

Colossians 1:1-14

This morning we begin our study of the book of Colossians: a relatively short letter written to a church in modern day Turkey that was not planted by the apostle Paul.

1. He writes this letter, based on what he had learned from the pastor there: a man named Epaphras
2. He pours out, from a prison cell, what He considers to be the most pressing information for a church that he had not, and would not, have the privilege of meeting face to face.
3. This information was not unique to Colossae because Paul instructed them to read the letter to the church at Laodoea as well...so we can be sure that it will also apply to us.

READ/PRAY

In the first 14 verses of Colossians we encounter what we often encounter in Paul's letters: a lot of words, phrases, commas and semi-colons, but not many periods. In fact there are only 4 periods in this entire section of Scripture.

1. One after verse 2
2. One after verse 8
3. One after verse 12
4. One after verse 14

So, due to the complexity of these 4 sentences, it a challenge to really dissect what Paul is communicating. I have simplified the 4 sentences down to one descriptive word each: Greetings. Thanksgivings. and Prayer. Deliverance. We will not be able to look at the entire text today, but we will walk through what we can.

I. Greetings v1-2

Saints

1. That word saint means "holy ones."
2. Who is holy?
 - a. Those who have been declared holy
 - b. Those who are being made practically holy: conformed to the image of Christ.
3. These people were saints...holy in their relationship with God.

Faithful brethren

1. While the term saint is a vertical relationship, the term faithful brethren points us to a horizontal relationship.
2. They were brothers and sisters in Christ and faithful to the family of God.

Right here in the introduction we encounter a description that we could all long for: that of saint and faithful brother.

1. We often can complicate so much...always looking for some experience.
2. Our daily life should be a practical development of both of the vertical and the horizontal
 - a. To be holy: both declared and practically
 - b. To be faithful brethren: faithful to the body of Christ that God has placed you in.
3. The Great commandments: Love God and Love others.

II. Thanksgiving v3-8

If we read this sentence carefully, we will see that Paul is giving thanks for one thing.

1. He is not giving thanks for their faith...or their love...but their hope.
2. The hope that is laid up for them in heaven is the central thing here. v3-5

What is this hope?

1. John 14:1-3, 27
2. Titus 2:13 *waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,*
3. 1 Peter 1:4-5 *to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*
4. This hope is an eternal hope, a hope of heaven, a hope of final reward.
5. This hope that they have is what Paul is giving thanks for.

Now, let us be honest this morning. If a 3rd party were to watch us, listen to us, and get to know us, **where would they say our hope is?**

1. Is it in this life? Or the life to come? (your time, your money, your energy)
2. Is it on earth? Or is it in heaven? (your time, your money, your energy)
3. What do our visions, our dreams, our goals, and our plans center on: the temporal or the eternal?
4. I did not ask if our goals were good, wholesome, helpful, or even biblical...I asked where they are rooted and centered? Here or there?
5. What are you living for, planning for, and hoping for? It makes a difference.

Hebrews 11:35-12:2

1. Do you notice that the thing that gave them strength was their hope in a future inheritance?
2. Without hope rooted in a future inheritance, an eternal inheritance, we take our eyes off of heaven and put it on our circumstances, the temporal, and everything changes.
 - a. The use of our time
 - b. The use of our money
 - c. The use of our energy
 - d. Our vision, dreams, goals, plans, and purposes become this worldly rather than other-worldly...and here we are...Christians caught up in the distractions of this life rather than focused on the eternal life to come.
3. Paul recognized that where we rest our hope (our time, money, resources, energy and hearts) impacts everything.

There are 2 things that we see about this hope.

1. The evidence of their hope.
2. The cause of their hope.

• **The Evidence of Their Hope** v3-5

Paul listed 2 things that let him know that the church at Colossae had a healthy hope.

1. **Faith**...in Christ
 - a. Not only a Saving Faith
 - b. But an ongoing Sanctifying Faith
2. **Love**...for the saints
 - a. The Christian has a double commitment
 - b. He is committed to Jesus Christ and he is committed to his fellow-men.

This faith and love depend on our hope that is laid up in heaven. Think about it.

1. Faith in Christ may involve a man in all kinds of loss and pain and suffering (time, energy, and money). The only way we would lose our lives now for Christ, would be HOPE
2. Love for others... a sacrificial, selfless service looks foolish to a self centered world and it usually doesn't pay as well. The only way we would lay down our lives for others now (time, energy, and money) is HOPE
3. Why lay down THIS life for Christ and for others? ONLY for the hope that is set before us!
 - a. The Christian hope is the confidence that it is better to hope in God than to believe the world.
 - b. If we are focused on heaven, eternity, and a future inheritance we count this life as nothing, and the life to come as everything!

Think about it.

1. This life is a vapor
2. Eternity is incomprehensible! (illustration of the spoon of sand and bird with water)
3. In light of this, which life should we really be investing in?
4. Where is our hope really at? Do you want to know?
 - a. Look at your faith in Christ...not just saving, but sanctifying. Are you living by faith, so much so, that a 3rd party could look at you and say...they are not living for this life!
 - b. Look at your love for the saints. Are you living in such a way that a 3rd party could look at you and say...they are fostering eternal relationships!
5. If we are not characterized by faith and love, then we give evidence that we don't really have hope.

1 Corinthians 15:19 *If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.*

• **The Cause of Their Hope v5-8**

The cause of their hope, and ours, Is three-fold.

1. **The Gospel v5-6**

- a. Gospel literally means “the good news.” It is the good news of God! THE GOSPEL
- b. The gospel is truth (the word of truth)
- c. The gospel is universal...it is for all the world.
 1. Very few things in this world are available to all people.
 2. But the gospel is for all the world!
 3. It is not confined to any one race or nation, nor to any one class or condition.
 4. It is for every nation, tongue, tribe, and people!!
- d. The gospel is productive. It is constantly bearing fruit and increasing. Don't let the west fool you!
- e. The gospel is about the grace of God (understood the grace of God in truth). **It is not so much the message of what God demands as of what he offers.**

2. **Their Response v6b-7a**

- a. hearing...it is not enough to see the gospel, it must be heard.
- b. understanding...it is not enough to hear the gospel, it must be understood.
- c. learning...sometimes in order for it to be understood, it has to be learned!

3. **Their Source v7-8**

- a. The gospel is humanly transmitted.
- b. There must be a human channel through which the gospel can come to men.
- c. They learned from Epaphras.
 1. Let's not miss this clear truth. Yes they learned from Epaphras
 2. But Epaphras had to learn from someone too!
- d. The gospel is meant to spread through all the world.
- e. Its power of spreading is its fruitfulness in **individual** hearts.
- f. Recipients of the gospel are they who must extend it.
- g. 2 Timothy 2:2 and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.