

I.N.I.

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

August 7, 2011

Colossians 1:1-14

In Christ Jesus, who is the Vine that gives life to us branches, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

In Psalm 1:3 the Lord gives us this description of a believing child of God. **HE SHALL BE LIKE A TREE PLANTED BY THE RIVERS OF WATER, THAT BRINGS FORTH ITS FRUIT IN ITS SEASON, WHOSE LEAF ALSO SHALL NOT WITHER; AND WHATEVER HE DOES SHALL PROSPER.** The Apostle Paul also speaks in much the same way about the believers in Colosse.

This morning we are beginning a four week study of Paul's letter to the Colossians. The city of Colosse was part of the Roman province of Asia. It was situated in the beautiful Lycus valley surrounded by mountains. Colosse was filled with diverse cultural and religious elements. Idolatry and paganism was rampant. As far as we know Paul had never been in Colosse, but he spent almost 3 years in Ephesus, a city 100 miles to the west. During those three years people from all over the province had come to Ephesus, the capital city and heard Paul preach. One of those was Epaphras, whom we believe was probably the organizer, the founder of the Christian congregation in Colosse.

About 5 years now pass. The Apostle Paul has been arrested for his preaching of Jesus and is in house arrest in Rome. Epaphras was having some difficulty dealing with a new wave of false teaching that had begun to infiltrate the city and the Christian congregation of Colosse. To some degree it was much like the false teachings that plagued the Galatians which we discussed the past few weeks. Certain false teachers were proclaiming to have attained perfect holiness by leading an ascetic life according to the Old Testament Law of Moses. They also taught Christian doctrine from a philosophical point of view, denying the deity (Godhead) of Jesus and teaching that angels were equal to Christ and therefore should also be worshiped. Though they spoke much about Christ, they did not believe in Him as Lord and Savior.

To counteract this influence of false doctrine, the Holy Spirit moved the Apostle Paul to write this inspired letter to the Colossians. In this letter the Lord through Paul

- 1) **Emphasizes the divine glory of Jesus Christ**
- 2) **Gives a strong warning against false teaching and**
- 3) **Encourages the Colossian Christians and all of us to live a godly life in word and deed.**

Our theme this morning is:

THANK GOD FOR THE GOSPEL'S GROWTH!

I: IT TAKES ROOT IN OUR HEARTS.

II: IT BEARS FRUIT IN OUR LIVES.

Paul begins his letter in the customary way as he did other ones. He identifies himself and also the ones to whom he is writing. **PAUL, AN APOSTLE OF JESUS CHRIST BY THE WILL OF GOD, AND TIMOTHY OUR BROTHER, TO THE SAINTS AND FAITHFUL BRETHERN IN CHRIST WHO ARE IN COLOSSE:**

Notice Paul clearly defines his apostleship as according to God's will. He also calls these believers **SAINTS**. That is ones "set apart" for God. You and I and all believers in Christ are **SAINTS**. Unfortunately the use of that word by the Roman Catholic Church has changed its definition. It is not one who has done so many good works that he or she has a holiness of his or her own. All believers in Christ are saints in God's eyes. Nor is the word **SAINT** only used for believers

who have died and passed on into their eternal rest. The word is one that describes all believers, **SET APART** from the rest of the world for God. To them Paul wishes the blessings of God's grace (**undeserved love**) and peace (**a oneness with God by having sins removed**).

In verses 3-8 Paul thanks God for their faith and their love that they have because of the hope of eternal life that was worked in them through the Gospel. We read again vs. 5-8...**BECAUSE OF THE HOPE WHICH IS LAID UP FOR YOU IN HEAVEN, OF WHICH YOU HEARD BEFORE IN THE WORD OF THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL, WHICH HAS COME TO YOU, AS IT HAS ALSO IN ALL THE WORLD, AND IS BRINGING FORTH FRUIT, AS IT IS ALSO AMONG YOU SINCE THE DAY YOU HEARD AND KNEW THE GRACE OF GOD IN TRUTH; AS YOU ALSO LEARNED FROM EPAPHRAS, OUR DEAR FELLOW SERVANT, WHO IS A FAITHFUL MINISTER OF CHRIST ON YOUR BEHALF, WHO ALSO DECLARED TO US YOUR LOVE IN THE SPIRIT.**

Paul and Timothy may never have worked among the Colossians personally and they also were now separated by over 1,000 miles but that did not mean that they were ignorant of what God had done in them and among them. For that working of faith in their hearts through the Gospel, Paul gave thanks to God. What a heart-warming message this must have been for these Christians. Whenever Paul and his companions prayed, they included the Colossians in their prayers.

