

Christ Is All: We Give Thanks

by J. Glyn Owen

Paul rejoices in the Colossians because of their genuine faith, love, and hope, which is a result of the gospel of the grace of God.

Duration: 48:43

Scripture: Colossians 1:3

Topics: "Thanksgiving"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the praise and thanksgiving expressed by the Apostle Paul and his fellow prisoner in Colossae. They rejoice not because of their own circumstances, but because they have heard that the gospel of Jesus Christ has been preached in Colossae and has resulted in the conversion of many people. The speaker poses the question to the audience, asking what makes them glad and what they are grateful for. He emphasizes that the true cause for rejoicing should be the spread of the gospel and the salvation of souls. The speaker then reads from Colossians chapter one, verses three to eight, highlighting the faith, love, and hope that the Colossian Christians have in Christ, and how the gospel is producing fruit and growing among them.

Transcript

Now, will you kindly turn in the scriptures to Colossians chapter 1, and I would like to read verses 3 to 8, words which are going to form the basis of our meditation this morning. Mr. MacLeod took us through the initial words, last Lord's Day morning, and we come now to the beginning of the unburdening of the message of this wonderful letter of Paul to the Colossian Christians. I'm going to read verses 3 to 8 in the New International Version.

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints. The faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel that has come to you all over the world. This gospel is producing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth.

You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ and on our behalf, and who also told us of your love in the Spirit. Now, as we've indicated, Mr. MacLeod dealt with the greeting and the salutation, which is in itself a very precious nugget. There in verses 1 and 2. And this morning we come to this note of praise and thanksgiving.

May the Lord enable us in our hearts to continue to praise him as we have sought to do in our hymns this morning and as the apostle here expresses his gladness because of what God had done in his power and by his grace in this ancient scene of Colossae. Now, the first thing I would like you to notice is the great news that gladdened the hearts of these two prisoners. You will remember, as we have indicated previously, that Paul and Timothy were prisoners when they received the news that occasioned the writing of this epistle.

True, they may have been in a kind of hired house, or, at any rate, they must have had some measure of liberty to entertain friends there and were allowed to write. But the fact is, nevertheless, they were in prison. Probably Paul's hands as well as his feet were in chains.

It is, therefore, something that takes us by surprise that they should begin writing this letter with such joy, with a note of gratitude to God. We always thank God. These are the very first words.

We always thank God. Now, the question is, what is it that occasions such gratitude from such people in such circumstances? Is it that someone has brought news that the accusations leveled against them, the accusations that have brought them into prison, have been dropped? No, it's not that. Is it that their enemies have died? No, indeed, it isn't that.

In fact, it has nothing whatsoever to do with themselves. It has nothing whatsoever to do with their state, their condition in prison, nor even their prospects before the law. They've heard the good news that the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ was preached in Colossae, over a hundred miles away, much more than that, among a people that Paul had never seen in the flesh, and that there the same gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ had resulted in many men and women coming to know God in his Son and by his Spirit, with the result that a little church was planted there, and they are showing evidence of being a genuinely redeemed and regenerate people of God.

Now, that's what made them rejoice. My friend, can I pose the question, would that make you rejoice? What are the things that make you glad? What are the things that make you sing? What are the things that make us truly grateful before God? It's a most revealing question, if you're honest with yourself. What I want to get from myself and perhaps from you this morning is this, the acknowledgement that either we are or we are not on the same spiritual wavelength as these two men, who were less concerned with their own physical and material well-being than they were with this one thing, the spread of the gospel.

And if men and women are coming to Christ in Colossae, distant Colossae, though they've never seen them in the flesh, they're glad, and not only are they glad, they must there and then in prison, not once, not twice, but whenever they think of them, they must praise and bless God, because His gospel got there and served these distant folk in Colossae. Now then, we're going to deal at some length this morning with the cause of their rejoicing, because Paul doesn't leave it at that. It isn't just that a mission or a campaign or whatever you'd like to call it, has been taking place in Colossae.

