



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Colossians 1:3-8

“Thanksgiving, the Golden Triad and the Gospel”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] We’re turning again to Colossians chapter 1 and reading for the Scripture reading this morning verses 3 through 8, Colossians 1 verse 3 through verse 8. The apostle has just finished his brief salutation to the Colossians, and now in verse 3, he writes,

“We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints, For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel.”

May I just, since we have a brief Scripture reading, make a couple of comments? That word that begins verse 5, translated “for” in the version that I am reading, is a word that really means “on account of” so we should think, in our minds at least, “on account of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven.” And then in the following words, if I may be allowed to retranslate them, “Whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth that is the gospel.” So the expression “the gospel” is in opposition with the word of truth. Then the apostle continues, “Which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and

bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth.” If I may be allowed to make one other comment too in verse 6, the apostle says, “Which is come unto you, as it is in all the world.”

Now it is clear from a study of the history of the times, and also of the special time of the apostle, that the gospel had not gone in all the world in the common sense in which one might understand that today. What Paul means is, as we’ve said so often for it has such significance for the Doctrine of the Atonement, when Paul says the gospel is come in all the world, he means that it has come into the world of Jews and Gentiles. He’s not speaking about everybody without exception, but everyone without distinction. And if we’ll just bare those things in mind when we read the Bible, we’ll understand it a whole lot better. One must remember that out of the context in which the apostle wrote the Jewish possession of the Divine Revelation was preminent. They had been given the word of God and they were given it as a trust in order that it might go to the Gentiles. The Old Testament records their failure, the New Testament as well, the same kind of failure that the church of Jesus Christ, probably, is experiencing today. But when the thought of the gospel going out to Gentiles arose, it made a tremendous impression upon the world of the apostle’s day. He was the apostle of the Gentiles himself. So we need, constantly, to read the Bible in the light of the history of the times and the culture.

So, “Which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth.” when we read in verse 23, for example, “If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister,” it will help us to understand what Paul means.

Then the final words of our Scripture reading have to do with Paul’s ministry of the gospel, “As ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellow servant, who is for you,” now many of the Greek manuscripts have “for us.” Both of these make sense. “Which is for

you,” well that means that Epaphras was the one through whom the gospel was given to the Colossians. If Paul wrote, and some of the finest of the New Testament manuscripts have for us, if he wrote for us, then he meant Epaphras is my representative to you.

“Who is for you,” or us, “you a faithful minister of Christ; Who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit.” That last expression, “In the spirit,” maybe translated by the use of a word spirit with a little “s,” in which case the reference is to the human spirit. “Who has declared unto us your love in your spirit,” or “your spiritual love,” I like it as we have it in the Authorized Version, capitalized. I think that, more likely, this is a reference to the Holy Spirit.

May the Lord bless this reading of his word. Let’s bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee and praise Thee this beautiful day for the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ which has gone forth throughout the whole world, not only the world of the Jews but also the Gentiles. And we thank Thee that we have been, by Thy grace, the recipients of the saving message of the Lord Jesus Christ. And we thank Thee, too, for the encouragement that we receive when we read the apostle’s exclaiming of the glories of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and of the suitability of the word of God for our needs. And we thank Thee, Lord, that it is suitable for us, in our lost condition, to give us the hope of eternal life through Jesus Christ.

And we thank Thee, too, that the word of God is sufficient for all of our daily life as well. Whether young or old, the gospel, the word of truth, the grace of God is sufficient for us in our school, in our business, in our home life. Nothing is more suitable for us than the divine inspired word. Help us, Lord, to remember this and may, by Thy grace, we be enabled through the spirit to live accordingly. We thank Thee for the day in which we live and for the privilege of proclaiming the gospel of Christ.

We ask, Lord, Thy blessing upon this assembly of believers and friends and visitors here. May the ministry, of the word of God, be rich in their lives today. And for

all of the ministry of the chapel, its radio ministry, its publications, especially the tape ministry, which goes out so far over this globe, we pray, Lord, Thy blessing upon it. May it bring forth fruit to the glory of Thy name.

