvious what the news was. If his face was shining, if his spear was decked with a laurel wreath, if his head had a wreath on

it and he was swinging a palm branch then joy would automatically fill the city and he would cry out - We had won. And the word that is used to describe that is euangelion, the good news, the news of victory. And that is indeed the gospel. It is the news of victory.

Jerry, when he was praying, mentioned the fact that people who are saved have been delivered out of the bondage of Satan. They have won the greatestof all victories, he said. That's right.

And the word, then, came to mean the best news, the greatest news, and certainly the gospel is that. The gospel is the word of victory.

Now, what do we know about this gospel? What is it that we have to give to men? What is the truth that we have to share with them? What is the truth of the gospel? Well, let's think about it. What do we know, first of all, about how it is to be delivered? What do we know about the spread of it? Jesus proclaimed it. In Matthew chapter 4 and verse 23, there's a simple statement, and not the only time it's stated, but in Matthew 4:23, Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in the synagogues and preaching the gospel of the Kingdom. Jesus proclaimed it.

In Mark chapter 16, verse 15, it says: "And He said unto them, Go into all the world and preach the gospel." We also are to proclaim it, whatever it is. But, not only are we to proclaim the gospel, we're also to defend it. Philippians 1:17, Paul says: "Knowing that I am set for the defense of the gospel." So, whatever this good news is, Jesus proclaimed it, He said we are to proclaim it and further, we are to defend it.

But, there's more even than that. More than just defending it, we are to labor in it...we are to work at it. Philippians 1:27: "Striving together for the faith of the gospel." This is to be something we set ourselves to accomplish, this is an objective that demands discipline to reach, the communication of the gospel. So, we are to proclaim it, and while we're giving a positive proclamation we are to be able to defend it against the attackers, and we're to work hard at it.

We also are to enjoy the fellowship of the gospel, Philippians 1:5, "For your fellowship in the gospel is cause for thanksgiving," in verse 3 ... "I thank my God," then to verse 5, "for your fellowship in the gospel." We are to enjoy the fellowship that we share in common possessionof the gospel.

Further, Paul told Timothy in II Timothy 1:8, he said this: "Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel." He says here we are to suffer for the gospel. We are to preach it with such boldness and defend it with such strength and firmness and work at it so hard that we wind up even suffering in it.

And then, according to I Corinthians chapter 9, where we have been studying in our morning time together, we are to make sure that we do not hinder it. He says: "Nevertheless we have not used this

liberty, or right, but we bear all things lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ." So, we're not to do anything to hinder it.

In Romans 1:16 we find out that we're never to be ashamed of it. "For I am not ashamed," said Paul, "of ... what?... of the gospel."

Paul told the Thessalonians something interesting. "For our gospel." chapter 1 verse 5, 1 Thessalonians, "came not unto you in word only, but in power and in the Holy Spirit." And here we find out that we have been divinely empowered to preach it.

And so, here is a very important commodity. Jesus proclaimed it. He commanded us to ... to defend it, to labor in it, to fellowship in it, to suffer for it, not to hinder it, never to be ashamed of it and to realize that we've been divinely empowered and equipped to proclaim it.

But, what is the quality of this good news? What is the source of it? Well, what is it like? Well, in Galatians 1:6, it's called "the only good news." The only gospel, and Paul says if anybody comes along and preaches any other gospel, let him ... what? ...let him be cursed.

In Acts 20:24it's called the good news of the grace of God. In Romans 1:9 it's called the good news of His Son. In Romans 15:16 it's called the good news of God. In I Corinthians 9:12 it's called the good news of Christ. In II Corinthians 4:4 it's called the glorious good news. In Ephesians 6:15 it's called the good news of peace. And I love this, in Revelation 14:6 it's called the everlasting gospel, or the everlasting good news. That's its character.

What do we learn from that? It's from the grace of God. It's the good news about His Son. It's the good news about God Himself. It's the glorious good news. It's the good news of peace, and it's the everlasting good news. This is a fantastic commodity. That's a description of its character, of its essence, of its quality.

What is it content? What is it? First Corinthians chapter 15 clearly tells us what it is. First Corinthians 15:1 "Moreover, brethren, I declared unto you the gospel." What is it? Verse 3, "1 delivered unto you, first of all, that which I had received." The Lord gave me the gospel, here it is, "That Christ died for our sins, fulfilling the Scriptures, and that He was buried andthat He rose again the third day, again fulfilling the Scriptures." That's the gospel.

What is it? It's good news. Good news about what? Good news about Jesus Christ. Good news that Jesus Christ died for our sins and that He rose again that we might live. That's good news. It's the only true good news there is. And apart from it there would be no really good news.