It isn't just that people have been urged to come to Christ or Christ, or even that they've professed to come to Christ. What is really making Paul and Timothy glad is this. There is evidence that those who have responded to the gospel are genuine.

And he mentions three features of the genuine Christian faith, of the genuine Christian experience. And I would like you to look at them, because they come up over and over again in the Apostle Paul and indeed in other writers in the New Testament. There's a triad here.

First of all, Paul and Timothy rejoiced on account of the emergence of faith in the Colossians, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus. Now this is not everything, but it is something. It doesn't comprise everything that took place in Colossae, but it is the first thing.

We rejoice this, Paul, because we've heard of your faith in Christ Jesus. You see, faith is basic to everything else. Without faith, says the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews, we cannot please God.

Now you take that seriously, and it's stunning, but it's true. Without faith, there is nothing whatsoever that you and I can do to please God. Faith is a necessary ingredient in the attitude of the soul toward Him, and in the absence of faith, anything we may say, anything we may sing, anything we may preach, anything we may do, it comes to naught.

Without this necessary thread of faith running through other things, they are equal to nothing. Therefore, Paul and Timothy rejoiced, because they saw the basis of a genuine discipleship, because here there was genuine faith. Now you may ask me rightly, why are you stressing that? We don't see anything very much to indicate that the faith is genuine.

Well, now, true, it is hidden there. But I want you to believe me that it is there. Paul uses rather an unusual preposition, translated in English, in faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Generally in the New Testament, when the New Testament writers speak of faith in Christ, they use one or other of two prepositions. One of them, in with the accusative. And it means something like this.

It means motion towards someone or something with a view to resting upon that object. Just as I were to move forward to this rostrum and mean to put my weight on it. Okay.

So faith in Christ is a coming into the presence of Christ with a view to resting upon Him. The other preposition is actually just this. It's faith upon Christ.

It is just resting upon Him. Standing on the promises of Christ my Lord. Resting on Christ and His work and His promises.

Resting on Him. Just as you're sitting on those pews and I'm standing here. You're resting on something.

I hope you're very comfortable. I hope you're putting your weight on what's under you this morning. Now that's exactly what faith is generally spoken of in the New Testament.

But Paul uses a different preposition here. And this can only be used of a genuine, a deeply genuine faith. It is faith in Christ.

It means, you see, that they've not only moved up and come face to face with Christ and are resting upon Him, but their faith has penetrated into Him. They're in living, vital communion with Him. Faith has gone into Christ.

They're in Him now. Not outside of Him, coming near, but in Christ. They're men and women who have been born again.

They are like branches in the vine. Or if you like to change the metaphor, they're like fish in the sea. They're living in Christ as in their element.

They're in Christ. And if you want to use another metaphor, which for some reason or other, one or two of the commentators have used, it's like an anchor being cast into the bed of the ocean. And it's not just got down there on the surface.

It's got, it's got right into the rocks, amid the rocks. And it's there, holding. Has your faith taken you into Christ? Are you in Christ? What is your element today? Where do you live? Oh, you live in Toronto.

Or you may be visitors here. You come from some other place. Your address is elsewhere.

Listen, my friend, where are you living spiritually? Are you a man or a woman in Christ? Faith, genuine faith, real faith, is the faith that has brought me into Christ. One commentator has a beautiful word here, and I think I ought to read it to you. He's referring to the tendency, the point that he was writing, the tendency among some theologians particularly, to stress the value of love in opposition to faith.

And this is his comment. Let us not fall into the specious fallacy which would discredit faith in favor of love. With the almost inevitable result of discrediting a distinct, revealed, and infinitely needed ground and warrant of faith in favor of a religion of subjectivity and mere emotion.

Faith, in the realities of the soul, is as needful to love as the fulcrum to the lever, or the wick to the flame. Love indeed is greater than love from one glorious point of view, because faith is for the sake of love rather than love for the sake of faith. But whoever discredited the foundations of the temple in favor of the gate beautiful, or thought that the gate beautiful could ever get beyond its need of the foundation.

