

Rooted in Christ
January 15, 2017

I want to tell you a story from Christian history. This is not in the Bible. This happened several hundred years after the New Testament was written. Through much of their history the Romans fought wars to decide who would rule the empire. Our country fought one civil war. The Romans fought many civil wars against each other, each war deciding who would rule part of the empire.

Our story today takes place at such a time. **Constantine and Licinius** were each ruling part of the Roman empire. But they did not get along with each other. Part of the reason for the friction between them was that Constantine had recognized Christianity as a legal religion. Licinius was pagan to the core. He decided to stamp out Christianity in the part of the nation that he ruled. And he was afraid that the soldiers in his army who were Christians would desert him in the heat of battle and go over to fight for Constantine. So he ordered all Christians to be removed from his army.

We pick up the story with **Governor Agricola of Armenia**, who served under Licinius. Agricola had 40 soldiers in the same troop who were all Christians. He tried to get them to sacrifice to the Roman gods. They refused. He next tried to appeal to their honor and their soldier camaraderie. He said they were dishonoring the rest of the Roman soldiers they served with. They answered that it would be a greater dishonor to Jesus if they turned away from him.

Frustrated, the governor threatened to flog and torture them. The soldiers remained true to Christ. So, he did have them flogged, but still they did not recant their faith in Jesus.

Finally the governor ordered that they be forcibly stripped of their clothes and held out on the middle of a frozen pond until they died or changed their minds. Instead of waiting to be stripped, the Christians quickly tore off their clothes and went out voluntarily upon the ice. They said, "We are soldiers of the Lord and fear no hardship. What is death for us but an entrance into eternal life?" The date was **March 9, 320 AD**. They stood shivering on the ice, but singing hymns as the sun went down.

The governor ordered a temporary hot bath house to be thrown up at the edge of the pond. Surely the warm water would lure the men off the ice! Instead, they prayed aloud, "Lord, there are forty of us engaged in this battle. Grant that forty may be crowned and not one be wanting from this sacred number." Later in the night, however, one of the men did change his mind and crawled off the ice to the bathhouse.

Then a most curious thing happened. One of the guards, not a Christian, was so impressed by all this that he took off his clothes and joined the men on the ice, asking Jesus to save him too. So there were still 40 soldiers for Christ.

In the morning some of the 40 were dead. A few were still showing signs of life. So the governor had all 40 of the bodies gathered and burned in a big bonfire.

The Christians held firm to Jesus to the very end. This is the kind of faith we need if we will follow Jesus in our day. This is the kind of faith that can only come from a deep, personal relationship with the risen Jesus. This is what the missionaries who wrote the New Testament wanted for all Christians to experience.

We are working through part of Paul's letter to the Christians in the city of Colossae. In the first part of the letter he reminded them of some of the blessings they had as followers of Jesus. We did not read that last week, but let me list these blessings for you.

- **You have been rescued from the dominion of darkness. 1.13**
- **You have been brought into God's kingdom. 1.13**
- **You have been redeemed, forgiven of your sins. 1.14**
- **You have been reconciled to God. 1.21-22**
- **You are holy in His sight, without blemish and free from accusation. 1.22**

These are just some of the benefits, blessings, and riches that we receive as followers of Jesus Christ. There are more besides these. Oh, how blessed we are in Jesus. Let us make sure we do not take these for granted. Let us not lose the joy of our salvation.

But there is the danger of missing out on these blessings if a person quits following Jesus. So Paul warns them to remain firm in Christ, not moved from the hope held out to them in the Gospel (1.23). He warns them because there was danger that they might quit Jesus. This church was being targeted by false teachers. There were people in their community who did not accept the full truth about Jesus. They were subtracting truth from the gospel and adding untruths. In the end it was no longer the good news of Jesus Christ. It was no longer the truth of salvation from God. Instead it was false teaching that saved no one.

Paul's primary goal in writing this letter is to warn them to hold on to Jesus. They must become so confident that salvation is found only in Jesus' death and resurrection alone that nothing will move them to desert Him. He wants them to grow up in their knowledge of Jesus. He wants them to grow firm in their commitment to Jesus. So, he warns them of these things...

Colossians 2:4 (NIV) "... so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments."

There are lot's of fine-sounding statements being made in our world today. There are lots of things that sound good. But they are empty of truth. In today's passage, he encourages them further and gives them help in staying true to Jesus. He writes,...

Colossians 2:6-7 (NIV) So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

The context of this sentence is not the manner of how they received Jesus. It is not how they received Jesus. The context is simply that they did receive Him. To put his words another way, "You received Jesus. Continue in Him." He urges them to remain in Jesus. Do not desert Jesus, no matter what fine-sounding arguments they hear, hold on to Jesus.

The way to be rooted and built up in Jesus is by living in Jesus. The more fully and completely they live in Jesus, the stronger their faith in Jesus will become. Their knowledge of Jesus must grow. Their experience of Jesus by the Holy Spirit must increase. Their obedience to Him must continue. They will experience Jesus meeting their needs for comfort, guidance, courage, and joy. And in all of this their faith would become stronger. They will not be misled by fine-sounding arguments against the truth they know in Jesus.

