

A Detailed Description

(Colossians 1:1-8)

(preached 3/6/16; Sunday AM)

Introduction

On my 15th birthday, I remember headed to the DMV to get my driver's permit...

I walked over to a machine where the driving test was given...

I answered 30 questions, just missing a couple of them...

I then walked over to the counter, where a woman took my picture, gave me a license, and told me congratulations.

I looked at her and said, "what else do I need to do before I can drive."

She said, "That's it, baby. Be safe." Then she yelled, "Next!"

As I was walking out, I was thinking "that was too easy. There has got to be something more I need to do to be able to sit behind the wheel and drive."

But the truth is that getting enough of those 30 question correct was sufficient for me getting my license and getting behind the wheel.

Scary thought, right?

Well when it comes to Christianity, many people both saved and unsaved alike often struggle with the idea of how simple Christianity seems...

“All that God requires to be right with him is to repent of your sins and believe in Him??” is what a lot of people say with a hint of unbelief...

“That’s it??!?”

It is almost like some people want a more complicated way to get to God.

And as a result, incredibly complex false religions have popped up throughout history....

Muslims have to keep the 5 pillars of their religion...

Prayer, Fasting, Trip to Mecca, giving to the Poor, and a reciting of their religious creed.

Mormons have a complicated system of how a person ranks in their church...

Jehovahs Witnesses have a complex of how to get to differing levels of heaven...

The Jews had even developed an elaborate system of laws to keep in order to be right with God...

And on and on false religions go in pursuit of a more complicated way to God than simple repentance and faith in Christ to save you...

People seem to be overly concerned with the simplicity and sufficiency of Jesus Christ...

I even hear it from people in the church at times who get wrapped in knowledge, thinking that God will reward them greater for what they know about the Bible..

You even see people in the church who get so wrapped up in man made rules thinking that following the rules better will get them a better seat in heaven...

For whatever reason it is, people have a desire to make salvation more complex than how it is described in the Bible...

And in the process, they get confused and lead others into confusion as well...

God is clear in the Scriptures....

A person is saved when they turn from their sinful life while turning to trust in the truth that Jesus saves.

That is the clear message of salvation and what it means to be saved, but ever since that message was preached, people have sought to add to it and confuse people about it...

False religions come from Satanic influence...

Satan has always sought to steer people away from the simple truth of salvation...

And he uses all sorts of means to do that...

For some, Satan keeps people from salvation by making their sin more appealing...

For some, Satan makes the price tag of leaving sinful relationships behind too high for people to get saved...

For others, Satan just simply needs to complicate the simplicity of the gospel by making them think that salvation is not understandable...

Or requires more than just repentance in Christ...

So, he often seeks to add on good works or even maybe special knowledge to the requirements of being saved...

In the process, people gets confused and frustrated and remain in their sin...

Well, that was the problem in the church at Colossae...

And that became the reason that Paul wrote a letter to that church under the inspiration of God...

To correct people in the church who were trying to add things to the gospel message...

Jesus came to save people from their sins...

Repent and believe in Him in order to be saved had become a message that just seemed to simple for the people in the church at Colossae...

However, Paul is going to write to remind them that Jesus is sufficient to save...

And repentance and faith in Him are what the Lord requires to be saved....

Nothing more and nothing less...

That is going to be the point of this letter that we will look at over the next few months...

The gospel of Jesus Christ is brilliant even if it is simple.

The person of Jesus Christ is supreme even if He seems meek and plain.

And if He is supreme, our entire lives need to fall in line with his commands.

Now, let's bring our minds up to speed on the context of the book of Colossians...

For the past year and a half, we have been living in 30-33 AD as Jesus ministered all over Israel...

In the book of Colossians, we find ourselves in 60-62 AD, which is 30 years later than what we read about in the book of Mark.

In those 30 years, a lot of things have occurred..

After Jesus ascended back to heaven, the disciples followed his command to spread the gospel all over the world..

And though it starts small in and around Israel, the good news of salvation begins to go all over the known world..

Though God used many people to spread the gospel in the early days of the church, nobody was used more than Paul.

We miss most of the story of the spread of the gospel as we skip over the book of Acts,

But one person we must grab from the book of Acts is Saul of Tarsus, who became the apostle Paul who wrote much of the NT...

After Saul was radically converted in the mid 30s AD, he began to help the message of salvation leave the borders of Israel and go all over the world...

Here is a map of all the places that Paul and others on his team took the gospel...

If we zoom in on that map, we will find the city of Colossae which is located in modern day Turkey..

Now from what we know, Paul never stopped in Colossae and started a church there..