Now, this gospel, this tremendous good news, this unbelievable truth is the source of Paul's thanksgiving in Colossians 1:3 to 8. "We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," why? "since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have to all saints, because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel which is come unto you as it is in all the world and brings forth fruit and grows as it does also in you since the day you heard it and knew the grace of God in truth." What really is the cause of his thanksgiving is that they heard the gospel and that the gospel bore fruit in their lives.

Now, he only knows his readers at a distance. He never had met them personally, apparently. But he is in no doubt about their spiritual position. This has been reported to him by Epaphras. Verse 7: "You learned of Epaphras the gospel," and he is the same one who has come to Paul to report how they received it. Epaphras has told Paul of their faith, news of their new life in Christ had been brought by this man who founded the church in Colossae and he was telling them about their tremendous response to the overtures of divine grace and it stimulated in Paul the desire to say thanks.

Now, as I said, this is a usual pattern for Paul. He...he has a salutation, to begin with, and then offers thanks. The only letter where he violates that principle is Galatians and he's so hot and so irate and so furious when he writes, he dispenses with any niceties and just gets right at the rebuke. But every other epistle that Paul wrote has in it thanksgiving for something, he could always find something to say thanks for. And the report of the Colossian Christians was great. They had received the gospel, they had believed the gospel. The gospel had just transformed their lives. And even though there was the imminent danger of heresy, that we'll be studying-in weeks to come, that was just outside waiting to attack the church, generally the believers were doing very well. And Paul praises God and thanks God for that in verses 3 through 8.

Now, let's look at verse 3 and we'll kind of a beginning and then we'll look at specifics about the gospel. We...in saying we, he probably includes Timothy who was with him according to verse 1: "We give thanks to God the Father." Now, we need to kind of construct this in the Greek so you'll understand it. "We give thanks to God the Father," and take the always and put it right there. We give thanks to God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ always in regard to you when praying. He doesn't mean they're always praying, he means that when they do pray they always remember to thank God for the Colossians. He's not saying we're always praying for you, but when we are praying we're always reminding the Lord of our thanks for you. And so, Paul says we are thanking God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ for you ... always when we pray.

That's a beautiful statement there, "God," and there's not really an and in the Greek, "We give thanks to God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." This is expressing the relationship of God the Son and God the Father in incarnation. Even though Jesus said, "I and the Father are one," even though Jesus said in John 14, "If you've seen Me you've seen the Father," it is still true that in the

incarnation, Christ became a son, Christ became a servant and rightly can be identified as the Son. And here we find him saying, in essence, "We give thanks to God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," and simply referring to the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ in His humiliation saw God as His Father. And certainly He did. When He prayed Himself, He prayed - Our Father. And in His incarnation He saw God as the Father.

But lest you think Jesus is taking a role of subordinate...a position here, notice it calls Him the Lord Jesus Christ. And that raises Him back to the level of equality with God Himself. For, He is none other than the Lord of lords.

And so, beginningly then, the Apostle thanks God and by doing that, notice, he raises his commendation above the level of flattery. He is not patting the Colossians on the back; he is giving the glory to the one to whom it was due. Thank You, God, for what You've done in the lives of the Colossians ... thank You for the effect that the gospel has had in their lives.

Now, in this thanks, verses 3 to 8, we see a beautiful picture of the gospel and he points out seven aspects of the gospel. They're very basic**,** all of us knowthem, believe them, all of us, at least, who are believers in Christ. And yet how exciting it is to hear the good news again. Let's look at these seven principles of the gospel.

Number one, in his giving of thanksgiving he presents a broad picture of the essence of the gospel in what he says. First point, the gospel truth is received by faith ... the gospel truth is received by faith. "We give thanks to God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ whenever we pray for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus. Now, this is where it all begins. Paul says - I want to thank God that you believe. I want to thank God that you have faith. I want to thank God that the good news is Jesus Christ and you believe it. You know, there were plenty who didn't. In Galatians chapter 1, verse 7, he said: "Some pervert the gospel." There are plenty of people who don't believe it, they pervert it. There are others who disobey the gospel. They hear it and they may even accept it as the truth, but they do not obey it. Romans 10:16, "They have not all obeyed the gospel."

So, Paul said in Galatians - Some pervert it. And in Romans-Some just disobeyit. Now that's a very dangerous position to occupy. Second Thessalonians chapter 1 and verse 8, says that the Lord will appear from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. So, for someone to pervert or disobey the gospel is to put them in a very, very serious position.

In 1 Peter 4:17 it says: "For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God, and if it first begin at us what shall be the end of them that obey not the gospel of God? If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" What is going to be the fate of somebody who disobeys? But you have believed, you have not perverted it and you have not

disobeyed it you have believed it and I praise God for that. That's the beginning of his thanksgiving, and as a pastor I can say the same

to you. As I look at the congregation of Grace Church, week in and week out, the deepest thanks in my heart goes to God because you have believed and obeyed the gospel. The message of our Lord Jesus Christ it says - "Jesus came into Galilee," Mark 1:14, "preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God." And what did Jesus say? This: "The time is fulfilled, the Kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe the gospel." Jesus said - Repent and believe it. And Paul says I'm so glad you did as God moved on your hearts.