We thank Thee, and praise Thee, for the country in which we live, and we give Thee thanks for our governments. We pray Thy blessing upon our President and others who serve us in this way. By Thy grace, Lord, give us the kind of freedom, constantly, in which the gospel may run and have free course.

We pray especially for those who are suffering or have suffered. And we especially pray for Blanche Leffel's [ph 8:39] family. We ask, Lord, encouragement for them. May, in the midst of her home going, there be reflection upon the fact that all of us live a life that is temporary, as far as this world is concerned, we thank Thee that she's been released from her suffering, and now is in the presence of the Lord and enjoying the communion that is eternal. We ask, Lord, Thy blessing upon others whose names are listed in our calendar of concern. We especially pray that Thou wilt minister to them, encourage them, and meet their needs.

We rejoice in a triune God, a Father, who loves and cares, the Son, who has redeemed us, and the Holy Spirit, who exercises a constant ministry in our lives. We surely have been blessed tremendously.

Now Father, as we meet today in the Sunday school and the ministry of the word around the Lord's Table, may we experience a time of true ministry and commune that glorifies Thy name and builds us up in our faith. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] We are studying Paul's letter to the Colossians, and our subject for today is "Thanksgiving, the Golden Triad and the Gospel." The Golden Triad, of course, is the Golden Triad of faith, hope and love. Two weeks ago when we had our initial study I mentioned that the apostle wrote Colossians to combat a form of false teaching that was an amalgam of esthetic Jewish teaching mixed with pagan, perhaps Gnostic

elements. To meet the challenge, he gave them Christ. That’s always the way in which challenges, spiritually, are properly made. Preeminent in the old creation in that he is the creator and sustainer of the universe, preeminent in the new spiritual creation in that he has accomplished the atonement and is the first born from the dead. The only person who, at this very moment, has been resurrected in the biblical sense, the full biblical sense, possessing a glorified body, he’s the first fruits from the dead.

And because he is preeminent in the old creation and because he is preeminent in the new creation, he is sufficient for us. The apostle makes that plain in this epistle that’s his great theme. He says, for example, in verse 16, “For in him were all things created,” and then at the conclusion of that text he says, “All things were created by him, and for him.” And then in the 18th verse, he says that he “is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.” And in chapter 2 verses 9 and 10, he will say that believers are filled full in him, so he is sufficient.

If we were looking for an outline of the Epistle to the Colossians, and it’s not the easiest of Paul’s letters to outline, we would say that we can divide it into four parts conveniently. The first part, being doctrinal, in which the person and work of Christ is expounded, chapter 1 verse 1 through chapter 2 verse 3. Then the second part is directed, primarily, to the false teachers and the false teaching that they were giving and so we might call that polemical in the sense that he warns against that false teaching. And there he sets for the heretical precepts of the false teachers in the Lycus Valley by looking at them in the light of union with Christ. And then, as is his custom after dealing with doctrinal matters, he turns to ethical matters.

We don’t say, in Believers Chapel that is, I don’t say in Believers Chapel, that he then turns to things that are practical because if I were to say he turns to things practical after telling you things doctrinal, what would I be saying? I’d be saying, essentially, that doctrine is not to be classified as practical, but that’s false. That’s false to the whole of the Bible. So I use, somewhat unsatisfiedly, the word ethical. So the apostle turns to things

ethical in chapter 3 and verse 5, and there deals with the believer’s life in its everyday expression, chapter 3 verse 5 through chapter 4 verse 6. And finally in chapter 4 verse 7 through verse 18, there is a personal section in which Paul says something about his private plans and affairs.

That’s a simple outline of the apostle’s letter to the Colossians. And if you can remember the four words: doctrinal, polemical, ethical, and personal, then you have the essence of the progress of the thought in this marvelous little epistle. It is an epistle that we need in our day because we are living in days of feeble convictions and vacillating theological view points. It’s refreshing again to hear the ringing notes of authoritative truth. We need this note of categorical certainty. We have too many sweet iffy wimplers, raised by theological maiden aunts. And so the result is that the Christian church today doesn’t really have any grasp of biblical doctrine and in the experiences of life they are thrown to and fro.