But Paul did stay for 3 years in Ephesus, and people would come to Ephesus to hear Paul preach and then take that message back to their towns...

And one of the men who came to hear Paul preach in Ephesus was a man named Epaphras...

After he heard the message of salvation preached in Ephesus, he went back to Colossae and started a church there...

The area in an around Colossae was perfect for farming and many people did that for a living..

But Colossae was best known for being situated near the main road through the region...

People walking from east to west or even north to south would stop in Colossae...

So the city was a true melting pot of people...

Most were Gentiles but there were also some Jews who had settled there as well...

However, when Epaphras came back with the gospel of Jesus Christ, enough people in Colossae believed it to start a church there...

Unfortunately, the church there began to be influenced by two dangerous errors...

One error taught in Colossae was the idea that a special higher knowledge above the Scriptures was needed for salvation...

The other error taught in Colossae was that faith alone was not enough for salvation...

That believers also needed to follow the strict diet laws of the OT, obey the Jewish sabbath and festivals, and keep the OT law.

Such teaching stood in contrast to the gospel of Jesus Christ...

In fact, it was an insult to Jesus because it said that Jesus + something was needed to be saved...

Jesus + higher knowledge or Jesus + rules...

Therefore, Epaphras went to Paul and asked him to clarify the gospel and help him get the church back on track...

At the time that Paul wrote this, he was under house arrest in Rome...

Now, this letter that we will look at over the next few months is simply written to the church there to keep them thinking clearly about the gospel...

They didn't need special knowledge above the Scriptures added to Jesus to be saved...

They didn't need to follow special rules above the Scripture added to Jesus to be saved.

They simply needed to trust in the perfect Savior...

Paul was simply going to tell them that Jesus was enough to save them, but He was also enough to change them from hater of God to lover of God...

And he is going to do this in two parts in his letter to them....

First, he is going to remind them of the truth of the gospel and the truth of Christ in the first two chapters and then he is going to tell them how to live in light of that truth...

Now, Paul is the master of this when he writes his letters to the churches...

He usually starts with truth and ends with instruction on how to live..

We all do this as parents as well...

Let's say our kid misbehaves...

We sit them down and we start with the truth..

That is not how we raised you.

You know that is not what we taught you to do.

Now, this is what we expect you to do next time this happens..

That is good parenting, and that is how Paul parents the churches to which he writes...

Give them the truth and then tell them how to live in light of that truth...

Paul is going to start with the truth of the gospel and the truth of who Jesus is...

And he going to end Colossians with practical instructions on how that changes those who call themselves Christians..

We are going to learn how to put off sin that seems to repeat itself in our lives.

We are going to learn how to forgive others and overlook people who offend us.

We are going to learn how to be better wives, husbands, parents, employees, and employers...

We are going to learn why prayer is important and how to pray.

We are going to learn how to talk to others..

All of that awaits us in Colossians, and the truth is that we need instruction in how to live in light of who Jesus is in our lives..

This morning, let's just spend our remaining time in the first 8 verses that open this book...

Paul is chained to a Roman soldier...

Epaphras, the pastor of the Colossians church is there by his side along with Timothy and others, and he sits down to write this letter to the Colossians...

God is inspiring every word of it, and the Spirit is carrying Paul's pen through every letter of every word..

And let us benefit from it now almost 2000 years later...

I have broken these first 8 verses into 3 parts...

Let me read this passage, and then we will take a brief look at these first 8 verses...

***1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ [a]by the will of God, and Timothy [b]our brother,
2 To the [c]saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.***

3 We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, 4 since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have [d]for all the [e]saints; 5 because of the hope laid up for you in [f]heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, [g]the gospel 6 which has come to you, just as [h]in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and [i]increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it and [j]understood the grace of God in truth; 7 just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf, 8 and he also informed us of your love in the Spirit.

Let's begin our look in the first two verses of this book

In those two verses, we find....

I. A Description of the Letter (1-2)

Paul begins the letter like he does most of his letter with a brief greeting...

He identifies himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ, which is true..

You say, “well, he wasn’t with Jesus in ministry like the 12 other apostles.”

That is true but he did see the resurrected Jesus face to face and was actually taught by Jesus shortly after he was converted to faith in Him.

Paul also identifies Timothy as well.

Though Paul was under arrest, he had his own house and Timothy and others were allowed to come and visit.

This doesn’t mean that Timothy helped write the letter; it simply means that Timothy was with him when it was written...

Timothy was Paul’s son in the faith.

Someone that Paul had mentored and cared deeply for.

And then Paul simply identifies the audience of this letter..

The faithful saints in Colossae..

Saints is simply a word that means people who are set apart for God.