In Acts 15:7, Peter rose up and said: "Men and brethren, you know how that a good while ago God made choice among usthat the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel and believe." The Bible tells us that the gospel is to be believed. That's where it all begins.

What does it mean to believe? What is he saying? How do you become a Christian? How do you receive this good news? Simply by believing. The word, in the Greek, the verb is pisteuo, to believe, to have faith. The word simply means to be persuaded...to be convinced that something is true and to trust it. Faith is believing. It isn't like one little boy said that faith is defined as believe what you know ain't so, that isn't faith. Faith is based on evidence. Faith is based on fact.

Look at Hebrews 11, and this is, I think, a helpful passage and it's the only biblical definition of faith that we really have spelled out. Hebrews 11:1 "Faith," and this is most interesting, "is the substance of things hoped for." Faith is the substance of things hoped for. In other words, you...you hope for something and as you hope for something that is unseen, your faith gives it present reality. Faith is not wistful longing, it is knowing with absolute authority and absolute certainty, it is taking something you can't see that seems way out there and giving it substance.

You say - What do you mean by that? Well, I always go back to the same illustration, because I have occasion to drive a lot, and I'm sure you do too, and I often drive on roads that I've never driven on before cause I'm going to some church or some camp somewhere. And I'm always amazed at myself because it doesn't matter where I am, I will just go along, sailing along in the dark ... it could be even a foggy night and I'm rolling along, minding my own business, haven't got the faintest idea what's around the bend. For all that I really know, I could drop off a 500 foot, cliff and the road could just end and a little sign say - "Bye-bye," you know? I have no knowledge of anybody who made the roads. I have no insight on where the road is going. There could be a 45 foot-thick concrete wall right in the middle of my lane, for all I know. So many times when I drive the freeways, you ever see those bridges that just go up and stop? Huh? I think about those. You know, I mean, somebody puts the little thing in the wrong place and off we all go. You drive across bridges assuming that there's not going to be one little 20 foot gap.

Well, what you're doing is you can't see something but your confidence that what you can't see is going to be all right gives you present substance...even when you can't see it. That's faith. You say - Well, I know enough about people who build the highways, this...you know, that's...nobody's going to do that. Or, you go into a restaurant you've never eaten in. Can you believe what we do? We go into places we've never eaten in and we just eat that stuff. We don't know who made it, most of the time we're not too sure what it is. They cover it up. But you eat it. Why? Because faith... faith in what ... I don't know...but faith in something unseen gives you present reality that you can grab.

You say - Well, I mean, there's somebody going around checking these restaurants, isn't there? Now, when you travel abroad you don't have that faith because there is no evidence and you have had experience to prove that very fact. Evidence, elenchosin Greek...means conviction, faith is conviction about something you can't see based on something you believe or know. Faith actualizes into reality an unseen truth and commits a life to it.

I always go back to Noah. To me he's incredible. I mean, God said - Noah, it's going to rain. And, I know the first thing Noah did was try to visualize rain because it never had rained ever in the history of the world. Rain??? What is rain? It's water falling out of the sky. Oh. And I know he tried to visualize rain and then he tried to visualize a flood, and he believed God and so that unseen reality got immediate substance in his mind.

But notice, faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. He became convicted and his faith actualized a momentary action and he built a ship in the desert. And that, to me, is unbelievable. You know how long it took him to build it? One hundred and twenty years. As I've said, a guy going out and ordering thelumber, but 120 years laterhe's still punching the pegs in? It's amazing.

But we do that. We trust the signs we see on the highway. There are reasons. There is enough evidence so that we can actualize into present reality an unseen thing. And that's precisely what we have with faith in God. God says - Jesus Christ can transform your life. Jesus Christ died and rose again. We haven't seen that. We haven't verified that with our eyes, but there is enough biblical evidence, there is enough testimony from the people who have had their lives transformed for me to take that unseen truth and actualize it as a reality right now. That's believing. That's how you get saved. That's how you receive the gospel ... by actualizing the unseen into the present.

You say - Well, what do you have to believe? I hear people say -..... they believe. And there was a song, "I believe for every drop of rain, a flower grows." Well, you're wrong. You could never prove that - for every drop there's one flower. You don't believe anything very intelligent. "I believe that somewhere in the dark, a candle glows." What a stupid line. Who cares? Right? Sure, there are people going around saying - I believe ... I believe. You believe what?

Well, what does He say in verse 4, "Since we heard of your faith in ... what? ...in Christ Jesus." The relationship between faith and Christ Jesus is the relationship that saves.

