

Well, I like that. I've not seen that yet. And that was a nice reminder that it's a little drizzly and nasty outside this morning. But these times don't last forever. And if you're in a place in your life where it's a little cold and drizzly and maybe muddy, murky, those times don't last forever.

Forever either. Amen. Ever either. Amen. Say that seven times and you'll understand why I tripped over that phrase just a little bit.

And there's a few things going on in our congregation. We've got some people sick. We've got students traveling out this morning. I got a prayer request for Jason, a man in our community just going through some surgery on his spine. I'm just thinking that we could begin before we even jump into the sermon, just with a little prayer time.

Can we do that? Is there anything that we can pray about? I've mentioned Jason. I mentioned our students traveling. We've got some sickness still that sort of just seems to circle back and back around.

Is there anything else that we can pray for today? Yeah.

Art hall and has a connection with our congregation, had a fall, and so we want to keep Art hall and his fall. Someone will remember that really well and can pray for them. Who? Brad dykes. Brad Dyke's son.

They've called in hospice for him. We've been praying for his son for a while, and so Brad's with his family this morning, just kind of sorting some stuff out. Anyone else we can pray for? Yeah, at the back, Carla? Israel and Gaza, that area there?

Yes.

Well, can we just take a moment and lift up those concerns? I'll give us a time. Just. You can add your own in silence and then I'll close us.

Father, we lift up this morning the concerns of our hearts. You want us to bring our concerns to you. You care for us, and therefore you care about the things that we care about and the people that we care about. God. The interesting thing is you care about them a lot more than we do.

Even as our hearts break. And for some situations, certainly, we lift up those in our own congregations who are struggling financially and health wise. We lift up art and a few others. We lift up Brad's son and that whole family situation. We pray God, that you would be present there as they make some hard decisions and look at some difficult future things.

Lord, difficult and hard things are nothing new to you. From the beginning, your people and the surrounding nations have just been in a constant sort of struggle for survival. So we lift up the situation of the Middle east right now. We pray for your will to be met there, Father. We lift up those who are traveling, especially this kind of weather.

Pray for our students as they're traveling home. We lift up those outside of our congregation, Jason, for example, who just are undergoing some scary stuff. The people that care about him are nervous. And so I pray, God, that you would give peace and comfort and oversee those who are making health related decisions and even doing surgery. God, for all the things that we care about, we again know that you care about us and you love us, so you care about those things too.

And in situations and people that are far from you, you care about them a lot more than we do. So we lift up those in our circles who are far from you. We pray that by your grace, by the spirit working in them and working through us, they will be drawn to you. We pray this in Jesus name. Amen.

Well, we're starting a new series, all things new, and it put me in mind, as we were studying through this, of a friend I have. His name is Shay. If he's watching this morning, I don't think he is. But Shay lives out in California. That's his real name, by the way.

I usually try to spare the names of those who are innocent, and he certainly isn't. No, he's a good guy, but he's always struggled with this idea of what faith looks like. He grew up in a different religious setting than most of us, and so that sort of affected his view and his perspective and understanding of who God is, primarily things like how much control does he really exert in the world around us and over me, over history? What does this God require from me? What do I owe him?

What does he owe me? Is that God even real?

Now here's the interesting thing. When we were talking about this a couple of months ago, he has no issue at all with Christianity. He thinks Christianity is great. You don't often hear that from secular circles, do you? He thinks Christianity is great.

But the whole God thing, he's still like on the fence about. But according to him, if you just do an unbiased survey of the effect of Christianity on the world as a system of governance, both individually and in sort of civil settings, that survey will lead you to the inevitable conclusion that just doing things like God tells us to do them makes the world and people and communities better, even if you don't actually believe in that God. It's an interesting premise, and it's a little hard to argue with. After all, in first kings, the promise from God is this, that if you observe what the Lord your God requires, if you walk in obedience to him and keep his decrees and commands, his laws and regulations as written in the law of Moses, do this and you will prosper in all you do and wherever you go. And so just doing things as God told you to do, as Shay would say, even if you don't believe in him, will make things better.

And we see that somewhat in history, don't we? Wherever Christianity has taken root, places where men and women lived out their faith and did things the way God told them, systems have appeared and risen up that improved life, not just for believers, but for the world around

them. Think about hospitals. Hospitals take care of physical needs. And early Christians understood that physical needs and spiritual needs.