William Childs Robinson, one of the stalwart warriors of the faith of the last generation, wrote, in a message that he delivered and gave in the *Evangelical Quarterly*, in written form, “The church which conquered the ancient Roman Empire and ascended the throne of the Caesars’ was not a church that gave forth an uncertain sound concerning her redeemer.” The apostle doesn’t say, “I think,” “I know,” “It’s the general viewpoint of biblical scholarship that.” We say things like that because we’re not apostles, and we don’t have the ringing note of certainty within our vocabulary. We can, when we repeat the apostles teaching say things like that, but even then we must interpret them. I’m glad that we’re able to read that the apostle’s writings, and we know that the things that they wrote, are, as he puts it, “The word of truth,” that is, the Good News.

Now Paul avoids cheap sentimentalism of ethics at the expense of the knowledge of truth. He is a person who is interested in the agenda or the things to be done. But he is also interested in the credenda, the things to be believed. Both of these things are things that are important. We constantly have people who want to emphasize one at the

expense of the other. It's perfectly alright to emphasize the things that are to be done, but do not do it at the expense of the things that are to be believed. We cannot do things that please the Lord if we do not believe the things that the Lord would have us to believe. If we can unite the credenda and the agenda, I'm using the Latin terms, you understand, agenda has come to be an English word, but the things that are to be believed with the things that are to be done, then they give us the power and the passion, the heart of flame to citadel of unbelief.

Now two weeks ago, we looked at the salutation. It's a marvelous little epitome of significant truth, and this morning we're going to look at Paul's thanksgiving. It would be interesting to study all of Paul's thanksgivings. Scholars have done that. Not too long ago, a well known scholar wrote a theological work of significant on the *Pauline Thanksgivings*. They are very interesting. This is one of them. And first of all, in verse 3, the apostle declares his thanksgiving. All of his letters contain a thanksgiving, with one exception. We know that in Believers Chapel because, not too long ago, we looked at the epistle of Paul to the Galatians. And the point was made, more than once that in that epistle, of all Paul's epistles, there is found no thanksgiving, the reason, the apostle was so concerned over the gospel and that the Judaisers had brought in after he had preached the pure gospel that he begins with some very sharp words about preaching false gospel.

But ordinarily he begins with a thanksgiving. The apostle was the kind of man, if there was something good to be said about a people to whom he wrote, he usually said it. The Lord Jesus also followed that methodology. So there were some good things that could be said about the Colossians, and Paul mentions it here. He doesn't hesitate, of course, at points to say things that have to be said that are not good, but he finds something good in the saints here, and he gives thanks for it. He heard from Epaphras when he was in prison the good news of the effects of the preaching of the gospel in the Lycus Valley.

Now notice that the authors who are responsible for this, that is the apostle who was the instrumentality, it seems, of the conversion of Ephesus, and Timothy with him, when they hear of the good news of the progress of the gospel in the Lycus Valley, they don't congratulate themselves. He doesn't say, and send out a prayer letter about, how significant the work was that he had done in the heart of Epaphras, and therefore, he was soliciting funds for an expansion of the activity which was proceeding from the prison in the church in Rome. The method of the apostle is so different from methods that we use today because the apostle never preached, so far as we can tell, from anything but a motive for the glory of God. So they did not congratulate themselves. They thanked God, how important that is.

Now he says, “We give thanks to God.” You'll notice also it's, “God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” We live in a day in which there is no clear doctrinal understanding of the Christian faith. If an individual should say to us, “I believe in God,” we are inclined to say, you must be a Christian. You must believe in the kind of God that we believe in, but if you cannot attach to I believe in God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, then there is insufficient evidence of the Christian standing of that person. So when someone says to you, “I believe in God.” You should say, in kindness and love and hope, “Which God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ or the God of Islam or the God of modern Judaism or the God of Jehovah's Witnesses, or the God of, and you can attach the names of other non Christian cults that do not respond to the teaching of the Scriptures concerning the trinity?” He says, “We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Now we also, in our day, have people who deny that faith is the gift of God. We often have people say, “Faith is what we do.” Well there is a sense in which that is true. God doesn't believe for us. We believe. But the faith that we exercise is an ability that is given us by God. If it is not given us by God, then, we have a problem with salvation by

grace. For if it is true that God does his part and we do our parts, then we have a gospel of confusion. We have a gospel of faith and works.

