

Complete: Thankful for Gospel Work – Colossians 1:3-8

My first year out of college I worked at a job for about 10 months that was the most physically demanding job I've ever had. I drove a dump truck and a skid steer bobcat and cleaned up construction materials from residential construction sites. The days were long and summer in South Carolina is no joke.

Even though the guy that ran the company was very disorganized and terrible at his job, the work itself was alright. I liked getting up in the morning and doing a job that sees something accomplished. The objective each day was clear, and I was tired each night, but I knew I had worked hard and seen the results of that work.

We are designed to work; it's built into how God has made us as humans because we reflect God's image. God is a God of activity and work. Genesis 2:2 describes God as finishing His work of creation. Since God has made us to work and see things accomplished, he has graciously built into work a sense of satisfaction when we do finish the job.

One of the most amazing gifts of grace to us as humans is that God has called us to participate in His work in the world through the spread of the gospel. The gospel does work when it is proclaimed and made clear. Romans 1:16. The gospel accomplishes a purpose and goal. It moves. It advances. It works and we get to participate in the job.

And when we see the results of the gospel in us and in those around us, it brings a sense of gratitude, joy, and satisfaction. At least, it did for Paul and it should for us as well. And thankfulness for the gospel's work is exactly where Paul begins his letter to the Colossians in 1:3-8. So, in this opening passage of the letter here's what we will see today. **3 Actions that Create Thankfulness for God's Gracious Work Among Us.**

1. Value the Evidence of the Gospel (vv. 3-5a)

Paul typically begins his letters with a section of thankfulness for those he is writing to. Colossians fits this mold perfectly and Paul's thankfulness is driven by

the gospel. The first thing he is thankful for is the evidence of God's work among the Colossians.

Now remember, Paul did not start this church, and he had never been to Colossae. But he's heard of the work God is doing in their lives and he's thankful for it and he prays for them because of God's work in them. Look at verse 3 and the first couple of words of verse 4. The reports Paul has heard focus on some specific evidence of the gospel in their lives.

Now, before I read these evidence's I want to ask you a question. How can you tell if someone is a Christian? What does it look like to live as a Christian? What tips you off? I can tell you are a Tigers fan because of your T-shirt, your bumper sticker, and because you know the names of the players. What are the signs of a Christian? I've lived in a Christian environment before where the signs of being a Christian were the clothes you wear, and the music you listen to.

Notice the signs that Paul has heard are showing up in the lives of the Colossians. Look at the rest of verse 4 and the first phrase of verse 5. Faith. Hope. Love. These are the three cardinal virtues of Christianity. Look at them a little more closely.

Faith is in Jesus Christ. This entire letter will be about Christ, but faith in Christ means I know Him and trust Him. I trust what He says and I trust that what He did on the cross has been applied to me. So, faith is directed to Christ and in Christ, but notice the second virtue. Love for all the saints. The Colossians were growing in their knowledge of Christ and their trust in Him and also learning to love one another more and more. They were sacrificing for each other. Giving up their own preferences for each other. Serving each other. Love is the most necessary quality for any believer to have in relationship with others. Col. 3:14.

But faith and love are built on a foundation. Notice the beginning of verse 5. Hope here is not an inner subjective feeling here. It's an objective reality that is waiting for you in heaven. 1 Peter 1:3-5. This hope becomes the soil in which faith in Christ and love for others grow.

These are the evidences of the gospel's work in the Colossians that Paul had heard about and he's thankful to know that they are growing in faith, hope, and love.

Now, I think we often complicate the Christian life. I think we make it about too many things. These are the cardinal virtues for a reason and if you will give yourself to these 3, you will see other areas begin to fall into place. This is how it works in other areas of life. When I start to run regularly, I suddenly start to sleep better, eat better, and am more intentional about my daily schedule. Faith, hope, and love are at the center of how God works. Give yourself to these and watch what happens in your life.

This entire time I've been talking about faith, hope, and love as evidence of the gospel's work in the Colossians and in us. But Paul hasn't used the word gospel yet. Why have I been saying that? Well, look at the rest of verse 5.

The reason the Colossians had faith, love, and hope was because they had heard the gospel. And when the gospel is proclaimed, it is effective and does its work.

2. Expect the Effectiveness of the Gospel (vv. 5b-6)

Notice that the gospel, or good news, is the word of truth. We live in a time where we have to question every bit of news we hear. Is this actually true? Did it happen this way? You do not ever need to question that about the gospel. At the most basic level, the gospel is the news about what God has done through Jesus Christ to redeem human beings from sin and restore a relationship to God which results in life with God and entrance into His kingdom. It's the truth about Christ's victory over sin and death through His substitutionary sacrifice for sin on the cross. And this news has massive implications for those who hear it and believe it is true.