This is the New Testament term for those who have come to faith in Jesus Christ..

I know it is very common and you hear Christians describe themselves as a old sinner saved by grace..

And I understand that, and it is true...

However, the NT never calls a believer a sinner...

They are always referred to as saints..

And yes, the ruined the term saint has been ruined by the Roman Catholics who have a step by step process of becoming a saint....

That is clearly not the biblical idea of a saint..

Saints are simply people who have repented of their sin and put their faith and trust in Christ to save them...

And that is who Paul was writing to in the church at Colossae...

And then in verse 3, he moves from a description of his letter to....

II. A Description of the Saved (3-5a)

Paul is writing to the saints at Colossae, but how does he know they are saved people...

Most likely, he had never visited there.

However, Epaphras was there with him and he had brought a report of what the church was like...

And from that description, Paul gave thanks to God for them...

In Paul's mind, the people in the church of Colossae were saved and he offers three very important words as evidence of their salvation in verses 4-5...

First of all, Paul considers them saved because of their faith...

And that is true...

People who are saved have faith...

In other word, they believe the gospel...

Hebrews 11:1 describes faith like this...

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Contrary to what you may think, faith and belief are not these states of mind where you need to concentrate harder to see it...

Faith and belief are based on evidence and faith and belief come with certainty and authority...

Let me give you a quick look...

You are in a plane that is going to crash.

The pilot climbs to the back of the plane, hands you a parachute, tells you that it works and commands you to put it on and jump out.

You can't see the parachute.

All you see is a backpack.

You haven't used a parachute before.

But the authority of the pilot's word causes you to strap it on and jump out..

You don't have to sit there and try to conjure up faith like it is some mystical thing way out there..

You listen to his words, you strap on the parachute and you leap out the door...

Your faith in the parachute isn't a blind faith.

You trust the pilot's words.

You trust the parachute is in working condition...

That is faith and belief.

The same is true for those who are saved....

We have read the word of God ourselves or we have heard it told to us by someone else and we believed it as the word of God...

Faith comes by hearing the word of God...

The Colossians had heard the word of God from Epaphras and they had believed...

If you are here this morning claiming to be saved, you have faith that God is true to His word as it revealed in the Bible...

You have faith that Jesus is real and that He lived and died and was resurrected to provide salvation to you...

You have faith in that above everything else in the world...

Faith is not divided loyalty to all the religions in the world...

A person with faith is certain of what he believes and he holds on to it and only it with all his might...

The second word that sticks out in verse 4 is the word love...

The people in the church at Colossae were filled with love for one another..

That is the second piece of evidence that convinced Paul that these people were truly saved...

They loved one another....

John 13:34-35

34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

Love is such a misunderstood word in our culture today...

Nearly everyone sees love as an emotional experience...

That is certainly a part of love, but that is not all love..

I had an emotional experience when I changed John Andrews diaper, but it wasn't warm fuzzier..

But I certainly changed his diaper because I loved him.

Love is self-sacrificing service to someone else...

It can involve emotional elements like tears and hugs and handshakes, but it is not a requirement..

This is where people get in trouble with their idea of love...

People think if the emotional element of love isn't there that love isn't there...

Let me say this...

I show my love to you most as a pastor when I sacrifice my time to study and read the Word of God in order to bring it and teach it to you...

I don't always get around to everyone each week to give you a hug but I do get the Word out every week to your heart...

I assure that I love you and I hope you see that I love you when I am prepared to help you understand more about the Lord...

Now, that doesn't mean I can ignore loving you in other ways; it simply means that love is not all about warm fuzzies.

Love is emotional expression to others, but love is also sacrificial service to others as well...

Jesus loved the disciples, but he didn't go around giving hugs at the last Supper..

He washed their feet and he taught them truth...

Love is action...

You may think we show our love for each other each week at Pine Grove by the hugs we give, but the best way to love one another is by serving one another...

Teaching a Sunday school class.

Serving in nursery.

Working on the church building.

Giving to the ministries of the church.

Being faithful in your attendance as a way to encourage others.

The truly saved are known for their faith, their love and then finally by their hope...

In verse 5, Paul says that their hope is evidence of the true salvation of the people in the church at Colossae.

What was their hope in?

It was in the promises of God to resurrect them after death..

It was in the promises of God to grant them eternal life and a place in heaven with him...

It was in the word of God to keep them saved and to work in their lives to make them more like Christ...

People who are truly saved are filled with hope..

And people filled with hope are hard to discourage in this life..

It is disappointing to see so many people who call themselves Christians be filled with complaints and never content in this life...

Hope should root out all bitterness in this life...

What can this world do to us when we are looking forward to a better day?