Now when Paul says, “We give thanks to God,” I should have said, before I turned again to this text, that there are many texts that state, plainly, that faith is a gift of God. We don’t have time to deal with that. We deal with that constantly, week after week. But I want you to notice the way in which the apostle gives thanks. He says, “We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith.” Now it’s clear from this, that if the apostle gives thanks to God for their faith, their faith is the product of God. Think about it for a moment. If he says, “We thank God for your faith.” He’s saying, “Your faith has its origin in God.” That’s very plain. Sometimes we don’t bother to think when we read the Bible, but if we think about this we will see that that’s true.

Let’s suppose, for example, and this sometimes happens to me, an individual comes up to me and says, “Dr. Johnson, I want you to know that six months ago I heard a message given by you, and I want to thank you for the unfolding of the truth of, and then he speaks of a certain truth.” And I look a little puzzled because I don’t remember even speaking on that topic. And further, as he outlines it, it becomes evident to me; it’s something I’ve never said. What he has done, in his mind, is to confuse something that he heard from someone else with something he thought he heard from me. That’s often true.

I do have people who will come up and say, “Ten years ago, I was listening to a tape, I think it was from you, and I just want to say I appreciate the exposition of, such and such a truth.” Now to thank me for a message preached by someone else, well if it’s, of course, as a human being, it’s possible for us to be in error, but the apostle is not in error. If he thanks God for the faith of the Colossians, it’s obvious. God is the one who is responsible for the faith. If it were true that that individual said to me, “I want to thank you for the message that you preached,” when I really didn’t preach it, and he knew it,

that would be an evidence of insincerity. And so when Paul says, thoroughly sincere, guided by the Holy Spirit, “We thank God for your faith.” If you’ll just think for a few moments, you will see that faith, therefore, comes from God. That’s very plain. That’s the kind of reading of Scripture that you ought to do, incidentally. You ought to think about the things that you read in the word of God. So Paul says, “We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints.” So, the one who is to be thanked is the Lord God. Paul thanks the Lord God for the work of the Lord God among the Colossians, and he does it in a characteristic way, with continual prayer.

Now looking at the justification for the thanksgiving, he talks about this triad of faith, hope and love. Faith is the root of life. Notice he says, “We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus.” Faith is not saving faith until it is in the sphere of Christ Jesus. Faith doesn’t save, that is just general faith. Confidence doesn’t save general confidence. It’s confidence in Christ. It’s faith in Christ. We could illustrate this very simply by saying, “I have faith in the Penn Square National Bank of Oklahoma City.” We could have said that a few years back, about nineteen eighty-one, and you could have said it very strongly, in fact you could have said it with enthusiasm. You could have said it with real enthusiasm, and you would have lost all of the money that you had in that bank, or most of it, because that bank was an insolvent bank. So enthusiasm does not help, does not save. Faith does not save. It’s the object of faith that saves. So Paul thanks God for their faith in Christ Jesus.

We constantly read of people in the paper who have been duped by others. Just this past week, we read in the paper of a well known sports figure, an outstanding football player that anybody who understands anything about football has had any interest in football in the last twenty years would remember the name of this man. He was a great player at the University of Arkansas and then at the San Diego Chargers, and I

think also in the NFL finally. Well this man was involved in a business, a partnership of some kind, and now he's suing a particular individual for over nine hundred thousand dollars. He had a lot, evidently, of confidence in the individual to whom he had given money for investment purposes but now he's discovered that his confidence and his faith were not placed in a sound object. So over and over again, we learn the fact that confidence, faith alone, does not save. It's faith in Christ. There must be that object, the divine second person of the Trinity, if we are to have salvation.

