

Col 1:1-23
Ezekiel 17
Psalm 112

“The Fruit of the Gospel, Part 2”

July 17, 2022

Last time we read from Jeremiah 17 about the two trees –
the cursed shrub of the desert,
and the blessed tree – the blessed man whose heart hopes in the LORD.

Well, Jeremiah was the preacher that Ezekiel learned from.
Ezekiel was exiled as a young man from Jerusalem and taken to Babylon.
But while a young man in Jerusalem, he would have often heard Jeremiah’s preaching.

And you certainly hear a lot of Jeremiah’s themes returning in Ezekiel –
though always in a new key – with a different twist!

Ezekiel takes Jeremiah’s image of the blessed tree and blends it with Isaiah’s idea of the branch.
It sounds strange at first.

The topmost twigs of a cedar tree become a low-spreading vine.

The story is told in a way that would remind Israel
of how God took them from Egypt
and planted them in the Promised Land (Isaiah 5 or Psalm 80).

But Ezekiel is told that *this time* the story is about how Babylon
took the Son of David captive to Babylon.

But God promises that he himself will take a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar
(the branch of Jesse)
and God himself will plant it on a high and lofty mountain –
that it might become a noble cedar –
that all the trees of the field might know that the LORD
is the one who brings low the high tree – and exalts the low tree.

The LORD is the one who dries up the green tree – and makes the dry tree flourish.

I am the LORD.
I have spoken, and I will do it.

In Ezekiel’s day it was still more than 70 years before God would do it.
In fact, it was over 600 years before God *actually* did it –
when he raised up Jesus from the dead,
and planted that sprig on a high and lofty mountain!

What would that mean for Ezekiel?
I know that many of you wonder – what does it mean for me?

Psalm 112 helps us.

Psalm 112 was written for people like us.

People who live in between the promise and the fulfillment.

Psalm 112 describes the blessed man – the one who fears the LORD.

What does it mean to fear the LORD?

It means to believe God's promises,
and act accordingly!

Sing Psalm 112

Read Colossians 1

Introduction: Grace and Peace (v1-2)

1. Paul's Thanksgiving (v3-8)

a. Faith, Hope, and Love – the Basics of the Christian Life (v3-5a)

b. The Gospel Is Bearing Fruit in the Whole World – and in You (v5b-8)

³ We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, ⁴ since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, ⁵ because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, ⁶ which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing— as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth, ⁷ just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant.^[b] He is a faithful minister of Christ on your^[c] behalf⁸ and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

We looked a bit last week at the chiastic structure of the passage

- 1:3-8 we have heard of your receiving the Gospel, hope and faith
- 1:9-12 so we pray that you might please God, being fruitful in good works
- 1:13-4 because of your Redemption, deliverance through Son
- 1:15-18 by Christ the Center of All
- 1:19-20 Reconciliation through Son
- 1:21-2 from wicked works so that you are blameless in his sight
- 1:23 therefore continue in Gospel, hope, faith

Christ IS the center. Of Creation. Of Redemption. And indeed, of this paragraph!
Paul wants us to see that Christ is to be the center of everything!

The whole book of Colossians could be summed up as setting forth
who Christ is,
what Christ has done,
who you are in Christ,
and what that means for your life.

Paul and Timothy first assure the Colossians that they give thanks for them, praying for them
“Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints;

Because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven..."

Your hope is not merely IN Christ,
it IS Christ.

As the hymn-writer said:

My hope is built on nothing less,
than Jesus blood and righteousness
I dare not trust the sweetest frame
but wholly lean on Jesus's name,
On Christ, the solid rock I stand,
all other ground is sinking sand.

Therefore hope is the foundation of our faith and our love.

How does hope relate to faith and love?

Hope is not some vague wish.
We often speak as though it is.
We say, "I hope it doesn't rain today,"
when we are afraid that it might.

I once heard a preacher say that faith is not simply a matter of hope.
Plainly he was not thinking of Paul's concept of hope!

For the believer, Hope is something that is absolutely certain.

Our hope is as certain as our justification by Faith.

You can have all the love in the world,
but if it is not rooted in faith, it cannot please God.

You can have all the hope in the world,
but if your hope is in the wrong gods, it will not please God!

But here in Colossians, Paul and Timothy tell us that Hope is the foundation,
because without the Hope that is laid up in heaven,
why should we believe?

Without the promise that Christ is ours, and we are his forever,
why should we love?

As Paul puts it in I Cor. 15--if it is only for this life that we have hope in Christ,
we are the most miserable of men.

And it is this hope--in Christ--that produces fruit in us, through the word of truth--the gospel.

This is what Paul gives thanks for.

This is what he looks for in believers.