Jesus cared about both those things, and so we should care about both those things too. And so hospitals really came about because Christians took that responsibility seriously. Think about adoption, foster systems. Christians were really the first ones who would take in children who were unwanted by their families. The middle class workforce.

If you're here this morning and you're a middle class workforce, part of that is due to the fact that Christians elevated work. Paul told the early believers, listen, if you don't work, you don't eat. And so there was no longer this hierarchy between those who just got by on their good looks and charm and those who actually had to go out and work in the farms. He no, no, we all work around here. This is what we do.

And because of that elevating work and labor, the middle class workforce, the middle class standard of living really came into being. Christianity gave us a higher view of sexuality and marriage and the dignity and the freedom of women. Jesus actually brought people into his ministry, women into his ministry when no one else was doing that. And Jesus elevated and gave dignity to women in his ministry that existed rarely in other areas. Art, music, literature, just a survey of history.

Of those you see, the role Christianity played in its development, the idea of democracy, individual freedom and accountability. All those come from this place of our standing before God. Education, systems, education, not just for boys, but for girls and the deaf and the blind. All of that was initiated by Christians who took their faith seriously and used their influence to do something with that faith. Science.

The role of science. Leonardo da Vinci, Galileo, Kepler, Isaac Newton, all of these were men of faith who, their faith motivated them to understand and make sense of the natural world around them. When it comes to race and human dignity, man, we look to people of faith, Christians who transformed our understanding of what it means to love our neighbor, no matter what he looked like as ourselves. So as a system, as a philosophy of governance, Christianity has made a major impact in the world. It's got a lot going for it.

But Christianity is not just a philosophy. It's not just a system of governments, because behind all the good stuff is a God man. Jesus the angel said, he is Christ the Lord the savior. And when we are brought into him by the gracious work of the Holy Spirit and our obedience, then we find that we experience more than just an advanced civilization. We experience peace and love and joy.

Our lives are transformed, our lives are made new, and that flows through us, in us and through us, and then out of us. And that's when we see the world around us begin to change. So in this series, we're going to be looking at how the gospel, the good news of Jesus, transforms our lives

and the lives of those around us, how it makes all things new. So we're going to be in the book of Colossians. Now, Colossians is a small little book.

It's going to be hard to find. But I'm going to encourage you, if you got your bibles this morning or your bible app, to open it up to Colossians. It's at the back of your bible, sort of towards the end. It's tucked between, like Galatians and Ephesians, Philippians. And then there's a little four chapter book called Colossians.

And then there's the thessalonian letters. So I'm going to give you a little time to do it. I'm going to do a long prayer, so you've got time to find that in your bibles or get it on your phone app, look it up, and we're going to jump in. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word this morning. We thank you for how it instructs us and gives us insight and wisdom.

Thankful for the knowledge that's found there, for just the insight into the way life works and how the universe works and your plans and your purposes for it. But, lord, this morning I'm thankful for the way it impacts my life and transforms the way I think and how my new thinking transforms the way I act and how I use influence in the world, transforms the world around me, all because of your word, which is living and active. Lord, we pray that today, as we open your word, that it would be living and active in us as well, transform us by the word you speak to us through the Holy Spirit in Jesus name, amen. So if you're in Colossians. We're going to start by taking a look at this map.

So if you've traveled in the mediterranean area, then this might look a little familiar to you. So over here on that side, you see Ephesus and Smyrna and Troas and Laodicea. And there you see Colossae there towards the bottom, that little dot right there. Ephesus and Colossa are sort of sister cities. They are close to each other.

They impact each other. If you get on a boat at Ephesus and you travel that direction, you'll get over to Corinth, into the greek isles, and you'll get to Athens and other places like that. But we're going to focus our attention right here in this little area. This is what we would know as Turkey today, and Colossa is right there. If you were here earlier, before the service started, they have some little bulletin points about Colossa and the history of the country.

So you know a little bit about that already. But it was a trade route city. These are the cities that grew up because they were on the way to other places. And they grew up because they had something interesting there. They had an industry.

Colosse had a wool industry. They had a special wool. They dyed it a special color called colossian wool red, which is really cool. I don't know that anyone is wearing colossian red this morning. I don't know what it looks like, if it's like poinsetta red or if it's something else, but it was a very highly priced wool.