In the architect's thought, the foundation was for the gate, not the gate for the foundation. What's he saying? He's saying this. Faith and love are essential, we shall come to love in a moment.

But faith is the foundation of all. And faith that not just brings me toward Christ and onto Christ, but into Christ. Brothers and sisters, are we quite sure before God this morning that our faith has brought us into Christ? That we live and move and have our being in the risen, reigning Christ of God.

This is life. But now, that was one element. The cause of Paul's rejoicing along with Timothy was there, that they have made a profession of faith.

And the indications are that that faith is real, because it's brought them into Christ, and that means they're new creatures. But now, let's move on. Paul and Timothy rejoiced also because faith was accompanied by love.

And of the love which you have for all the saints. When one's faith has cast anchor into Christ and settled in him, it becomes a veritable channel, along which the believer finds the emotions of his Lord trickling into his heart. I hope we all know this.

You know, Paul hasn't gone long into the epistle to the Romans when he says exactly the same thing, only in different words. He talks about being justified by faith, having peace with God, and then access into his presence in Romans 5. And then he says this, The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. My friend, have you drawn near enough to God in Christ to have the dews of the Hermon of the heavenlies drop and distill upon your soul that you're saturated with the grace of the throne? Has love come into your heart? Has the flood come in? Do you know anything about it? And you say, how do I know anything about it? Is it that it gives me a tremendous kick and a sense of emotional release or excitement? Well, not basically.

If it's come into you, it'll get out through you. That's how you know the love of God. And your love toward all the saints.

How do I know that the love of God has come into me? In this way. When it comes into a man, it flows out through him. And it flows out through him in this sense.

First and foremost, towards the saints of God. Saints are those who are separated to be the Lord Jesus Christ's property. Now, this is the point.

The stress is made here by Paul that the Colossians showed love towards all the saints. The fact that you love some of the saints doesn't really prove anything. Not a thing.

You see, you may love somebody just because they're your type. Maybe purely natural love. Oh, they were with you in school.

You wear the same old school tie. You speak the same language. They're the same color skin.

And that still means an awful lot to some people. Far more than it should. And they're of the same social class.

And they drive the same car, you know. Oh, we have a special love for them. My friend, it doesn't mean a thing.

The love of which the Apostle Paul speaks here is love toward all the saints. Which means this. Not because they belong to my class.

Not because their skin is as pale as mine. But because they're related to Jesus Christ. They may be black.

They may be white. They may be rich. They may be poor.

They may be cultured. They may be illiterate. They may be in Africa.

They may be in Norway. They may be anywhere. But if they're related as the dedicated ones of Jesus Christ, I love them.

Now that's the love that comes from Christ through His people. Oh, blessed love this. And you see, this proves genuine regeneration.

When you don't look at a man's face or his suit of clothes or anything else. But you look at a man and see there a man or a woman who belongs to Christ. Because of that, my love flows out.

The love of Christ has flown in and it flows out through me. First of all, to all the saints. Now, of course, sooner or later it's going to overflow those banks.

And it's not going to be confined even to the saints. Because God loves people who are yet not saints. And in a pagan city like Corinth, God would say to the Apostle Paul, Oh, Paul, you can't see it, but I have many people in this city yet.

And I want you to love them and I want you to serve them and I want you to go after them. So that the love of God in our hearts flows out first to the saints and then to all the objects of His mercy. You wonder that Paul sang in prison? And then there's tonight.

My word, you people this morning are listening so well. And finally, the clock is going quicker than usual. Paul and Timothy further rejoiced because faith and love were accompanied by hope.

For the hope laid up for you in heaven. Now, hope is sometimes a subjective phenomenon. Dwelling within the soul of the believer, we say that we have hope.

Or you may express it like this, I'm hopeful. In the Christian sense, in the biblical sense. Here it seems to be different.

It seems to be in the objective. Our hope is laid up in heaven. Not hope in the heart now, but hope in heaven.