The same is true of us today. Our knowledge of Jesus must grow. Our experience of Him must increase. Our obedience must continue. And as He meets our needs for comfort, guidance, courage, and joy, our faith in Him will grow stronger. And we will learn to recognize the falsity of the world's fine-sounding arguments against the truth of Yahweh, the creator of heaven and earth.

For example, the world says Jesus died over 2000 years ago and is still dead. But we know God raised Him from the dead. The world says Jesus was only a man, but we know He is God. The world says we don't need a savior, but we were convicted in our hearts by the Holy Spirit that a Savior is exactly what we need. The world says you can be your own savior, but we know that Jesus is the only Savior who can save from sin. He is the Savior God sent us.

So you who put your faith in Jesus, now remain true to Him. Just as you started a right relationship with God through faith in Jesus, so continue in Jesus. He is still the answer to our sin problems. **Don't turn your back on Jesus.** That is Paul's point.

Instead, make a concerted effort to grow stronger in Jesus. He gives us several pictures to that effect. First he says to root yourself in Jesus.

The roots of plants grow down into the soil from which they gain nutrients and water. They also provide support, gripping the soil. This is how plants stay upright when the strong winds blow. Even trees of hundred feet can continue to stand up against the winds of storms. Their roots go deep and hang on tenaciously to the soil.

Like a plant with roots, cling to Jesus.

The second picture he gives us is of a building. We are to be built up in Jesus. The gospel truths were only the beginning of what we must know of Jesus. The Gospel serves as the foundation of what we need to know of Jesus. There is more to learn.

Every year at Christmas the question comes up about the virgin birth of Jesus. The question is asked, "Must you believe in the virgin birth in order to be saved?" The answer is no. The fact that Jesus was born of a virgin is not part of the gospel message. It is not part of the message of salvation. It IS a statement of fact as presented by several of the biographies in the Bible about Jesus. And for that reason we should believe it once we learn it. But you do not have to know about and believe in the virgin birth in order to be saved. Instead, this is a further truth to learn about Jesus after you are saved.

This is just one example of what there is to learn about Jesus. As you read the Bible, you will learn a lot of things about Jesus that you did not know when you first received Him.

Like a building being built of many materials, build yourself in the many truths of Jesus.

And the last picture is one of physical development. We call this exercise. One of the exercises that we all must do at every age is strength training. The current issue of AARP magazine has an article about older people just accepting fatigue as a part of aging. The article says that is a mistake. The reason we feel fatigued and less strong is that we fail to exercise. We fail to push our bodies to do more than we need them to do. So they become weak. We must continue to push them a bit harder than we would like. This strengthens the muscles, the heart, the lungs, the circulatory system. It gives us greater health for all the living we want to do.

Paul is saying here that we need to be strengthening our faith in Jesus by putting it in to practice. We should be living in such a way that our faith is being tested. We must live in such a way that we must rely on Jesus for courage, direction, comfort, and peace. In this way, we will see Jesus work supernaturally in our lives and our faith in Him will grow stronger. As you live with Jesus you will experience His character. As you seek help from Jesus you will find Him faithful. And your trust of Jesus will grow stronger.

So we must exercise our faith in Jesus.

And then the last thing he writes of is thankfulness.

Giving thanks for the blessings you have in Christ must be a habit. The opposite of giving thanks is complaining. The middle ground is silence. This is almost as bad as complaining. Failure to appreciate what you have in Jesus is failure to appreciate Jesus. That is great sin.

We are taught in Romans 1.21 that failure to give thanks to God for life is one of our chief sins. We must make thankfulness a habit. Your notes contain several other passages that urge us to a lifestyle of gratitude. But Paul really hammers on it in the letter to the church at Colossae. Counting 2:7, he says it four times in Colossians. That is far more than any other book in the Bible.

Make a habit of expressing thanks to Jesus all day long.

Christian, you have so much to be thankful for. You received a personal relationship with a person, Jesus. So live in relationship with Him.

This translation uses the word live, but as we saw last spring, Paul often uses the word walk. He does so here. Walk in Him. Walk in Jesus. In using the word walk we get the idea that we aren't simply living for Jesus. We are living our whole day with Jesus. Live in Him, with Him, not just for Him. And in that relationship express your thanks all day long for all kinds of blessings. Make a habit of expressing thanks to Jesus all day long. Overflow with thanks. This will help keep you humble and appreciative of His blessings towards you.

All of these things will help us continue in Jesus and resist the fine-sounding arguments of the world.

Invitation

Are you ready to admit to God that you are a sinner?
Are you ready today to admit you need a Savior?
Are you ready to receive Jesus as the Savior you need?
Are you ready to turn your life over to Him as Lord?

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(Passages on gratitude. Ephesians 5:4, 19-20; Philippians 4:6-7; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18; 1 Timothy 2:1-4)