These Colossians who read this letter were familiar with the metaphor that Paul used in vs. 6 **IT (THE GOSPEL) IS BRINGING FORTH FRUIT...** Paul uses that metaphor again in vs. 10 to illustrate the marvelous and miraculous nature of the Gospel. The Gospel causes growth, spiritual growth. The Gospel had taken root in their hearts and the Gospel had been bearing fruit in their lives.

FOR THIS REASON, Paul says, **WE DO NOT CEASE TO PRAY FOR YOU..** and again **FOR THIS REASON WE GIVE THANKS TO THE GOD AND FATHER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.** The Gospel had taken root in their hearts and Paul's prayer was that it would continue to grow. Before the false teachers arrived on the scene, the Gospel had free course, but with their arrival came confusion and uncertainty. Paul's first prayer is that **YOU MAY BE FILLED WITH THE KNOWLEDGE OF HIS WILL IN ALL WISDOM AND SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING.** Paul is praying that the Colossians have more than a fact knowledge of God's will, but a life-renewing, heart-transforming knowledge of God's will in Christ. This includes wisdom--**the ability to properly apply one's faith in various situations**, as well as understanding--**the ability to evaluate spiritual matters and reject that which is false and cling to that which is true.**

These false teachers boasted a great deal about their thorough knowledge and exalted insight, wisdom and understanding. Paul gives the Colossians the perfect antidote to such false teachings. False teaching robs people of the certainty of a close relationship with God; it robs people of the desire and the power to do God's will; and it robs people of the proper guidelines for living according to His will. All of these things are found only in the pure Gospel. Therefore the false teachings that these people were spewing forth only brought emptiness--not fullness; ignorance--not knowledge; foolishness--not wisdom.

Paul says in vs. 12-14 **THE FATHER...HAS QUALIFIED US TO BE PARTAKERS OF THE INHERITANCE OF THE SAINTS IN THE LIGHT. HE HAS DELIVERED US FROM THE POWER OF DARKNESS AND TRANSLATED US INTO THE KINGDOM OF THE SON OF HIS LOVE, IN WHOM WE HAVE REDEMPTION THROUGH HIS BLOOD, THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS.**

How in the world could we have been qualified, adequate, fit to be partakers of the inheritance of saints in the light? Certainly both Jew and Gentile, since the fall into sin, have no adequacy of their

own. Scripture is clear when it proclaims: **THERE IS NO DIFFERENCE FOR ALL HAVE SINNED AND COME SHORT OF THE GLORY OF GOD.. THERE IS NONE THAT DOES GOOD, NO, NOT EVEN ONE.** Our sufficiency, our adequacy, our qualifying for this inheritance is all a **GIFT OF GOD'S GRACE IN CHRIST JESUS.**

In Old Testament times when a nation was conquered by another nation the defeated people were often transplanted from their homeland, taken away from their cities and homes where they lived in freedom, to foreign lands where they lived as slaves. In the believer's life it is just the opposite. We were living in the slavery of sin in Satan's kingdom, under foreign control, in the bondage and darkness of sin and unbelief and God in one mighty act of love sent His Son into our world of sin and shame to take our place. Jesus delivered us, rescued us from the power of darkness. He lived the perfect life of obedient love we could not live. He went to the cross to give an all sufficient payment for the curse and punishment of our sins and the whole world's. The Father accepted His Son's work on our behalf and proved it by the resurrection of Jesus, declaring the whole world's sin paid in full.