There are different ways in which the Bible speaks about faith in Christ. It sometimes speaks of faith in Christ as faith in and upon Christ, the figure is the figure of a foundation. In fact, the preposition that follows words that have to do with faith is a preposition that means upon. And then we have a preposition frequently used with expressions of faith which means unto in the sense of unto and union with. But here we have one that means simply sphere in the sphere of. There are three different kinds of figures that we have in cases like this. We have the figure of the foundation. We have the figure of the husband, that is, you believe into Christ and become united to him, and the church, of course, is the bride of Christ. And then you have the figure of a home in the sphere of Christ. So the faith, that is saving faith of which the apostle speaks here, is the kind of faith that brings you into the family of God. It's in the sphere of Christ, in the home of the faithful. That's the thought that lies back of Paul's thought there. Then he also thanks God for the love that the Colossians have for all the saints. That's the fruit of life. If faith is the root of spiritual life, love is the fruit of it.

Now there is a sense in which believers ought to have a high regard for, and affection for, everybody within what Augustine called, “The world about us,” but Christians live within the city of God, that is, we live within a sphere of the family of God and the love that we exercise is a love that is directed, primarily, to the saints. You'll notice the apostle doesn't talk about the universal fatherhood of God, or the universal brotherhood of man, which a generation or so back was so popular, and which still lurks

under the comments of lots of people in our day. He says, “We thank God for your faith in Christ. We thank God for the love which you have for all the saints.” So a Christian’s love is directed, primarily, to those who are related to him in Christ. There is such a big difference when you are around Christians who have a common faith in Christ.

Just last weekend, I took a few days off for vacation, went out and played eight rounds of golf in five days, too much for an old man. In three days, I played thirty-six holes every day. Can you imagine that? I haven’t been playing golf for a generation, it seems like, and I went out and suddenly played that. But we had a group of Christians. We had seven Christians who went out to a little bit north and west of Phoenix, and there we played golf. And we played in an environment, like an ordinary kind of environment, and it was such an enjoyable thing to get out with seven believers. You didn’t have to dodge any clubs that were thrown because of three or four putts. You didn’t have to listen to the kind of language that I listened to for so long on golf courses, and participated in. I can still remember taking my putter and throwing it into a tree near one of the greens, trying to qualify for the Southern Amateur. I was playing with a fellow from Dallas, by the way, when I was just a kid, about eighteen years of age. And I can remember breaking clubs and things like that, such a pleasure to be in the midst of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. So Paul speaks about the love that we have for all the saints.

Now, of course, we can be very upset with the saints. And we can be disturbed and irritated by them, but there is a difference between a saint and a non saint, a big difference. And so Paul talks about the love for the people of God. And then, in a striking expression, he says, “On account of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven.” Now there are different ways to construe this, and for the sake of time, I’m just going to point out a way that maybe, and most likely is, the way in which Paul means us to understand this. He says, “On account of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven.” Now that’s a strange way of putting it because we might not have thought that the apostle

would do it this way. He thanks God for their faith, the root of life, their love, the fruit of our daily Christian life, but, “On account of the hope,” we, I think, would tend to think, he should think of hope as a consequence of faith and love. But actually he says faith and love are a consequence of the hope. He says we thank God for faith and love, “On account of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven.”

In other words, what Paul is saying is that it's the hope that we have that leads to the faith and love. Now God often does that if you will think about it for a moment in the preaching of the gospel. We have the gospel preached to us and we have the marvelous story of the forgiveness of sins through the atoning work of Christ, and we are, as Calvin says, “We are ravished by the marvelous hope that we have, and the blessings of the future, and drawn effectually by the Holy Spirit to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.” So hope, the hope expressed in the gospel, is that which results in faith and love in Christian experience.

Now all Christians, if they are Christians, are motivated by hope. We tend to think, and we sometimes, I think, falsely think that in the present life, we enjoy all that we have in Christ and that when we get to heaven, what we have then is just a culmination, just a little culmination of what we have already experienced here in fullness. Well if we want to look at it, we do have a fullness of Christian life if we are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. But let me assure you that the main thing, the big thing, is still before us, and that the present life is only a little gracious, precious foretaste of the real thing that is coming. We should never think of our hope as just a kind of last touch, so to speak, of the blessings of the Christian life. This is only a foretaste of what is to come. And if this is so marvelous, and it is so marvelous, what must that be, my Christian friends? A hope, that's magnificent. Think of it. Revel in it. As Calvin says, let it ravish your affections, so, their hope.