In Acts 16:31, it says: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." It uses the preposition epi which suggests resting on a foundation. In Acts 20:21, it says: "Believe toward the Lord Jesus Christ," which uses eis which means to find a dwelling place in, to go into, to abide in, to find a home. And here it says - "Have faith in Christ," I as if we had come to a place of security and anchor. And so, our faith in Christ is like resting on a foundation, finding a home, putting out an anchor. And salvation comes to us in human experience simply by believing. That's the simplicity of it, that's the beauty of it. John 1:12: "As many as received Him to them gave He power to become the children of God even to them that ... what? ...believe on His name." to believe on His name. That's the beginning of the gospel. And that's all there is to it.

Spurgeon use to tell a story about two men in a boat. They were caught in a very, very severe rapids and they were going to a place where there was a waterfall and even worse rapids and there was really no way, if they ever hit those rapids, that they would ever live. And they began to struggle for their lives. And as they were carried swiftly down stream, they were carried toward the perilous rocks and the falls and some men on the shore saw them and tried to save the two men and they threw a rope out. By this time the men had fallen out of the little boat, were struggling in the current. One man caught the rope and was saved. At the same instant, said Spurgeon, the other man who could have seized the rope, in the panic of the moment, grabbed onto a log that was floating by and that was a fatal mistake. One man was drawn to the shore because he had a connection with the people on the land. The other clinging to a log was carried down through the rapids and never found again.

Now, yousee, what faith does is faith gives you a connection with the shore. Faith gives you a connection to Jesus Christ. Good worksis grabbing a log. It doesn't go anywhere but along with you to your doom. And Paul says, first of all, Colossians, I want to thank God that you got the rope, not a log.

All right, gospel truth is received by faith. Secondly, the gospel truth results in love. That's in verse 4, "Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love which you have to all the saints." Now, we could talk so much about this. I could go on and on about this because this is one of my favorite subjects, but I'm going to resist the inclination.... almost said temptation but it certainly couldn't be a temptation to talk about that. He says the result of it has been the love you have to all the saints.

Now, Galatians 5:6 says: "Faith works by love." Where there's true faith there's going to be love. If you truly believe in Christ, you're truly His child; you're going to love your brother. I mean, that's just there. It is inevitable that where there is a healthy faith there will be a true love for the brothers. Faith does not lead to isolation. It is faith in Christ, in a sense that purges us of selfishness and gives a new

perspective toward others. And our love is a reflection of His love for us.

I love what he says here, and I think this is very practical. "Since we heard of your love to all the saints." Isn't that something? It was a non-selective love. They loved everybody. Beautiful concept. Philippians chapter 2, verse 2, "Fulfill my joy that you be like-minded, having the same love." Now, what he means by that is loving everybody the same ... loving everybody the same. Yes, the gospel truth will result in love.

Listen to this, the same magnet, who is Jesus Christ, attracts all the sinners to Himself is also in the process attracting all the sinners to each other. That's basic.

Look at verse 8. He says, basically, the same truth, talking about Epaphras, "Who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit." One of the characteristics of a Christian is love for his brother. "A new commandment I give you," said Jesus, "that you love one another." And later on He said, "I'm going to give you a capacity to go with the commandment." Romans 5:5, "The love of God will be shed abroad ... where? ...in your heart." So, there was a new commandment and there was a new capacity to fulfill that commandment.

In I Peter 1 he talks about the capacity to love fervently. This is good news. It's good news to know that we can love each other because that's something the world really doesn't understand.

So, there are two crucial sides to the Christian life. One is faith, the other is love. What is that saying? One is sound doctrine, the other is experiential love. We're saved by faith. We're saved to love. And love toward each other, people, simply means the act of self-sacrificing service toward one another. I am most loving to you, as I've shared with you so many times, when I will sacrifice myself to meet your need...when I will be diligent in setting aside things that I might choose to do in order to study as hard as I can to teach you the things that can change your life. That's the most...that's the most magnanimous act of love I can offer you. Not to walk up and put my arm around you and squeeze you and say Oh, I love you, my brot ... you know, that's fine.

But, I can't get around to everybody and if I start doing that my wife will get very upset anyway. But, the way I can love you best and the way that I can show my love to you most clearly and obviously is to invest all that I am and all that I have in your spiritual growth. Right? And the way you can best show your love to me is to respond by doing everything you can do to be all that God wants you to be and minister to me in anyway you're able.' And that's what he's talking about. He's not talking about everybody going around with some kind of earthly sentiment toward each other, that will never happen. But he's talking about us caring enough to do what God has given us to do in responsibility to meet one another's needs. And I always go back to John 13 where it says simply there that Jesus loved His disciples to perfection and He showed it immediately after that by washing their feet. And that's precisely what He said in 13:34, where He said: "Now a new commandment I give you that you

love one another as I have loved you." How had He just loved them? By washing their feet. God doesn't want you to feel sentimental; He wants you to minister to each other. God isn't concerned about attitude in regard to saying - Well, I love so-and-so and so forth, I'm so attracted to them, I'll serve them. He's more concerned about why you're not serving somebody else who has a greater need even though you don't have any emotional attachment, cause service is the issue.