And Colossa grew up because of the wealth that came from that particular industry. There's a church there in Colossa now, not now, but as we're reading the story, there was a church there,

and that church was planted by the church over in Ephesus. So this is what happens. Paul is traveling, and his compatriots are traveling through this area of the world, and Acts tells us that they're preaching. And Acts 19:10 says, all the residents of Asia, this part of Turkey here, both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord.

Everyone's hearing it, and this guy named Epaphras hears it. Paul is preaching in Ephesus, and Epaphras hears the word of the Lord. He is transformed by it. He accepts the gospel. He says, I'm in on following Jesus.

And one of the things he does is he begins to think, how am I going to serve God with what I have? He goes, well, I've got family connections back in a little town called Colossae. And so he takes the Gospel and takes it back to this town of Colossae. Now, Epaphras is a Greek name, so Epaphras is probably a Greek guy. And when he goes back, his connections in Colossae are probably Greek, not Jewish.

Now, if you know anything about the early church, this was a tension point for a lot of them. Is Christianity going to be a Jewish thing, like a branch of Judaism? Or is it something entirely different? And when the Greeks began to accept Christ, the Jewish leaders had to figure this out. What is God doing?

Is he doing just a twist on an old thing or is he doing a new thing? And they came to the conclusion that God is doing a new thing. And here in Colossae, we see this church made up of primarily Greeks, with a few Jews scattered in and they're trying to figure out what it means to follow Jesus here. So Epaphras, with his deep love for Jesus, his commitment to share the gospel and his influence is why you actually have the book of Colossians in your hand right now. Now this is written by Paul.

And Paul is writing from a very lonely and isolated place. Paul is in prison and he's writing to these people. Now here's the deal. Paul has never met anyone in Colossae. He knows Epaphras and that's about it.

What he knows of them, Epaphras has told them. But he loves them and he's concerned because what he's hearing back makes them a little anxious for the health of the Colossians. They've gotten caught up in a few things that threaten to pull them from their faith in Jesus. Getting pulled away from sort of the elemental truths of Jesus is pretty easy to do. Other things maybe begin to take priority in our lives.

Good things that we are called to do, but begin to take first place rather than second place. Things like kids and family and work stuff. It's very natural that happens. Things begin to take priority that aren't necessarily faith. They're not centered around Jesus.

They may be centered around us and our priorities, but it can happen in church as well, where a particular ministry focus secondary issues unrelated to salvation maybe take priority. How we are working for God and how zealous we are. That can begin to affect our simple trust and

centrality on Jesus, where that thing that we're doing becomes the most important thing. Of course, there's always the question of how we worship versus how other people worship. Are we doing it the right way?

Are we doing it the right way? These are all issues that the Colossians were sort of dealing with as well. Paul is passionate that secondary issues, that distractions don't pull them away from their elemental and primary faith in Jesus. So let's read what he says. Scripture begins chapter one, verse one of Colossians.

In fact, let's read it together, shall we? Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, by the will of God, and Timothy, our brother. Now real quick, I don't want to keep interrupting all this, but what Paul is saying is here. Hey, Timothy is with me and we're writing to you. He is with me.

Together we're concerned. So we're co authoring this letter. I don't normally try to bring in Timothy's name any more than I have to, but in this instance, Paul just gives me an easy opening. And so Timothy, I think, gets equal credit for the book of Colossian. So verse two to God's holy people in Colossia.

Okay, let's stop right there as well. So this is the truth. And this little phrase here points this out. God's holy people in Colossia. Now I don't know about you, but sometimes I get the idea that God's holy people are somehow separate from the world around them, that they live in a different realm.

But Paul says that's not the case. Says we are holy people and we are firmly placed in this world that he's put us in. So this morning, to God's holy people in Bedford, Paul is writing to us as well. We live in this world intentionally. God put us here.

You are here for a reason. God's holy people in the school system, God's holy people at GM, God's holy people working at Crane. God's holy people serving us lunch at the restaurant this afternoon. God's holy people right here in Colosse, right here in Bedford. The faithful brothers and sisters in Christ.

Grace and peace to you from God our father. Paul says, 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 God's people. The faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel that has come to you. In the same way the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God's grace. You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant who was a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf and who also told us of your love in the spirit.

So we're going to stop there. We'll spend the rest of the time sort of unpacking what these verses are saying. So what do we see right off the bat? For me, I see thankfulness. Paul goes out of his way to say, I'm thankful.