What do you mean? What does that mean? Well, probably it's the same kind of thing as Jesus had in mind when he said, Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moths and rust are corrupt and where thieves break through and steal, but rather lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven. Now, if you want to comment on that, I would give you the words of the Apostle Peter, who says that every Christian is born again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to an inheritance, incorruptible, undefiled, unfading in the heavens, kept for you and you are here kept for it. That's what Peter says.

In other words, I believe that what Paul is referring to here, ultimately, is Jesus Christ as their hope. You have faith which is in Christ, you have love which is toward all the saints of Christ, and this proves that you have hope laid up for you in heaven. In other words, Christ is your hope.

All that is in Christ is yours. You may hope for Him and for all that is in Him to become yours. Remember how Paul begins the epistle to the Ephesians in chapter 1 and verse 3 where he says that the Christian is blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

Now, just get that. It's really a mouthful, isn't it? Every conceivable spiritual grace that you can ever need, it's been given you. Given you, yeah? It's been given you in the heavenly places.

It's there in heaven. How is it in the heavenly places? It's in Christ. You look down the aisle as far as you can see with your prophetic eye and you can envisage the needs of tomorrow and the day after and the day after and the day after that and the weeks ahead and the months and the years and as best you can think of your emerging needs.

I know we can't go far, but just imagine them. Listen, my friend. Every grace that you and I can conceivably need has been given to us and it is all in the Christ who is on the throne.

Everything's there. Our hope is laid up for us in heaven. Christ is our hope.

As our anchor is cast within the veil, that hope is not going to let us down, for he is reigning forever and ever and is unfailingly loyal to save those who come to him. Now, it's no wonder that Paul and Timothy were rejoicing. They felt so sure that these people in Colossae were genuine Christians.

You can almost hear them cross-examining the messenger and say, yes, they believed, but did they really believe? They have love. Who do they love? Is it genuine love? Does it manifest the new nature in them? Is it the work of the Spirit in them? Or is it just natural affection? Or is it just some emotional swish? Sensing the reality of it, the great apostle is gladdened. And whenever he thinks of them, he says, with

Timothy, he can only do so giving thanks to God.

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you. Now, that brings me to the second thing, the good news that transformed the Colossians. What was it? All over the world, says Paul, this gospel is producing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth.

Now, it is quite obvious that Paul penned these lines. When he penned these lines, he had in mind the Colossian heresy. You remember how in introducing this epistle, we referred to a heresy that was incipient in the situation.

It wasn't fully developed yet, but it was emerging. And Paul is unquestionably thinking of that, though he's not saying too much about it. He's such a cautious, such a wise teacher.

He is expounding the glories of the gospel, but he's making references. If you're wise enough and if you're thoughtful, you will see the references, but they're veiled. The contrast between the heresy on the one hand and what it offers, and what the gospel of the grace of God does for men.

Now, let's look at this. We have, first of all, then, the identity of the life-transforming message. What was it that made all this difference in Colossae? Well, Paul puts it like this.

It was the word they had heard beforehand. Now, this is important. Which you have already heard about in the word of truth.

You may wonder, what is there significant about that? Well, again, Paul is using a word here. There is, as part of it, the ordinary, the normal word for hearing, but he puts a preposition before it, which means, heard beforehand. And that means, you see, that Paul is thinking of other things that they've heard since.

And he's wanting to stress the fact that the gospel that has produced this character and this change of life in the Colossians, they'd heard before they heard these recent innovations that were brought by the heretics. The gospel that they heard was a gospel that produced faith, a gospel that produced love, and a gospel that provided for them a hope laid up in heaven that no man could take away from them, because the hope is there in heaven already. This latter notion, or philosophy, or teaching, that has recently come into Colossae, however, was not a doctrine that was capable of producing anything like faith and love and hope of that order.

Pagan philosophy, Oriental mysticism, or Judaistic legalism can be mixed together in any proportion you like, but they simply cannot produce faith and hope and love of this order. But the word you heard beforehand, says Paul, before ever these heretics came on the scene, the word you heard before, that's the word that gave you this rich experience of God's grace. You see what he's doing? He's already beginning to put his arm around young Epaphras, the evangelist who taught them the gospel, and who has come to prison to visit Paul.