So, our faith is more than a conviction of the mind, it is the overflow of the heart, it is sound doctrine and it is love. And we have the commandment to love and the new capacity as the Spirit of God has poured His love in us.

Third thing, and we skipped an awful lot of things that we need to say about that, third thing, the gospel truth not only is received by faith and results in love but it rests in hope. The gospel truth rests in hope. And of course, as you know, faith, love and hope are the great triad of Christian virtues, right?

First Corinthians 13:13, "And now abides faith, hope and love and the greatest of these is love." And here they are again.

Look at verse 5: "For the hopewhich is laid up for you in heaven of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel." I just thank God not only for your faith, but I thank God for the love that results and I thank God for the hope that you have.

What hope is this? "It's laid up for you in heaven." The verb means reserved, it's the divine-lay-away-plan. Peter calls it, as we mentioned this morning in I Peter 1:4, "An inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you." We have a laid-away inheritance in heaven...what a fantastic truth.

In Hebrews chapter 6, 1 think it's verses 18 and 19, a similar statement: "That by two immutable things," and that has to do with God's promise and God's oath, both those two things, "in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation," or strong hope, a strong comfort, strong confidence, "who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us." Which hope? Listen: "We have as an anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast which enters into that within the veil."

What he's saying is that the Christian's got a long, long, long, long chain and on the end of it is an anchor and our anchor has been thrown into the holy of holies and hooked on the seat of the throne of God, and we're anchored within the veil. That's our hope. What a fantastic reality. Apparently, this hope even gives rise to our love to the saints as it says in the manuscripts clearly, verse 5: Because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven." This is the thing that can spawn our love.

When I think about our hope, it really excites me. Think about it this way. God established our hope by making us sons. Listen to that. God established our hope by making us sons. Listen to I John 3:1, "Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us that we should be called the children of God." He established our hope by making us sons. And you want to hear something exciting? He will fulfill our hope by making us like His Son ... verse 2, 1 John 3: "Beloved, now are we the children of God but it doesn't yet appear what we shall be but we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him for we shall what?... see Him as He is." God established our hope by making us sons and fulfills our hope by making us like His Son.

What a hope! What a fantastic hope! The gospel gives us love for one another and hope for eternity. Faith and hope are inseparably linked. We believe and so we hope.

You know, onething that the Christian does just to illustrate this conceptof hope is the Christian sacrifices the present on the basis of the future. You know, humanly speaking, that's not the way we are. You ever notice that with your children? You ever try to tell your little eight-year-old kid - No, you can't do that this Saturday, but you can do it three Saturdays from now. But I don't want it three Saturdays ... You know, I grew up and my dad always use to say to me, When are you going to learn, Johnny ... not to sacrifice the future on the altar of the immediate?

You know, until I was 16 1 didn't even know what he was talking about. When are you going to learn not to sacrifice the future on the altar of the immediate.... I can hear him saying it ... all over the house. "Irene, when is the kid going to learn not to sacrifice..." you know..."the future on the altar of the immediate." Everything has got to be now... can't wait.

Well, the Christian looks at it all the other way. Paul says in Romans 8:18, "The sufferings of this life are not ... what? ...worthy to be compared with ... what? ...with the glory which shall be ours." The Christian is willing to sacrifice the present on the altar of the future. I'm going to say - Hey, Lord, strip me, make me naked and poor and destitute just as long as I can have an eternal inheritance. Are you? If you're not, you're in bad shape, you've got all your values twisted. But the average man in the world is saying - Give me now. The Christian, friends, is anti-existential... don't want it now, I want it later. Buy now--pay later - that's the world. The Christian says - I'll pay now and get it later. That's abnormal.

You say - What brings that? Hope ... an incredible confidence borne out of faith that there's something in the future that's far better than anything in the present. Let me give you an illustration Moses ... "By faith," Hebrews 11:24, "By faith, Moses, when he was come to years refused to be called the son of Pharoah's daughter." Listen, being the son of Pharoah's daughter was a big deal. I mean, he was big cheese in the land. Pharoah was loaded. Pharoah was oneof the richest men in the world and Moses in his position had all of it. I mean, he had everything there was. But he didn't want

to be called the son of Pharoah's daughter, he was willing to say no to everything that he had. Moses was not an existentialist. He didn't want to grab the moment and get all the gusto he could get out of it; he was willing to sacrifice the moment for the future. And so it says he chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.

