**The Gospel is Better Than We Think**

Colossians 1:1-8

**Introduction**

A few years ago, Rob Bell wrote a New York Times bestseller book entitled, *Love Wins*, in which he wrestled with the thought that a loving God would send anyone to hell. His conclusion was that “the good news must be better than that,” so he took liberty to rewrite the gospel. However, a proper understanding of the gospel reveals that there is no better news; in fact, the effect of the gospel is greater than we sometimes understand, and therefore the gospel is actually better than *we* think it is. It does not need to be rewritten.

Paul’s letter to the Colossians expressed his concern that they could be carried off by influential false teachers, who emphasized an elite form of Christianity which offered fulfillment somewhere outside of Christ. Paul argued that they are truthfully complete in Christ. He is all they need, and their lives were to be centered around a relationship with Christ, not a list of endless rules and religious activity or acceptance with religious leaders. He wrote in order to help them understand what they received when they received the gospel. We will consider that as we explore the reason Paul gave thanks for the Colossians and the bearing it has on the rest of his letter.

1. **Paul gave thanks for the Colossians because they had received the gospel.** 
   1. Paul established his authority to speak to the church by reference to his apostleship (v. 1a).
2. This was not achieved by personal desire or merit; it was according to the will of God (v. 1b).
3. Furthermore, Paul was not alone in the ministry. He expressed thanks for Timothy (v. 1c), who shared a mutual interest in Colossians.
   1. Paul refers to the believers in terms that reflected the truth that he would communicate in the letter. (v. 2a)
4. He called them saints—those who have the quality to be brought near or into God’s presence; holy; set apart for God’s purpose (Leviticus 20:26). There was not a higher level or status they would attain. This did not mean they didn’t need maturity (v. 28); rather, it was the state that would make maturity possible.
5. He refers to them as faithful. He refers to them as brethren. They are in the family of God.
6. He points to the fact that they are “in Christ.” This indicates that they belong to Christ and have all they need in Him.
7. He also points out the fact that they are in Colossae, which implies they had both influences about them that threatened their spiritual well-being as well as opportunity to make a difference in the lives of those about them.
   1. His peace wish conveys the theological foundation for all that follows in the letter. (v. 2b).
8. He desires for their lives to be an experience of God’s grace and peace that come from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
9. Peace is not simply the absence of war. It is the idea of general well-being.
10. He emphasized that a proper understanding of God’s role as Father and the fact that Jesus is the Messiah and Lord forms the basis of experiencing God’s grace and peace.
    1. Paul’s expression of thanksgiving is connected to their reception of the gospel. (v. 3-8).
11. He gives thanks for the Colossians when he prays and intercedes for them on a regular basis. (v. 3). The reason he gives thanks is their reception of the gospel and all that comes with it.
12. Because of the gospel, their faith is in Christ Jesus (v. 4a), they love the saints (v. 4b), and they have hope (v. 5).
13. Their faith and love are founded on the basis of the hope of eternal life. “Laid up” means to be put away and awaited; to be stored up or reserved; it speaks of the certainties of man’s future as established by God.
14. Their faith, love, and hope came by way of the gospel. (v. 5). They heard the message (the Word), which was a true message, namely the gospel. This implies that the message they were hearing from the false teachers was a lie.
    1. The gospel has come to them as it has to all the world. (v. 6a). This emphasized the universal nature of the gospel; it is for all people. Therefore, there is no elite group of spiritual people.
    2. The gospel brings forth fruit. (v. 6b). It brings about conversion, change, new life, and a living hope. The gospel introduces man to the true grace of God (v. 6c).
    3. They learned about the gospel through Epaphras. (v. 7).
15. He is associated with Paul. The false teachers are not.
16. He is a dear fellow-servant. The false teachers are not.
17. He is a faithful minister who serves on behalf of the Colossians. The false teachers are not.
18. The implication is that they ought to listen to Epaphras instead of the false teachers!
19. Epaphras infomed Paul of their Spirit-produced love (v. 8).
20. **Central Idea: Paul gave thanks because the Colossians had already received everything they needed for life when they received the gospel.**
21. Look at what they received when they received the gospel: grace, forgiveness, redemption, reconciliation, justification, glorification, a home in heaven, peace, faith, love, hope, a changed life, fruit, spiritual leadership, the Spirit of God, and the Word of Truth.
22. What else do they need? Dietary laws? Religious holidays? Acceptance by the elite?
23. No, through the gospel they have all they need!
24. Therefore Paul could give thanks to God. God was the One at work in their lives.
25. Have you received the gospel? If so, then the gospel is better than you think!
26. **You received everything you need for life when you received the gospel. There are several implications from this great truth.** 
    1. You need to understand all that is contained in the gospel.
27. The gospel helps me to understand my real problem.
28. The gospel proclaims that my greatest problem is not my environment, my genetics, my lack of education, etc.
29. The gospel proclaims that my greatest problem is a heart that is bent on having its own way. Every sin is tied to man’s rebellion against God in the form of selfishness and pride.
30. There is no human problem that is not addressed by the truth of the gospel. Even natural disasters and disease are tied to the entrance of sin into the world.
31. The gospel helps me to understand the nature of my Savior.
32. He is sinless; therefore, He is good. He became sin for us; He is loving. He rose from the grave; He is all-powerful. He extends salvation to any who will believe; He is merciful.
33. The gospel proclaims God’s grace. He is finished with the work of redemption. He does not need my help.
34. He is actively at work in my life. He cares. I need to understand who I am in Christ; my true identity as a believer.
    1. If you think you have to go outside the gospel for the solutions to life’s situations, you have not fully understood the power of the gospel.
35. If God, through the gospel took care of our greatest need (salvation), He can meet all of our other needs that are connected to this life through that same gospel (maturity, marriage, raising children, finances, addictions, etc.).
36. Someone might say, “That solution doesn’t work in the real world.”

*“The good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ is a ‘then-now-then’ gospel. First, there is the ‘then’ of the past (forgiveness)…there is the ‘then’ of the future (eternity – free from sin). The church has done fairly well explaining these two ‘thens’ of the gospel, but it has tended to understate or misunderstand the ‘now’ benefits of the work of Christ…It is here that there is a “gospel gap”…People need to see that the gospel belongs in their workplace, their kitchen, their school, their bedroom, their backyard and their van. They need to see the way the gospel makes a connection between what they are doing and what God is doing. They need to understand that their life stories are being lived out within God’s larger story so that they can learn to live each day with a gospel mentality.” (Paul David Tripp)*

* 1. The gospel changes everything.

1. It provides hope upon the birth and raising of a child; it changes my reason for coming to work; it changes the way that I die and the nature of my funeral; it changes the way I look at material things—they are not my greatest treasures.
2. The gospel should be central to our lives. Our joy should be in the gospel. Our confidence should be in the gospel. What do you need in life? It is in the gospel.

**Conclusion:** Since the gospel brings such results, we should follow in the steps of those who made the propagation of the gospel central to their lives. Everyone needs to hear the gospel.