The word you heard beforehand, who did you hear it from? Epaphras. Whom the heretics were despising as not having the kind of sophisticated knowledge that they apparently had. Aha, says Paul.

But the word you heard beforehand from Epaphras was a word that brought you to faith and brought you to love and gave you the hope that is laid up for you in heaven. Now, what's come in recently can never do that kind of thing. Moreover, Paul identifies the life-transforming message as the word of truth.

And the emphasis there is, of course, upon the word truth. The word of truth. That was a distinguishing feature in the message as declared by Epaphras and accepted by the Colossians.

But what is truth? Well, we are in the middle of it, aren't we? What is truth? That question was asked long ago. Will you dare, will you allow me this morning, not to try and apologize for what I'm going to say, but try and put it in a nutshell, which is a very difficult thing to do, but I'm going to quote someone I know not who. Faith is not an idea.

Faith is not even, I'm sorry, truth is not an idea. Truth is not even a fact. Truth is correspondence between the reality and what describes it.

Truth is the correspondence between reality and the way it's represented. Now, what is Paul saying? Paul is saying there are spiritual realities behind the gospel that you heard. What are they? God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, and whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

The Son of God took our humanity to his deity in the virgin's womb and was born as a man and became obedient as a servant, even to death, even to the death of the cross. He died for our sins on the cross. He rose again, and as if that were not enough, he ascended up on high and he led captivity captive, and he is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, from whence one day he will return to be the judge of the quick and the dead.

Having arrived in the Father's presence, he with the Father sent forth the Holy Spirit to take his place among his disciples. Now, these are the realities. Behind the message of the gospel, behind the declaration of those things and of the possibility of sins forgiven and peace with God, there lie these great verities.

The gospel is not just a little story spun together. The gospel is not a myth. The gospel is not just sweet talk.

The gospel is truth in this sense. The message of the gospel has behind it these massive realities of God's intervention in Christ for the redemption of men and women. Now, see Paul is again thinking of the heretics and the heresy.

You remember one of their issues was this. They said God is very, very high. That was a truth.

Every heretic will have some truth to say. God is high. God is glorious.

God is too far away for us to get near him. That was true. Heretics will tell you that sometimes.

God has come down to earth. He's come near to us. Heretics will even allow for that sometimes.

But they usually say God comes near to us, to you, through us. These heretics conceded that God had come down. But how could the eternal God come right down and take flesh when flesh is evil according to them, not according to the Bible? How could it come into a human body when this human body is necessarily sinful? Now, in order to answer that question, you remember, they spun a whole chain of cobwebs, as one commentator speaks of it.

And they said, well, there is God up there in the highest, and then there is some being, an eon of God, an emanation from God. He stands next to him. And then there is another emanation of God next to him, and

another next to him.

And you have thousands upon thousands of these emanations of deity, and at long last you have Jesus Christ at the end of the chain. He came down to the very place where we are, and he represents God. But between him and God there are these myriads of chains, of eons.

Says Paul, that's just a figment of the weird imagination. There's no substance behind the words. There's no truth.

There's no correspondence to reality. There are no realities behind the words. They're but notions.

And that's the difference between philosophy and theology, properly so called. Behind biblical theology there are the realities, the substantive things of God, who God is and what God has done. But behind heresy there is nothing but the weird notions of a man or a woman, or both together.

Says Paul, behind the gospel lies truth. And so you see, even though this is not something that is very acceptable, in our age any more than any other age, Christians believe that when they accept the gospel, they accept truth. Let me quote R.C. Lucas in his recent book on this fullness and freedom, on this epistle, writes, The bold claim to possess and preach the truth must always be a scandal to men and women in any age, not least our own.

But we have to insist, says he, that the merits of the gospel cannot be compared with other forms of religious teaching. For while they are relative, by that he means this, that is truth for you, but not for me. You see, you meet people like that.

They tell you, that's truth for you, but it's not truth for me. Well, that's relative truth. It's not truth at all.

But Christianity, on the other hand, is absolute truth and universal. That means it is true for all. God so loved the world.