You see? I mean, he was saying Hey, I don't care about the moment, what I care about is the forever. And you know, Christian$ are like that. They don't get too caught up in the moment because they're too concerned about the forever. Look at the way we serve the Lord. We serve the Lord making sacrifices here in order to lay treasure in heaven, right? We serve the Lord here, setting aside our own prerogatives and obeying His will and disciplining ourselves like Paul did in order to win an incorruptible crown that we can place at His feet in eternity. We're eternally minded, we're citizens of another world. And our treasure's being laid up there. It says: Moses didn't want what was the now, Moses wanted what was the future and was willing to pay a terrible price. And you remember what he did, instead of maintaining his position as Pharoah's daughter, he went out and he took over the ... he took, really, the role of a defender of the abused Israelites and he slew one of Pharoah's own guards. And then it all began and he had to be identified with that people. And he wound up a poor sheepherder over taking care of the flock of Jethro.

Why did he feel that way? Verse 26: "Because he believed that the reproach of Christ was greater riches than the treasures in Egypt." Watch "Because he had respect unto the recompense of the reward." He believed that in suffering now God will reward him later. And it says it in verse 27: "By faith he forsook Egypt." Why? "Because as seeing Him who is ... what?...invisible." He was able, by faith, to actualize the invisible God and say -I'm willing to sacrifice the present on the altar of the future. That's Christian living. That's Christian living. I mean, our faith gives future hope. He endured as seeing Him who is invisible ... fantastic reality. Here we are as Christians and people say - Boy, you Christians are really something, you know, pie in the sky, by and by, that's all you ever talk about. Yeah, and I'm like Paul who said to Titus, - I just have one thing in mind, looking for that blessed hope, right? Even the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ. That's what I'm looking for. And my hope, based on my faith, actualizes an unseen event into the moment and I can live by it.

So, back to Colossians, I got kind of away from it. What he says is I thank God for your faith. I thank God for your love. I thank God for the hope which is laid up for you in heaven in which you heard before when the gospel came to you. The gospel gives us faith, love, hope, all those tremendous things.And my hope is this, people, here it is, I'll give it to you in a nutshell, my hope is this that it is better to stake my life on God's truth and believe in it than to stake my life on what I can see. That's my hope. That's because I have evidence to be convinced, that it's true.

A fourth, the gospel truth is received by faith, results in love, rests in hope, fourth--the gospel truth reaches the world, verse 6. This is great: "Which is come unto you as it is in all the world." The gospel

truth reaches the world. Do you know something? This is a super statement. It has such implications in Colossians that you can just go right by it and not catch them, it's so vague, but listen to this: he's saying the gospel is not just one more mystery religion of the Roman Empire. The gospel is not just one more local sect ... because the Colossians were getting bombed by these local sects, these forms of the mystery religion that we went into discussion on last time, and he's saying - Hey, people, the gospel is for the world. It's the same anywhere it goes. It's not merely an addition to the cults of the cities of Asia Minor, it's the true good news and it's the true good news for the whole world.

Romans 1:8, first, Paul says to the Romans: "I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world." And then in verse 16 he says, "And it is the gospel of salvation to everyone that believes, everyone...everyone ... Jew first and also to the Gentile."

In Romans chapter 10 on this same concept of the gospel going into all the world, he says: "But I say, Have they not heard? Yes, verily, their sound went into all the earth and their words to the ends of the world."

First Thessalonians chapter 1 verse 8: "For from you sounded out the Word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place, your faith toward God is spread abroad."

In John, Jesus said: "I am the light of ... what?...the world. He that cometh unto Me shall not walk in darkness." The gospel is to go to the world. Jesus in John 15, look at 26: "When the Comforter is come whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He shall testify of Me and you also shall bear witness."

Now, here He says to the disciples - You are going to be My witnesses. And later on you well know what He said and it's recorded at the end of Mark and the end of Matthew, He said: "Go into all the ... what?...the world." The gospel is not a local sect, the gospel is for the world. Its diffusion into the Roman Empire was only an indication of its world-wide scope and intent.

And, I love what it says in Colossians, chapter 1 verse 6, because of the way it says it: "Which is come unto you as in all the world." You have two things there - you have the gospel being personal and the gospel being universal, just a beautiful contrast. It's come unto you. In other words, the gospel is that personal, it can belong to you and yet it is that universal that it can be told to the world. I think of my relation to Jesus Christ in a very personal way, do you? I think of my salvation as a very, very personal thing, just myself and the Lord, He redeemed me. I think of Him as my Saviour. I don't think - Well, Lord, let's see, it's Tuesday, can I get an appointment? Or, - Do you mind if I interrupt You? I think of the Lord as totally mine and yet, at the same time, the gospel belongs to the world. Heresies, you see, are ethnic, truth is catholic, in the...in a true sense of catholic which means universal. Heresies are ethnic, they're localized, they're culturalized... truth speeds its way beyond

culture and beyond borders of countries and extends to the world...truth is truth in its own identity.