News of any kind has the power to shape and form the way you live, but this is especially true of good news. And the gospel is the most glorious news a sinful human being could ever hear. Your sin debt has been paid. Sin has been defeated. Jesus died for you and life in his kingdom is yours through faith. That's magnificent news and it has the ability to radically work in the lives of those who hear it. Look at verse 6.

The gospel had come to the Colossians, and it was spreading throughout the world and what was it doing as this message traveled over Roman highways and into cities and towns? It was bearing fruit and increasing. This language actually

sounds similar to the language of Genesis 1:26-28 when God first commissioned Adam and Eve. They were to be fruitful and multiply or increase image bearers of God. Because of Christ's work this commission now happens through the good news of the gospel. Image bearers of God are created as people believe and lives are changed. Listen to Colossians 3:9-10.

The heart of the gospel message is that God is a gracious God who freely offers this reconciliation and has taken all the steps to make it happen. Notice the language at the end of verse 6. The gospel is fundamentally about grace, and it is a message of grace. But how did the Colossians receive this message? If you look back to verse 6 you will see 3 times the word "it" is used to describe the gospel. Paul thinks of the gospel almost as an independent agent. But "it" always must be carried in the vessel of a sinful human and spoken to another sinful human and that is exactly what happened in Colossae.

3. Live as an Emissary of the Gospel (vv. 7-8)

Notice the fourth use of the word "it" to describe the gospel at the beginning of verse 7. I told you last week that what most likely happened in Colossae is that Epaphras was traveling to Ephesus while Paul was teaching there for several years. Epaphras heard "it", the message of grace. The true good news of Christ and what He has done. Epaphras believed the message to be true and then what did he do? He went back home and started telling those he knew the good news. He spoke. He shared. He explained.

Now remember, the gospel has a power all its own. The gospel is working in you at this very moment to grow your faith, hope, and love, but it also works in those who don't know Christ when you explain it to them. God has graciously allowed us to be vessels that carry this gospel to others. This is how it spreads. Listen to 1 Corinthians 4:1-7.

God wants to continue His work among believers here at WBC, just like he wanted to at Colossae. But here's the thing. This message is meant to work inside and outside the church. It's meant to go to people who aren't here this morning. It's

meant to be heard by them. We can limit the work of the gospel by keeping it in these 4 walls and among ourselves.

Listen, let's just talk practically here for a second about being a vessel or an emissary of the gospel. Here at WBC you may have noticed that we don't plan a ton of activities, events, and studies to keep you busy here at church. We want you to be here to worship on Sunday and we want you to go to a small group and get involved serving, but outside of that we don't expect a lot of people or organize events 4-5 nights a week. Why?

Because if you are here, you can't be out there. And if you aren't out there, you can't engage relationships with unbelievers and you can't let the gospel loose to do its work. When we think about church life there should be a constant tension. People need to be equipped and to learn the Bible and know God and grow. So it's great to have studies and classes and events and to root you deep and we do some of that. But you are how the gospel goes to our area.

I've been reading a book recently that says that every church has a relational reach zone. What does that mean? God has placed each person here into relationships with co-workers, neighbors, family and friends. We have a web of relationships that no other church has and that's by God's design. Other churches have a different relational reach zone and that's wonderful.

Our average adult attendance is approaching 200 on a Sunday but we are always missing people, so let's say for the sake of our argument that we have 250 adults rotating through WBC in a given month. How many connections to unbelievers do you think we have between those 250 people? Well, if you just take your neighbors on either side of your house, apartment, or condo, that's 500. Add in family, co-workers, and friends, and we very quickly get into the thousands.

Start there. Spend time with those outside of the faith so you can talk about Christ. Let the gospel do its work and sometimes the best way to do that is simply to invite a neighbor, friend, or family member to church to meet other Christians and sit under God's Word.

Let's be thankful this morning for the evidences of God's work among us, and then let's turn that thankfulness outward and watch the gospel continue its work among those who still need to hear it. It's still bearing fruit and increasing and we get to be a part of that. Let's pray.

Sermon Reflection Questions – 3/1/26

- What's the most demanding job, mentally or physically, you have ever done?
- What are some unclear criteria to use to determine whether or not someone's faith is real?
- Why do you think faith, hope, and love are typically called the cardinal virtues for Christianity?
- In what way does hope provide the foundation for faith and love?
- What are some specific ways Paul expects the Colossians to demonstrate love for each other?
- What are some practical ways you can prioritize faith, hope, and love in your life?
- How would you briefly explain the "good news" of the gospel to someone? What would you focus on to highlight the goodness of the news?
- Explain the concept of the "relational reach zone" that was mentioned on Sunday.

- What is one practical way you can increase your personal engagement with unbelievers around you?
- Who is one unbeliever you can commit to pray for that God will give you the chance to invite to church?