And he talks about several areas where he reasons why he is thankful. He is thankful for them. Now, again, Paul is writing from prison. He's got a buddy with him, it sounds like, but other than that, he feels very alone. He understands what it's like to be sort of forgotten or rejected or neglected and just left on his own.

He knows what that's like. And when you know what that's like, you are very thankful for the people that come into your life that share something with you. We call it here, you find your people. You find the people that sort of connect and join with you. If you've ever lived far from your family, you know how alone that can feel.

No one knows you or knows your story. No one comes from your place, speaks with your accent, no shared experiences. But when you find your people, those who share something with you, your sense of humor, your outlook, your sense of adventure there, you sort of find a second family. And for Christians, I know I found this when I was living out in Reno, Nevada, just sort of trying to make sense of where I was at and what God had called me to. And I found a couple of people that became my people.

My friends Jakus and Dalyen, they've actually been here worshiping with us a couple of times. They became my people. And it wasn't just that we shared a particular sense of humor or an outlook on life, but we shared faith together. And when you find your people, you find a second family. And for believers, that second family can become even more important than our first family, our blood family.

The second family can become influences on our lives in ways that others never have been. And so Paul has never officially met these people he's writing to. He's writing from prison. He's a lonely place, but yet he calls them his family, his faithful brothers and sisters in Christ, despite his concerns about them. And if you've got kids or family members, you know, there's things about their lives you're like, I don't know, but you love them.

You love them desperately. I'm thankful for you guys here. Many of you have experienced the same things. You're coming in from a place that's far from here. And when you come in you find your people, you find family.

This family's become yours. You become mine. So Paul is thankful for them. He's thankful for their faith, their faith in Christ. Again, my connection with Yakis and Dahlian way back in the early two thousand s, the connection there was not just on our shared experience.

They were from South Africa. I was from Indiana. It wasn't even our language. They spoke with a weird accent, and they still do. Our connection was around our faith.

And when we would get together, we would study and pray, and we would encourage each other, and we would challenge each other to keep our focus on Jesus, especially through those very challenging times that I've spoken of several times here. We needed each other to share

our faith with, to bolster that faith in times where it was challenging. They needed me. When the world looked really bleak, at times, I was thankful for their faith. This past year, 2023, was a rough year for a lot of folks here in our family.

We experienced death. We experienced some real setbacks financially. Families, relationships really struggled, and we went through those things. I'll tell you, it was the connection of the family, of faith that pulled us through and walked us through those seasons. Family means encouraging each other, means enduring with each other.

And when we do that, when we encourage and endure, then we build something incredible. The faithful family of Christ, the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ. So Paul is thankful for them, for their faith. He's thankful for their love for others, he says, for fellow believers and for those even outside the flock. And that's what I love about here at Sherwood Oaks, Bedford.

One of our things we say around here is we want to be the best church for our community. And that means, for those of you who don't know this, I'm going to explain it again. That means that we're not going to be the best church. I don't know who's got that covered right now, but from my perspective, we're not the best church. But we want to be the best church for our community.

There's areas that we could get a lot better in. We could get a lot better at serving and volunteering and helping clean up and welcome and greet. Lots of areas where we could grow and get better at. But my goal is that we don't just get good at stuff here, but we get good at stuff in our community. We become the best church possible for the community that God has put us in.

So we demonstrate that at this point in time, and we'll grow in this, I'm sure. But right now, we help with I mean, I think of these guys who show up in the bitter cold to put food boxes in cars that line up in our parking lot on Tuesdays, and they show up and they do that. They're serving the community around them. I'm thankful for you guys. When we put out a call that says, hey, one of our guys at the shelter needs new tires for his car, or we need to help with this, or we need to provide a meal on Thursday night for the shelter, you guys jump in and say, yeah, we can help with that.

With Hope Resource center and the way you guys have come around that other areas and ministries in our community that you guys said, yes, we will help. We want to be the best church for our community. But it's not just out there inside these walls as well. You guys are great at helping with food and encouragement in sad times, lending a hand when a job needs done, stepping up to help when there's a need, praying and crying with others when tragedy and difficult times hit. I'm thankful for the ways that you love each other and you love the world around you.

And Paul says he's thankful for the hope they share. Here's the key for hope. We don't hope in something. We hope in someone. Our hope is in someone.

Our hope is in Jesus. First, Peter says it this way. According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again into a living hope. Now that living hope we'll see is actually a living God. Timothy says it this way.