Now he says, “Whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth that is the gospel.” “The word of truth that is the gospel,” the gospel's always a scandal. Men don't

like to be told that they are sinners. But they are. And consequently, they react against it. We have all kinds of variations of truth, that is seeming truth, truth to them, claims of truth, that are attractive to various types of people. But they all lack staying power. Look at the heresies of the centuries that have preceded us. All of those great heretics, there is Aetius, Sabellius, the Docetics, Socinus. They've all passed into history, and when men pass out of this existence, never having received Christ, even though they may be great in the eyes of men, but not believers in Christ, they are greeted in the world that is to come, as the prophet Isaiah pictures it in figurative form, they are greeted there by the great men of the past who say to them, “Have you also become dead like us?”

And so when Paul talks about the word of truth, he locates that truth in the gospel. It may be a scandal to natural man, who is a sinner. He doesn't like to be told that he needs the Lord Jesus Christ and doesn't have anything with which to commend himself to God, but it's the word of truth that is in the gospel that saves a man, and it's only the gospel that has staying power. And we will ultimately see the day, we may not see it in this body you understand, I'm quite sure I won't, but we'll see the day when people will say, “What were Mormons? What were Jehovah's Witnesses? And we'll study them like we will study ancient history. That is, if we have that long before the Lord comes, because they do not have any staying power. They don't have any gospel. They don't have any word of truth that is agreeable to the things that are said in the word of God.

Now, the apostle preaches the word of truth. He preaches that which is doctrinal. He doesn't preach it doctrinarily, or doctrinarily I should say. That is, if it is simply theoretical, simply impractical truth, but he preaches doctrine, the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, which is doctrine.

Now, in the final few verses, the apostle derives his thanksgiving from the experience of Epaphras, and a word that had reached him. He reminds them, incidentally, that they derived hope from the gospel before the false teachers ever came in

among them. That’s very important. After all, the Colossians are disturbed by false teaching. And so, Paul simply says take a look at your past, when the gospel came to you through Epaphras, how did you respond? And what did you feel? Listen, he says,

“Which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you, since the day you heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth: As ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellow servant, who is for you (or for us) a faithful minister of Christ.”

So, “Since the day you heard of it,” the gospel has been bearing fruit. Now those that have come in afterwards, these false teachers, these pagans, these Gnostic Judaists, these people who have mingled the true with the false, and have confused you, just reflect upon the fact that you had this hope long before they came. So the apostle is laying stress upon the fact, “Which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; as it doth also in you, since the day you heard of it” so, it should be evident to them that whatever has come afterward is not a necessary thing. The gospel is the only thing that spans the grave and reveals the life beyond.

Now he says in verse 6, and I’ll close with some comments on this. He says, “Which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth,” the universally fruitful good news. Notice, “Bearing fruit and increasing,” now my text doesn’t have increasing, but if you have a modern translation, it probably has the word increasing because that’s probably to be read here. So Paul talks about inner growth and he talks about outer spread of the gospel. So it bears fruit and it increases. It bears fruit in the sense that men respond to it, and it increases in the sense that the gospel spreads over the face of the globe. I like this expression, “It bears fruit and increases,” because

one can see some striking illustrations of it in the way in which a simple statement of the word of God in strange circumstances often is the means of salvation of individuals.

I have heard, for example, of a young man who was traveling through a village, and he suddenly, he was on a bicycle, this was many years ago in England, and he suddenly had the desire and the burden to shout out a gospel text as he drove his bicycle through this little town. And so he shouted out, I've forgotten the text that he shouted out, but it was a gospel text. And later on, an individual told the story of how he'd been down by his bed side, and he was asking God to give him some indication of salvation. He had been very much troubled over it. And as he was praying he suddenly heard this text, and he didn't realize from where it came, but he said, “Lord, if you've just spoken to me, say it again.” And this person had the burden to say it again, and so he shouted out again this text. And the fellow, later on, said, “That's how I was saved.” They found out it was somebody who had gone through the village afterwards, shouting the text.