Listen to Revelation 7:9, and in here it tells us what's going to happen in the tribulation: "I beheld, and lo, a great multitude which no man could number." Now listen, - where did they come from? "Of all nations and kindreds and peoples and tongues, stood before the throne and the Lamb, clothed in white robes and palms in their hands and cried with a loud voice saying, Salvation to our God who sits on the throne and unto the Lamb." Who was there? People from all nations and all kindreds and all peoples and all tongues. How exciting. We see it happen today as the gospel spreads across the world. The grace of God is really extending to all men. The gospel calls all men every- where to ... what?...repent. And in Matthew chapter 24, sometime before the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, before He returns, it says in 14: "And the gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations and then shall the end come." Sometime during the tribulation period, the gospel is going to reach the world, the ends of the world. Yes, the gospel is received by faith, results in love, rests in hope and reaches the world. It's a message we can give to anybody in any culture, and the church is made up of people from all over the world.

Fifth, the gospel truth reproduces fruit. Look at verse 6 again. "And," he says, "it brings forth fruit and grows." Your Bible may not say, **"**and grows," butthe best manuscripts we have indicate that it should say that. "Brings forth fruit and grows," or, "and spreads -as it does also in you since the day you heard it and knew of the grace of God in truth." He says it is bearing fruit and growing. This is really the heart of the gospel, it is a living thing. The Word of God is alive and powerful, it is productive. Divine energy produces fruit. The gospel is like an inward energy that spreads like the mustard seed becoming a tree. It's alive and when it falls into the divinely prepared heart it bears fruit. It not only works within, not only bearing fruit within but it spreads, and those are the two ideas, The first idea of bearing fruit has an inward concept, the second is a spreading thing. The gospel gets into somebody and grows and he begins to mature and then it spreads and the church begins to grow. So, you have internal spiritual transformation and you have external growth in the church.

You see that in the book of Acts as the early church began to grow, you'll find that they grew internally, they grew inwardly, they grew spiritually in their hearts, and out of that came the growth of the church. For example, in Acts 9:31, the churches were resting in Judea and Galilee and Samaria and were being built up, edified, and they were walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit were multiplied. So, you have that fruit-bearing on the inside and that spreading on the outside.

Again, in chapter 12 of Acts, I think it's verse 24, "The Word of God grew." In other words, the Word of God was producing in the lives of the people, "And it multiplied." And then it was spreading so that others were being saved. Those two concepts are repeated many places in the books of Acts as we see the church moving and growing in exciting ways.

First Thessalonians 1:8 and 9, 1 think is the same idea, it says: "From you sounded out the Word of the Lord and your faith went everywhere." Prior to that, in verse 6, "You became followers of us and of the Lord." So, first there is that internal spiritual growth and then boom the sound goes out. And I believe that these two things are the result of the gospel and I think that's what Paul is saying. The gospel comes into a life, the good news is not merely a system of ethics, it is not merely a code of behavior, it is a transforming power, it begins to produce fruit in a life and then it begins to spread to many other lives ... new converts. I really believe that he's talking about converts here...as it does, he says, in you since the day that you heard. You've grown spiritually and your church has grown and people have been added.

So, the gospel not only received by faith, results in love, rests in hope, reaches the world, reproduces fruit - sixth, and we'll hurry the last couple, the gospel truth is rooted in grace. The gospel truth is rooted in grace. Look at the end of verse 6, "Since the day you heard it andknew the grace of God in truth." He just can't get-through a paragraph here, in fact, this whole section from 3 to 8 is one sentence, he can't even get through one sentence here without throwing grace in because grace is at the heart of the gospel. All other religions are based on the assumption that you do something to earn something. All other religions are based on the fact that a man can, by his own works, commend himself to God. He can earn salvation by humaneffort mixed with a certain degree of divine grace. But Paul is always, forever, laying the axe to the root of legalism. He is always chopping at the tree of works and he's going to really chop it down in chapter 2, verses 19 and following, when we get there in Colossians, but for now he just begins to take a whack at it. God is freely, sovereignly, merciful and forgiving, due to nothing we have done but His own grace, so he calls it the grace of God in truth.

Grace is simply God giving us what we do not deserve. In Acts chapter 11, just a couple of Scriptures to elucidate this, verse 18 says: "When they heard these things they held their peace," they heard the report of Peter about Cornelius and other Gentiles being saved, "they held their peace and glorified God saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life." They recognized that repentance unto eternal life was a gift of God and they said God has given this to the Gentiles, it's a gift.

Lydia in Acts 16:14, it says: "A certain woman named Lydia, seller of purple of the city of Thyatira, who worshipped God, heard us whose heart the Lord opened...whose heart the Lord opened." Salvation is a gracious act on God's part.