Ever had a trip planned to the beach?

The week before that trip, you are the most easy going person in the world...

Nothing gets you down.

Why? Because on Saturday, you are headed on vacation...

Hard to be upset about anything when the beach is just a few days away...

The same should be true of every true believer...

It should impossible for you to complain about anything with the hope of heaven constantly on your mind...

What can this world or the people of this world do to you?

That is why when you meet a person who is never seems to complain or be upset with anything in this world, you know that they are filled with hope...

And hope is a fruit of true salvation...

So, Paul gives us three words that describe a church of people who are truly saved...

They are filled with faith, love, and hope..

Then in the second half of verse 5, he helps us understand why they are truly saved by giving us...

III. A Description of the Gospel (5b-8)

The reason that the church in Colossae was a church at all is because of the gospel...

The good news that Jesus saves had come to them...

And let me say this, it is always good to take ourselves back to the time when the good news gripped our lives for the first time...

To remember the time when our sin was so overwhelming and the good news that our sin could be forgiven was so sweet....

To remember the greatness of the sin but also to remember when our ears heard the news of the greatness of a Savior...

And Paul takes a moment in the opening of his greeting to remind the Colossians of that gospel that they had believed in...

First of all, Paul calls the gospel the word of truth at the end of verse 5....

And that is important to remember that what we believe as Christians is not a fable or a myth or a lie...

But rather, we believe in the truth, and the gospel is truth....

#2, the gospel is always going forward...

In God's perfect wisdom, he sends the gospel through the world one person at a time...

You don't see a world-wide laser light show that proclaims Jesus as the way to be saved...

You don't a global newsletter that says Jesus is the way to be saved...

You get the good news going from person to person with the good news of the gospel...

And you today are a part of that expansion of the gospel into the world...

You are here because the gospel came to this land mass called North America one day and then in came down to SC and eventually to Fairview or wherever you were from...

The gospel goes small but it goes all the time and it goes everywhere...

You see that in verse 6....

The gospel goes into all the world constantly bearing fruit....

And then two final truths about the gospel...

The end of verse 6....

The gospel is a gospel of grace...

And here is what that means....

No one has ever deserved to have the good news of the gospel told to them...

No one have ever deserved to be able to have their ears, eyes and heart opened to hear it and then believe it...

Yet, God in his grace has not only brought the gospel to us, he has in his grace, given us the ability to hear it, understand it, and believe it...

Thank you Lord!

And then finally, Paul ends this section of his opening greeting by reminding them of their pastor who had been teaching them the truth of the gospel since he brought the good news to Colossae...

Paul writes..

You learned this gospel for Epaphras, a fellow bond servant of Christ...

Think about this, Epaphras loved the Colossians church so much and he was so burdened by the error that they had fallen into that he travelled over a 1000 miles from Colossae to Rome to talk to Paul.

This is the days before a nice 2 hour plane ride...

He had literally risked his life to get to Paul to get a word from the Lord to help get this church back on track...

And Paul is simply reminding them of how the gospel came to them from Epaphras...

And what a joy that is to honor those who teach us the truth, right?

That is why people have such a love for Sunday School teachers and pastors and others in the church who bring the truth to them...

I had four grandparents, and I loved them all, but how I have come to treasure the one of them who took the time to teach me the Bible...

My mimi made me memorize the books of the Bible, the 23rd psalm, the beatitudes...

Though I did not appreciate it at the time, I have come to appreciate it more and more...

That is the effect that someone who tells us the truth has on us...

We come to love them because they showed us the truth...

Epaphras had been that person for the folks in Colossae, and Paul is simply reminding them of that before he gets to correcting their errors in the verses ahead...

Conclusion

How would we sum up these opening verses?

For one, you need to ask yourself....

Is the description of salvation found in my life...

Do I have faith and belief in Christ?

Or am I just going through the motions of church because it is the “right thing to do”?

I assure you, the right thing to do is first of all, repent of your sin and believe the gospel...

But also do you truly love other believers..

Not just nice smiles and weekly hugs, but are you sacrificially serving other believers on a regular basis?

True love for the saints causes you to act.

Finally, are you filled with hope this morning?

Do you truly have your hope set in heaven?

Is it impossible to get you down simply because you know that this world is not your final stop?

I can assure you if this world is all the hope you have, I can understand why you are always so miserable...

The hope of heaven is what you need today, and that only comes through the truth of the gospel that has come to you today in God's Word...

It was clear to Paul that many in the church at Colossae were saved because of their faith, love and hope...

But the most important observation of the day is this....

Is it clear that you are saved today by your faith, hope and love?

If not, today is the day to repent and believe the gospel....

Let us pray...