When the Holy Spirit through the Gospel brings that Good News to the hearts of individuals and creates saving faith in their hearts they are transplanted into God's kingdom of light and life. We have been rescued from the deep, dark dungeon of Satan's domain through Jesus Christ and by the Gospel we have been brought into the kingdom of light and life and forgiveness. Christ paid the price, He bought us back. That message has not only taken root in the hearts of these Colossian Christians, but in yours and mine as well. For that salvation, we will want to thank and praise His glorious name every day of our lives throughout all eternity.

Paul also gave thanks that the Gospel was bringing forth fruit in their lives. We read vs. 10-11 **THAT YOU MAY HAVE A WALK WORTHY OF THE LORD, FULLY PLEASING HIM, BEING FRUITFUL IN EVERY GOOD WORK; AND INCREASING IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD; STRENGTHENED WITH ALL MIGHT, ACCORDING TO HIS GLORIOUS POWER, FOR ALL PATIENCE AND LONGSUFFERING WITH JOY; GIVING THANKS TO THE FATHER...**

Once the Gospel has taken root in the heart of the believer, it continues to water, fertilize and shine the light of God's love on the believing heart so that it produces fruit in the Christian's life. Paul lists four examples of what he means to **HAVE A WALK WORTHY OF THE LORD, FULLY PLEASING HIM...**

1) BEING FRUITFUL IN EVERY GOOD WORK: What happens when a fruit tree has many leafy branches, but little fruit? That fruit tree needs pruning and constant care so that it bears fruit on all of its branches. A Christian likewise needs to make consistent use of God's Word so that the law can prune and cut away the attitudes and actions that come from a sinful heart and do not conform to God's will and so that the Gospel message of God's love in Christ can bring forth fruits in every good work. Consistent use of the Word prevents the lifestyle of practicing Christianity only for an hour or two on Sunday with ungodly, selfish, worldly living the rest of the week. In other words---looking good on the outside but bearing little fruit.

2) INCREASING IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD: What happens when a fruit tree stops growing and stops bearing any fruit? It is chopped down and used for firewood. A Christian needs to make consistent use of God's Word also so that his spiritual maturing process does not become stunted or stagnate. Consistent use of God's Word prevents the "confirmation-graduation syndrome"--"I'm all done with Bible learning, with Christian education, because I'm confirmed! I don't need to study God's Word any longer."

3) STRENGTHENED WITH ALL MIGHT, ACCORDING TO HIS GLORIOUS POWER, FOR ALL PATIENCE AND LONGSUFFERING: When high winds come whipping in, great damage can

be done to fruit trees that are not deeply rooted and strengthened. Again consistent use of God's Word helps a Christian remain strong and firm in faith even when the storms of adversity, family and marital problems, illnesses, stress from our jobs or from mounting bills, temptations from within and without, come whipping in. **Patience** is the strength to bear up under pressure and **longsuffering** is the ability to remain calm in the midst of trials.

4) WITH JOY GIVING THANKS TO THE FATHER: God's Word does affect a person's whole outlook on life. It leads us to rejoice in the sure certainty of everlasting life and to rejoice even in our sufferings. It leads us to give thanks for the multitude of blessings we have received and to give thanks even when we have lost everything. Worry, stress, fear, insecurity, misfortune are all barriers to thankfulness. Consistent use of God's Word and seeing all that God has done for us will fill our hearts with thanksgiving even in the face of all of these troubles. The stock market drops, our faith in Christ continue strong.

Thank God for the gift of faith, for life in God's family, for the blessings of redemption and forgiveness of sins, as well as all of the countless physical blessings we enjoy. A thankful spirit is the heart of Christian faith.

These words of Paul were well timed for two reasons. First to help these Colossian Christians fight against these false teachers, and second because according to historical records shortly after this letter was sent to the Colossian Christians, some think only a year later, the city of Colosse was completely destroyed by an earthquake. The Lord strengthened them to fight against false teaching and to also endure with patience and longsuffering the disasters of life.

These words have been given to us for the same purpose. May that be the blessed effect these words of our Lord through Paul also have in our life as the Gospel bears fruit in you and me.

Amen.