In Acts chapter 26, verse 17, Paul was told by the Lord that he was going to be an Apostle and a minister, delivering...He says: "Delivering thee from the people and from the Gentiles unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes and to turn them from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God that they may receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance." God says - Paul, I've got a job for you to do, I've got some people to redeem and you're the man that's going to be the humanagent. God

not only chose the people but God chose the instrument to reach the people.

And so, he's simply saying it's all of grace, we don't deserve anything. Listen to II Thessalonians 2:13: "We are bound to give thanks always to God for you," whenever I ... you know, whenever anybody is saved I don't say - 0 thank you, you wonderful brilliant person that you would choose to be saved...oh, what a marvel you we. No. We are bound to give thanks to God for you, brethren. Why? "Because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth unto which He called you by our gospel to the obtaining of the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ." It's all His act, it's all His grace. Just keep that in mind.

In Romans chapter 4, it says: What did Abraham do to gain his salvation? He didn't do anything ... absolutely nothing.

So, Paul says- Another thing about the gospel, it's by faith, results in love, rests in hope, reaches the world, reproduces fruit and is rooted in grace. And lastly, and this gets it right down to us, listen. 'The gospel truth is reported by men ... it's reported by men. Look at verse 7 and 8: "As you also learned of Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is for us, not you, who is for us a fellow diakonos, servant, of Christ who has declared to us your love in the Spirit." Here he introduces Epaphras and he's thankful to Epaphras. You know why? Because somebody had to take the gospel to the Colossians and Epaphras had done it. "As you also learned from Epaphras."

What did you learn from Epaphras? The grace of God in truth, the gospel. He's the one that gave it to you. They had heard the gospel from a man ... Epaphras, our beloved, fellow slave, I love that. See that word, our dear fellow servant? That's sundoulos, our fellow slave, our faithful minister. I'm so thankful to God for Epaphras. Listen, the gospel truth is reported by men.

There's got to be a human channel. That's us. "You shall receive power after the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you shall be My...what?...witness." We are His witness, that's us. To the disciples He said: You go out and testify of Me.

In Romans chapter 10, just listen to this, this puts it as strongly as we can: "How then shall they call on Him whom they have not believed? How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard and how shall they hear without a ... what? ...preacher?" That's pretty clear. First Corinthians 1:21: "In the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God," listen, "it pleased God by the foolishness of ... what? ... preaching to save them that believed." God wants human agents. This glorious gospel and all that God has done funnels down to a dependence on men and if you're not going to do it, God will find somebody to do it. But, oh, what a joy to be a part of it. This is the gospel and Paul thanks God for it and I thank God for it because I don't know what my life would be like without it. And God help me, to be selfless enough to say - If it's done so much for me, the least I can do is share it with somebody else, right?

One of the most interesting myths, and I love to read ancient myths, I close with this, one of the most interesting myths is that which relates to Orion, the son of Jupiter. Orion was a mighty hunter. Orion was a giant and even gods fall in love and he fell in love with Maropi. She was the daughter of the king of Cheos. And so, Orion went to Cheos and he says - I want your daughter to be my wife. Now, Cheos dawdled around, checking out the scene if there might be somebody better, and so Orion thought - I better do some things to show him what I am. So, he did some super, super exhibitions of power. One thing he did was he took a whole island and cleared it of all its wild beasts and dragged them all in and presented them to his beloved. What a mess! And still the father was unimpressed. So, he was very, very concerned and he was enraged by the indifference of the father so he decided to really act on his own and he sought his bride by violence and the father got upset. And one night Orion got drunk and the father put his eyes out and cast him into the sea to die.

Well, as the legend goes, an oracle, or a medium, or whatever, came to him and said - If you go and catch the rays of the morning sun and let them burn their way into your eyes, you'll receive your sight again. And he did and he gained his sight. He was afterwards killed by Diana, but in honor of him he was placed among the constellations and we have the constellation Orion.

Dr. Biederwolf wrote, in response to that story, this comment and I thought it was beautiful:

"O my brother, those of us who have been called out of darkness into His marvelous light know what it is to have the inner vision blinded by the god of this world. To have eyes that see not, to sit in appalling darkness with all the glorious truths and divine realities in general lost to sight. But there is one who is full of light, of pity and love and you can, if you will, turn your blind face toward heaven until the Son of righteousness arises with healing in His wings, until He who looses the bands of Orion shines on you and turns the shadow of death into the brightness of the morning light." That's the gospel. Let's pray.

Father, I thank You for that. I thank You that I was blind but now I see. 0 God, may I be willing to take the message of sight to somebody else. May I be like that oracle who said to Orion - there is a healing in the Son, may I say that. I pray that if there's anyone here tonight who has never gazed into the blazing light of the Son of God that this might be that very special, that one night when they would gaze at Him and be transformed. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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