THANK GOD FOR THE GOSPEL’S SIMPLE POWER

1. It is powerful
2. It strengthens faith
3. It bears fruit

A group of men was being interviewed to be pilots for a steamboat on a dangerous part of the Mississippi River. The question the interviewer posed to the group was this: Do you know where all the rocks are? The group was silent. To a man, no one knew. Finally one man finally stepped forward and said, Sir, I don’t know where all the rocks are but I know where they are not. He got the job.

Our God does not demand that we know everything - he does not even expect us to, but he most certainly wants us to know the important things. In Colossians 1, Paul identifies the important things. With Paul, we THANK GOD FOR THE GOSPEL’S SIMPLE POWER.

Paul says: We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you. Why is Paul thankful? Paul is thankful because he has heard about the faith of these Colossian believers.

But how did all this happen? Did the Colossians wake up one day reprogrammed? Was there something in their water supply that caused them to suddenly put their trust in Jesus Christ for the salvation of their souls? Remember, the Colossians were flesh and blood people just like you and me. They dealt with sickness and death. They enjoyed times of prosperity and times of financial depression. Although it was over 1,900 years ago, the Colossian Christians lived in the same real sinful world that we live in. Yet they lived each day with hope - an expectation that they would one day receive the crown of eternal life - an understanding that this vale of tears isn’t the end of the story - a daily certainty that their heavenly Father was watching over them, blessing them, and would one day call them home.

What caused such hope? The gospel - the good news about Jesus Christ. Paul knew this good news well. Paul used to hate Christians and he spent much of his time trying to get rid of them. Paul had a disdain for Christ, the one who claimed to be the Son of God. That all changed one day when Christ, the very Son of God, met Paul on the road to Damascus. Surprisingly, Christ did not destroy Paul, but instead embraced him with his love. Paul never forgot that.

The Colossians could relate to Paul. Many of them did not have Jewish blood running through their veins, which meant, they did not grow up with the Bible. They grew up with either no gods or false gods. But then came the good news about Jesus Christ and everything in their lives changed. They learned that the Holy Father would not punish them for every last thing they did wrong, for Christ had already paid a terrible price for their sin. They learned that their eternal salvation did not rely on how well they have lived or how hard they could work because everything had already been done for them by Christ. They learned that a heavenly inheritance had already been promised to them and was waiting for them. That was good news!

How did they find out about this good news? Well, this is not all that flashy and exciting. Somebody told them. They had not been initiated into some secret organization and thus gained access to some privileged information. They had not journeyed up a mountain to visit some wise old man who shared some transcendent body of knowledge. It was just an ordinary man named Epaphras who told them the good news about Jesus. You learned this from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf.

Quietly, without fanfare and fireworks, the gospel had turned heathens in to heaven-bound believers. Does this sound familiar? Sure the names have changed. Paul has been in heaven for almost 2,000 years. Epaphras too. But the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are still real events. And that powerful yet simple message of Christ dying for sins is still being preached from pulpits and taught in Sunday School. Babies are being baptized, consciences are being soothed at the communion rail, Bibles are being read on lunch breaks, home devotions are being led by moms and dads - and God is filling his people with his love and reminding them of what has been accomplished for them in Christ - and their faith is being strengthened. Everyday Christians like you and me are walking around
in the vale of tears but we know this is not the end of it. We know a perfect home in heaven awaits.

It all seems so ordinary, so simple. In reality, what God accomplishes through his powerful gospel is amazing and awesome. He turns cold-hearted heathens into warm-blooded believers. He takes loads of real sins and offenses and buries them in the heart of the sea. He takes the holiness and perfection that only he could provide and he wraps it around you and me. He gives strength to the weak. He gives confidence to the unsteady. He gives grace to those who just do not deserve to have it-all this in his simple, yet powerful gospel message.

No wonder Paul says: **We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you.** He knew about the faith the Holy Spirit had worked in their hearts and he was overjoyed. He also knew about the byproducts of that God-given faith. He had also heard about their love for all the saints. By saints he does not mean the figurines people put on their dashboards or dead Christians, but fellow believers. The more the Colossian Christians heard about Jesus, the more their trust increased and the more their anticipation of heaven grew. And the more their faith in Christ grew, the more they wanted to love and serve Christ and each other.

That is not a natural, human-born reaction. Our natural mind asks how we can make sure we are serving ourselves first, and maybe if we have a little bit of time and energy left over, then we can consider thinking about someone else. Or we figure: **So I’m supposed to love others. Well, what is the least amount I can do to still get by?**

But a new command has been given to those whom Christ has made into new creations: **Love one another.** Or the way Paul puts it when he is talking to the Galatians: **Do good to all people, and especially to those who belong to the household of faith.** Or the way Paul puts it here: **That you might live in a way that is worthy of the Lord. Our goal is that you please him by bearing fruit in every kind of good work and by growing in the knowledge of God.**

As new creations we have a new way of looking at things, a new way of doing things. Imagine you have a family reunion in Colorado. Your entire family is going to be there. In fact, your entire family has rented a bus so you can travel to the reunion site together. The whole point of the reunion is to get all of you in one place so you can enjoy one another’s company and have a grand happy time. What sense would it make if you bickered and argued and bad mouthed each other the whole way there?

In the same way, we are headed for heaven. We know there is going to be a beautiful reunion there, where all believer will live together in harmony with each other and in the presence of God. What sense does it make for us to bicker and argue with each other now as we are walking down that road together that leads to that heavenly reunion? What sense does it make to badmouth each other and criticize one another and make life miserable for one another? We know we will be sharing the joy and bliss of heaven soon enough. Let’s not wait until then to act like good sons and daughters of the Father. At our baptisms we have been made into children of God. That has made us brothers and sisters with one another. When Paul heard reports about the Colossians, that fact stood out. They were living like brothers and sisters. They were expressing love for one another.

The Lord desires that for us as well. That we may, day in and day out, grow in the knowledge of God - grow closer and closer to Christ - and having a genuine love for one another that also grows and shows. It shows in how we treat each other. It shows in how we respect one another. It shows in how we go out of our way to serve one another. All as if we were serving Christ himself.

Those things are happening - here and around the world. As Paul says: **The gospel is bearing fruit and growing in the entire world.** The gospel is powerful. It is strengthening and solidifying our trust in Jesus. It is bearing fruit among us. For that we praise and thank God. May it continue to do so, so that the riches stored up for us in heaven drive us to be more fruitful and more faithful in our lives here on earth. God grant it. Amen.

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