God sent forth his son. That is true for all. God's son died.

That has happened. It is true. He is risen.

It is true. He's ascended on high. It is true.

He sent forth the Holy Spirit. It is true. The Spirit has given us the Word.

It is true. The Spirit and the Word has given us the Church. It is true.

It is true. We're not dealing with figments of the imagination. Behind everything there is truth.

And we are of all men most foolish if we pretend with the one hand to believe the gospel and then suggest to people that we don't have the truth. Our gospel is the truth. Because Jesus Christ is truth incarnate and the only source of infallible knowledge.

The last thing I can say this morning is this. Paul also identifies the transforming message as the gospel which has come to you. That is, to the Colossians.

The word which the Colossians had heard from Epaphras was not merely truth and therefore reliable. It was good news. It was gospel and therefore desirable.

Later on Paul speaks of it as a message of grace. Now these two thoughts belong to one another. The transforming message spoke of a freely offered salvation already complete in itself and available to the most unworthy without charge.

That's good news. And it still is. Here were tidings of a full salvation that was able to save to the uttermost whilst at the same time it was free for anyone to receive it.

It came gratis. This stands out in sharp contrast with a kind of Jewish legalism and salvation by works concept now being preached in Colossae as Paul was in prison. And this good news came to the Colossians.

Notice that. Every word here is important. Oh brothers and sisters, let us read the scriptures carefully.

The gospel came to Colossians. Colossae didn't come for the gospel. The gospel always comes to us before we come to it.

The grace of God always seeks us before we seek for it. The gospel came to Colossae. How did the gospel come to Colossae? It got into Epaphras' heart when Paul was preaching in Ephesus.

And having got into Epaphras' heart, Epaphras by the grace of God was sent back home and he took the gospel with him. The grace of God came to you. Then you came to Christ.

Then Paul proceeds to stress the validity of the claim that the message that had reached the Colossians was divine in origin and unique in character. He goes on and he adds to it. Let me just mention these as I close.

First of all, he refers to the universality of its application. This is truth, he says. This is the gospel of God.

This is not a human philosophy. One thing that proves that is this. This is a gospel that performs its appointed ministry everywhere.

All over the world the gospel is bearing fruit. You know, we've really lost the significance of this. May the Lord help us to recapture it.

This message bore fruit in the lives of those who had received it in Colossae. The kind of fruit we noted in verses 3 to 5 centering in faith, love and hope. Yes, yes.

But whereas the nature of the fruit it bore and still bears is unique, what Paul now stresses is that it does the same thing anywhere and everywhere. This is not a plant that can only thrive in certain climatic conditions. This grace which brings forth fruit brings forth fruit everywhere, whether in the equator or in the poles.

Its potency is as wide as humanity. It is neither confined to an age group nor an era in history nor to a class in society. It is boundless.

It is universal in its potentiality. You remember our Lord's claim. And I, he said, if I be lifted up from the earth will draw all men unto me.

Now that did not mean, as it may appear to mean, that he would draw people without exception. Because if you just read the context, go back to chapter 5 of John, you will find that Jesus has already said to some

people, you will not come to me that you may have life. So it doesn't mean everybody without exception.

And he will tell some of the children of Abram according to the flesh that there will be those who will come from the east and from the west and they will sit down with Abram in the kingdom of God but the children of the kingdom will be cast out. They'll be outside. So this is not universalism that everybody will be saved.

It doesn't say that. Well, if it is not everybody without exception, what then is it? Well, it is everybody without distinction. I will draw all men unto me.

Now you say, what warrant have you got for saying that? Well, I'll give you my warrant and here it is. It's explained most beautifully in the book of Revelation as, for example, in chapter 5 and verse 9. Here we are in the new Jerusalem. Here we are before the throne of God.

And they sung a new song saying, Thou art worthy to take the book and to open the seals thereof for thou wast slain and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation. Every kindred and tongue and people and nation without exception. Jesus Christ did not set out apparently to bring every man and every woman out of darkness into his kingdom.