This is why we labor and strive, because we have put our hope in the living God who is the savior of all people and especially of those who believe. A living hope and a living God who is the living Christ. My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and his righteousness. And it's only through his blood and his righteousness that we are able to enter into this hope that God freely offers us. And when our hope is in Christ, it's settled and secure, so we can be thankful for the hope that we have in heaven, the unshakable kingdom of heaven.

Like Paul, when I see faith, hope and love expressed in our community, in our congregation, I am thankful as well. Because Paul says this is where the kingdom actually flourishes. By flourishes, I don't mean just that it has a good time, but that it is growing and expanding where people are living in faithful community, when they're expressing faith, hope and love and they're experiencing God, working through them and expressed through them in those ways, then Paul says this. The gospel bears fruit and grows throughout the whole world. Do you remember that passage?

I'd like to think that it comes through amazing children's programming, which we have here, our phenomenal coffee bar, which I don't think any other church in town has the high level and quality of coffee and snacks that we have here. Personally, I'd like to think that somehow the gospel flourishes and grows because of some great preaching here, certainly great music here. All of those things are good. But that's not how the gospel flourishes and grows. Did you know that?

The secret is this, Galatians tells us, Paul writes to them in five, chapter five. He says that the thing that really counts is when faith gets expressed through love. That's when the gospel flourishes. That's when the kingdom of heaven advances. Paul says, because of your faith and your hope and love, faith is growing throughout the world the same way it started with you.

It's advancing in the same way. The pattern just repeats itself over and over again as you give the Holy Spirit room to direct your life. People see your faith. People see your hope. People see your love.

The Holy Spirit then begins to work in the lives of people around you, and it begins to work in them and draw them. And then the pattern repeats itself. They become followers and disciples and do the same thing again. The gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world as it has been doing, Paul says, among you, since the day you heard it and truly understood God's grace. You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who's a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, who also told us of your love in the spirit.

Jesus lived this with his disciples. His disciples then lived it with those around them as they went into all the world and shared the good news. At some point in time, those disciples met up with a young couple named Aquila and Priscilla. And they absorbed it. They took it in, they began to live it out.

And a man by the name of Paul interacted with them, and he gained this as well. He grew in this and his discipleship, and then he began to share it with others in a little church in Ephesus. A guy named Epaphras heard that message, and he said yes to it. He says, I'm all in. And he took it back to his little hometown of Colossa, and he shared it there.

And now Paul says, look, the same way that you received it has been the way it's been received all the time. God using each one of us, our faith, hope and love, to advance the gospel, the kingdom advances and bears fruit because of our obedience. As we keep Jesus as our primary focus, we're going to share at a time of communion here and as just a reminder, Christianity as a philosophy or as a system of governance has a lot going for it. Good things happen when we follow God's laws. But that's not why I am a Christian.

I'm a Christian because of Jesus. Jesus is the one who loved me and died for me, who brought me into this new and living hope. When I accepted his offer of salvation, Jesus brought me into a family of people who share my love for Jesus, who want to grow in faith and hope and love as well, who want to challenge me to keep my focus on him. Jesus planted in me a love for others, people within the body of Christ and outside the body of Christ. The kind of love that looks past offensives and offensiveness and see people as Jesus sees them.

We're going to talk in a few months about this idea of being unoffendable. But love, the kind of love that Jesus wants us to live out, is unoffendable.

I'm growing in this area and I'm a Christian because Jesus has given me a settled hope. I'm living it out because my hope is settled. Not in Colossa, not in Bedford, not in this world or this nation. My hope is not in those things. My hope is in Jesus.

That's where my hope is settled. I may live here, but I know my citizenship is in heaven. Paul says we have grace and hope in Christ Jesus, and that's what we're going to celebrate now as we share in communion. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, this morning, as we take the cup and the bread, we remind ourselves of your love for us.

You gave your life willingly so that we might willingly give our life to you. And in so doing begin to experience what it means to have the spirit moving in us and through us and around us. Jesus, we want the center of our lives and affection to be you, so that everything we do really brings honor and glory to you.

As we take the cup and take the bread, bring us back to that point again. And then for those this morning, Lord, who need grace and hope, maybe even in this room, our prayer is that they would surrender to the voice of the Holy Spirit and respond in obedience to the offer you make

to bring them into this new kingdom that you're doing, where you're making all things new in their lives. We pray this in Jesus name. Amen. Thank you for listening to this message from Sherwood Oaks Christian Church.

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