This is the fruit of the gospel:

faith in Christ Jesus
and love for all the saints,

rooted in the hope laid up in heaven--Jesus Christ.

And so when Paul heard about their faith and love,
he gave thanks to God,

and began to pray for them

This first section of Paul and Timothy's epistle could be summarized like this:
Because of your faith in Christ and your love for all the saints,
which was produced by hope and rooted in the word of truth of the gospel.

Paul rejoices in what you have learned,
he praises God for your faith and your love.
But you're not finished yet!
You must continue to grow in grace.
Your life must continue to change:
in your mind--you must still gain more wisdom and knowledge
in your walk--you must still increase in holiness and good works
in your suffering--you must still persevere patiently through trials
and in your thanksgiving--you must still remember your great redemption.

So let's walk through this prayer:

2. Paul's Prayer for You (v9-14)

a. That You May Be Filled with the Knowledge of His Will (v9)

⁹ And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,

First, Paul prays "that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will
in all wisdom
and spiritual understanding" (v9)

What does it mean to know the will of God?

It doesn't mean that we know everything that God is going to do.

What part of the will of God should we know?

That part concerning us!

So the simple way of putting it is:

What does God wish us to know?

"To be filled with the knowledge of his will"

means to know what God desires for us to know and to do.

This isn't very complicated.

Paul is going to spend the rest of Colossians telling you exactly what you should know!
namely:

Who is Christ?

What has Christ done for us?

Who are we in Christ?

and How does that change our lives?

Paul give us two description of this knowledge:
Wisdom--knowing how to live in God's world
Spiritual understanding--being led by the Spirit, not by the flesh

This is not merely head-knowledge.
As you learn doctrine—as you learn the teachings of the bible--
if it does not change the way you live,
then you haven't really learned that doctrine.

If you love the doctrines of grace,
and yet you are not becoming more gracious,
more forgiving,
more humble,
then you still lack the knowledge of God's will.

And notice this:
Paul does not pray that you may LEARN ABOUT God's will,
rather, he prays that you may BE FILLED with the knowledge of God's will.

This is **Spiritual** understanding,
in other words,
it is granted by the Holy Spirit.

How does the Holy Spirit give this knowledge?
Through the ordinary use of the means of grace.
You still have to study the scriptures –
but you are studying the scriptures *prayerfully* –
seeking to understand what the Spirit is saying in the Word!

And the purpose of this spiritual knowledge is that you may walk worthy of the Lord (v10).
Spiritual understanding and true wisdom always have practical results.

Paul is speaking to those who are already Christians (v6).
He is speaking to the saints—and to the faithful brethren (the faithful pastors). (v2)
He does not question their salvation.
He calls them to walk worthy of their calling,
because of who they are in Christ!

Have you ever seen someone who stuffs his head full of knowledge?
They can be pretty cocky--and sometimes downright arrogant.
They tend to use knowledge as a weapon to knock down others.

Ultimately, the path you walk along is the test of your wisdom and knowledge.
Do you walk worthy of the Lord in the path of wisdom?
Or do you walk worthy of death in the path of folly?

b. So that You May Walk – and Bear Fruit (v10)

¹⁰ *so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;*

Indeed this is the **Second** thing that Paul prays for:

“That you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing him,
bearing fruit in every good work
and growing in the knowledge of God (v10) --cf. v6

How do you walk worthy of the Lord?

Can you fully please him?

Would you believe that the answer is YES??!!

Now don't get me wrong.

You are all sinners,
and you will NEVER in a million years be able to please God
by anything that you do apart from his grace.

But Paul prayed that you and I would walk worthy of the Lord.

HOW?

Take a peek at verse 12.

HE qualified us.

Or as he puts it in verse 21,

HE reconciled us through Christ's death

--even while we were enemies in our minds by wicked works.

There is nothing that you can do in yourself to live a life that pleases God.

If you are trying to live a good life,

and are trusting in your own ability to save you,
you are in peril of God's wrath and curse.

But if you trust solely in Jesus Christ,

you may walk worthy of the Lord, and you may fully please him.

It's not that you won't sin.

It's rather that when you sin, you repent.

It's not that you are perfect;

it's rather that you live your life by the grace of the one who IS perfect--even Christ.

The way you walk in a manner that pleases God,

is by bearing fruit in every good work
and by growing in the knowledge of God.

Remember verse 6?

the Gospel is bearing fruit and growing?

This is how the gospel bears fruit in YOU

--that your life shows forth the transforming grace of God

This is how the Word of God grows in YOU
--that you grow in the knowledge of God.

Where is your struggle with sin?

Do you have a tendency to say harsh things to your husband or wife?
Have you gotten in the habit of lashing out at your children, or your friends?

Or are you the sort that just bottles it up inside and steams?

Where is the fruit of the gospel?