The church is an ecclesia. It is calling men out of the world to be his own. It is calling a bride to be his own.

And when at last we shall come to that vantage point from whence John was speaking these words, we shall find that there hasn't been a kingdom, there hasn't been a nation, there hasn't been a people speaking any language, but that out from among them the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne has gathered his elect, has saved and redeemed and washed in his blood those who were guilty, black and white, rich and poor, north and south, east and west. They will come without exception. This gospel, my friends, is effective everywhere to perform what God in Christ means it to perform.

Everywhere, says Paul. It is bearing fruit everywhere. And the vitality is extensive.

It is producing fruit and growing. And it is with this I must close. A gospel doesn't lose its potency upon its first impact.

In fact, it grows. It spreads. If you receive this gospel of truth which is your salvation, if you receive Jesus Christ, then the seed that you receive at that moment will begin to spread through your own life.

It will touch your head, touch your heart, touch your conscience, touch your will. It will affect your body, your way of living, privately, publicly, in business, wherever you are, wherever you go. You see, it will permeate.

It will cover the whole length and breadth of your life. Nothing will be left untouched by it. There's no more privacy when this gospel has found root in your soul.

Not only that, but let it come into any district. When the gospel comes into any home, sooner or later other people are going to feel the impact of it. Father and mother, brother and sister, neighbors next door, people we work with and so forth.

The gospel spreads. This is the message. This is the history of the church.

Dr. Hendrickson refers to this marvelous phenomenon and quotes Justin Martyr, writing about the middle of the second century. And Justin Martyr puts this on record, writing to the pagans of his day. He says,

There is no people, Greek or barbarian, or any other race, but by whatever appellation or manners they may be distinguished, however ignorant of arts or agriculture, whether they dwell in tents or wander about in covered wagons, among whom prayers and thanksgivings are not offered in the name of the crucified Jesus to the Father and the Creator of all.

He has gathered men out of every kindred and tribe and people and nation already, says Justin Martyr. Tertullian, half a century later, says this. We, he says, are but of yesterday, but yet we already fill your cities, your islands, your camps, your palaces, even your senate and your forum.

Christians were in the senate in Rome. And then this last sentence, but most significant. We've only left you your temples.

We don't come into your temples. We are separated to be the Lord's. We belong to Jesus Christ.

We don't come to your temples. You can keep them. But we invade every other place in society and we capture the hearts and men for our Lord.

That's the gospel. You say, is it going on still? Oh, brothers and sisters, it is. It thrills my heart every time I come to the fact that every week for a number of years, two, three, four years, maybe longer, at least 1,000 churches are founded on the continent of Africa alone.

No, I didn't make a mistake. I'm quoting. 1,000 little churches at least are founded on the last continent of Africa alone.

The potency of the gospel. This is not a flower that thrives in a hothouse. This is a seed that will grow anywhere in Caesar's household and in your home and in your stony heart.

Accept it. And as you begin to experience the faith which is in Christ Jesus our Lord and the love shed abroad in your hearts by the Spirit towards all the redeemed and you begin to come alive to your inheritance, your hope in heaven laid up, may the Lord enable you to be faithful as a disciple and a witness to his grace. Let us pray.

Oh, Lord, with humble, grateful hearts we bow before you. What we desire to do is to worship. We're not always sure how to do it when we have been meditating on a passage like this.

The marvels of it, the wonders of it, they just creep over our souls and overwhelm us. Oh, God, you are too great for us. And yet we thank you that you cause something of the ocean of your love and mercy and of the great abyss of knowledge concerning yourself that is revealed.

You allow it to make an impact upon us and to fill our little minds which are but cups at the best. We pray, oh, Lord, that you will enable us sincerely to take it in, honestly to accept what we receive and loyally to serve the Christ, our Savior. To that end, go with us throughout this day and let not the seed that has been sown be taken away by the birds of the air.

Rather, may the seed of your word be watered by the Spirit that we as a congregation and those who visit us from time to time may become the fertile field wherein you bring forth eternal food to your everlasting praise. Amen.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/4/SID4664.mp3>

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