Well, it was a true story, and I think that was true too. I just don't have the details with me now, but Mr. Spurgeon, in London, many years ago when he was ministering there, was asked to be the speaker at a big rally at the Crystal Palace. And so, thinking that since this is going to be a big rally and this was a strange auditorium for him, he went down to the Crystal Palace in London, the old Crystal Palace, a great place, and he decided that he would test the auditorium for his voice. Well, there was a fellow who was working up on top of the building, and he had been troubled over spiritual things, and he was thinking about those things as he was working way up on the top of this building. And Mr. Spurgeon walked in, and in order to test the building, he shouted out, “Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.” And this fellow sitting on top of the building up there heard that text. And through that text, he was saved.

The word of truth, the gospel, it brings forth fruit and increases as it is given forth. And it does it in all the world among the Gentiles. You know you learn this that the false religions are always, at best, ethnic, whereas Christianity is found over the face of this

globe. Paul says, “Since the day you heard it and knew the grace of God in truth.” Growth begins with the reception of the gospel, and it’s independent of additions of the heretics, and it’s something incidentally, that is learned. We do not just suddenly feel the gospel. The truth of the gospel is, as the Puritans used to express it, it’s taught, not caught. And so we must learn the facts of the gospel. He says, “Since the day you heard of it and came to know the grace of God in truth.” All other religions have men commending themselves to God by error. But in the gospel, we have the grace of God, God commending himself to man’s need through the gracious saving work of the gracious Lord Jesus Christ.

If you want to rouse the ire of the Apostle Paul, and then talk about salvation by merit, whether by works or by the sacraments or by some mixture of them, that always got the apostle’s goat, and he was very mad. He said, “If anyone preach any other gospel than the grace of God unto you which I have preached unto you, let him be anathema,” blessed intolerance of the preachers of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I’m reading a book by an Israeli Jew, very interesting book. It’s called something like, *Hard Hats and, Heroes and Hard Hats, Hustlers and Holy Men*. And Ze’Ev Chafets is describing life in Israel. He’s an Israeli, born in America, but he’s an Israeli by desire, and he’s trying to give people a feel of the land. And in it he expresses something about Judaism today. Judaism today is an ethnic religion, I’m sorry, an ethical religion. Salvation by works, salvation by what you do, great stress on the Law of Moses, but it’s by action, by response to the law that one is saved. Mr. Chafets says that when he went to the synagogue in Pontiac, Michigan, a Stevensonian synagogue there. All he was taught, and all he remembers about the truth that was taught there, was simply, be a good person, and be sure to speak to Aunt Mae after the service. That was all he remembered. That is essentially the preaching that we are exposed to today. In the Colossians case, they had the word of the gospel because a faithful man by the name of Epaphras had come into contact with the Apostle Paul and he preached the word to them, came back to

Paul, asked, no doubt, for help and encouragement, and Paul said, “He’s declared to us your love in the spirit.”

If you’re here this morning and you’ve never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, we commend to you the gospel, which is the word of truth. The gospel of the grace of God, the Lord Jesus has offered the saving sacrifice in the shedding of his blood. And you may have the forgiveness of sins if, by God’s grace, you can shed yourself of your self-righteousness, acknowledge your need of Christ, flee to the cross, rest in him and in the light of the hope of the experience of eternal fellowship with the Lord God, be given faith by the Lord himself. May God move you by the hope of the gospel, the truth of God to come to Christ, and believe in him. May we stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, how marvelous it is to read these ancient words, but so full of meaning and so full of truth and encouragement today. If there are any here in this particular auditorium, Lord, who have not yet responded to the gospel of the grace of God, may that response come now. We thank Thee for the hope that we have. We thank Thee for its motivating power. We thank Thee for the faith that Thou hast given us. Lord, give us love for all the saints. For Jesus’ sake. Amen.