Where is the knowledge of God and his grace overflowing into good works?

We all know the saying

“you only hurt the ones you love”

WHY?

Is it not that we expect too much from others?

Husbands, do you have realistic expectations for your wife?

Do you expect her to always be ready and cheerful
when you get home from work?

Experience has probably taught you that it's not always that way.

But is there some part of you that thinks that it really should be that way?

And isn't there just a little bit of you that is sort of bothered when she's not?

Here's the problem:

You aren't exactly living up to your end of the bargain either!

Don't get upset with your spouse for their failings,
until you have successfully dealt with *all* of yours.

And kids,

do you expect your parents to be perfect?

You've probably learned by now that they're not.

But do you still think that they should be?

After all,

your whole life is still pretty much determined by your parents.

If they make a mistake, it can mess up your whole week!

Why do we have such a problem with truly loving those who are closest to us?

Because we are more concerned with ourselves, than with others.

We are more interested in getting things our way,
than with helping those around us.

Do you love your spouse because of what he or she provides for you?

If so, then that's a rather self-gratifying "love"!

True love seeks to provide what they need.

The same goes for parents and children.

Bearing fruit in good works means being more concerned for the interests of others,
than in whether you get what you want.

Growing in the knowledge of God means gaining the wisdom
to be understanding and forgiving when they fail

Because we are going to fail one another.

We are going to face situations which are difficult.

Times when we DON'T WANT to love,
situations where we DON'T FEEL like forgiving.

Places where we have been sinned against,
and we just want to get back at them.

That sounds hard, right?

We're not strong enough for that!

Well – Paul and Timothy understand this. That's why:

c. Being Strengthened for Endurance (v11)

¹¹ being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy;

Thirdly, Paul and Timothy pray that you would be “strengthened with all might
according to his glorious power
for all patience
and longsuffering
with joy” (v11)

As we bear fruit in good works and grow in the knowledge of God,
we will face trials.

It is not easy to be a Christian.

It's much easier to be an unbeliever.

I had a good conversation about temptation and self-control with an unbelieving friend,
and my friend just laughed and said:

"I don't worry about self-control, I just do whatever I want!

You Christians must have a rough life."

You see,

growing in grace is not easy.

walking worthy of the Lord can be a painful path.

But Paul promises that we are strengthened with God's own strength.

Patience and endurance will be given to all God's people as they face various trials,
and Paul even promises that this will come with joy.

NOT that we will LIKE trials,
but rather that we will be strengthened to persevere through them.

Notice also what you are strengthened with:
“strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might...”

Do you really think that God’s strength is insufficient for you?
No – that’s not your problem.

You have no doubt whether God’s strength is sufficient.
You just wonder whether God will actually do it!

I’m sure that God’s “glorious might” is indeed *glorious* and *mighty*!
But down here – I don’t see it.

But this is why Paul gives thanks in the way that he does!

d. Giving Thanks to the One Who Has Delivered Us (v12-14)

¹² giving thanks^[d] to the Father, who has qualified you^[e] to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. ¹³ He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Therefore **Fourthly** Paul prays that we will give “thanks to the Father who has qualified us (made us able) to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light” (v12)

This is indeed a great and precious promise.
God the Father has loved you in such a way that he has qualified you
--made us able--to be partakers of HIS inheritance.

It doesn't say that God discovered that we were qualified;
it doesn't say that God merely foreknew that we would qualify
It says that God himself qualified us.

This is not something God *will do*.
It is something he *has done*.

This is already true.

While we were enemies, dead in our transgressions and sins, as Eph 2 puts it,
God sent his Son to die for us,
and through him to deliver us from the power of darkness
and bring us into the inheritance of the saints in the light.

We no longer dwell in darkness.
We are heirs of the light.

And even so, in Christ we are not only qualified,
and made able to share in Christ's inheritance,
but we are also delivered from the power of darkness,
and brought into the kingdom of the Son.

Jesus Christ is called the SON of God's love.

What does this mean?

It means that Jesus is the Son of God par excellence.

He is the one who receives the full inheritance.

He is the firstborn, as Paul insists in verses 15 and 18.

We are adopted children,
and we partake of Christ's inheritance.

He inherits the whole universe,
and we inherit all things in him.

And in His blood we have redemption, namely, the forgiveness of sins.

On the cross – in his death –

Christ, the Son of God, came under the power of darkness.

Christ, the Son of God, inherited the wrath and curse of God.

Christ, the Son of God, was disqualified and disinherited by the Father.

All of this was done for us:

that in Christ – in his resurrection –

YOU now have been set free from the power of darkness
in Christ,

YOU now have been qualified as an heir with all the saints in the light
in Christ,

YOU now have been conveyed into the kingdom of the Son,
and have received redemption through his blood,
the forgiveness of sins.