

Date: May 17, 2020

Series: Moving Forward – a study in Colossians

Sermon: Colossians 1.9-14 – A Pastor's Prayer for You

Introduction

Good Morning. How we doing? Anybody else thankful that we are beginning to see some signs of re-opening for our community? I know we have a ways to go and nothing is really all that certain but, I saw more humans this past week than I have in 2 months. It was great. I love humans. On that, I do want to make you aware of the re-opening plan our leadership team here at Mercy put together. We know there is a lot we can't know, BUT we are cautiously optimistic and have laid out steps we intend to take if things continue on the trajectory they are on. The plan and an explanation about it are available at mercycharlotte.com. Check it out when you get 5 minutes.

Ok with that said let's hop into our message for today. We are in the Book of Colossians. Colossians chapter 1. The reason we are in this book, which is actually a letter, is because we need God's help as we try to move forward into whatever the world is going to look like as the pandemic lifts. What we know is there is a mountain of uncertainty right? We don't know if its going to get better or if there's going to be a relapse. You may not know if your current job will still be there or if the job you lost will come back. Harris Teeter doesn't know if it will ever *see* Toilet Paper again. Walking through all of this uncertainty, at least for me, has felt like walking across rope bridge in dense fog. I'm not sure where to step, I'm not sure what's around me. Can I trust the next plank? I need something concrete and certain that I can trust in. That I can hope in.

Colossians offers that hope in the form of the supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus. Remember last week we talked about the uncertainty these new believers in this young church were dealing with. How are we supposed to move forward together? What do we believe & how do we live? Some in the church were trying to make Jesus one of many gods they worshipped. Others were trying to say you had to trust Jesus AND obey a set of religious rules Judaism had built up. And then you got all the pleasures of the world around them in their city. And Paul says listen we gotta clear some things up so you can move forward as a church. And the way to clear things up is to look at Jesus. He is SUPREME above all other Gods, he alone is Sufficient so you don't need those laws. And he is BETTER than what the world has to offer.

And what we need as we move forward as the church is a bigger vision of Jesus than we've ever had. We need him at the center and we need to fix our eyes on him and he needs to be BETTER and Exalted because he's all we can really trust in! So that's why we are here in this letter. To see Jesus rightly and then see how to move forward together. I'm so excited. Last week was the intro and we saw Paul celebrate the faith of this young church. That's how he opens the letter. Praising God. And I told you we are going to see a pattern...That before we DO something for God, there is some heart level work that has got to happen. Before we DO, we pray. We ask God for the strength to obey & the right heart to obey. And before we pray, we praise. We worship God for who he is and what he's done. So last week we talked about that spirit of thankfulness. How the way to build the faith you need to trust God moving

forward is to first look back at how faithful he's been. Because he has been faithful church!

So that brings us to this week. Having celebrated God's work he's now going to go into a prayer for them. And it's the prayer I want to hear prayed over us ok. We are going to start in verse 9 and just walk through it and I want you to hear this as a pastor's prayer for Mercy Church. And in many ways its my heart for you.

9 For this reason also, since the day we heard this, we haven't stopped praying for you.

For this reason...Connecting back to vv 3-8. The reason is the work God was doing through their faith. For this reason – Because of your faith. Since the day we heard that you were growing strong. Since the day we heard the gospel was bearing fruit. Since the day we heard of your love for one another...***We haven't stopped praying for you.*** I want to pause right here and say something that is an important observation about the nature of this whole letter. Paul writing to this young church.

- This is the way a spiritual parent responds to the faith of their spiritual children. "I'm so happy to see you growing. Your walk with Jesus...that's what strengthens my walk with Jesus. And I'm gonna KEEP praying for you. I'm not going to stop praying for you."
- This is what a spiritually mature person looks like by the way. They CELEBRATE God's work in others and PRAY for **him** to do MORE work. Sometimes we think of maturity as knowledge. As if the most mature people in the faith are the ones that win in Bible

Jeopardy. And I'm not KNOCKING knowledge in fact Paul's about to pray for them to have knowledge. But maturity is knowledge that leads to holiness. Knowledge is like the fuel that should take you to maturity but it isn't maturity by itself. Spiritual maturity looks like a spiritual parent celebrating the progress of their children.

- I believe we all need spiritual parents. This is language I've learned to embrace from friends whose faith was formed in the African American community. It's rich and biblical but my tradition growing up just never really incorporated it. But we need people who will say...Man I SEE YOU. I SEE YOU TRYING. You got some things right and you are WAY OFF on some other things and you know what...that's a part of walking with Jesus. Spiritual Parents will pray for God to continue to make you like Jesus and you will let their words carry real weight in your life.
- Mercy Church – We've got a lot of you that need to step into spiritual parenthood. Really. That's your next step of trusting God. It's claiming responsibility for the faith of someone else. Now, you don't just walk up to someone and declare you are their parent because you want to be. I can't just pick out a young guy like Luke Akinsola. Great guy I think we have enough in common and he's about 10-12 years younger than me. He's athletic....I wear tennis shoes. We are the same. But I'm not walking up to him and saying "Luke, I am your father." No. that's random and weird. Instead look at the people God has put in your life and start praying

for God to strengthen their faith. And start celebrating God's work in their lives. And see what God does.

Ok back to our passage. Let's see what it is that Paul is praying for this church. Maybe it's the prayer you need, maybe it's the prayer you need to pray for somebody. Our whole passage today (vv9-14) is one long run-on sentence so I'm going to try and break it down for you.

We are asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, Paul & Timothy are praying that they may be filled. It's passive. He isn't praying that you fill yourself. You can't. It's God's work. He's praying God will fill them. With the knowledge of his will.

- Let's talk real quick about what this means. "his will" is not the set of decisions we are supposed to make throughout life. Like we come to a decision point and we often think that God's will is one of the options and we gotta figure out which one so we can stay in the will of God. Like is it the job in Charlotte, Atlanta, or New York. *Obviously it's the one in CLT. Just playing.* That's NOT what Paul is talking about. And That's not how the bible talks about God's will. Instead Being filled with the knowledge of his will is talking about...a deep and abiding understanding of Christ and all that he means for us. The next verse he's going to say this means knowing God himself. Getting so intimately familiar with who God is...that's how you gain wisdom and spiritual understanding. Wisdom and

understanding...he's going to say in chapter 2 that they are in Christ...

- **3 In him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. -- Colossians 2:3**
- You get to know GOD. The Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit. God says first LOOK AT ME. Get to know me. In fact, just stay here for a really long time. Get really, really familiar with me. Stay here. Abide here. Make your home HERE. Start your day here. End your day here. And good news I'm a mobile home so STAY here as you go throughout the day. Memorize the word & meditate on it.

10 so that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him:

And in knowing more of them you will be supplied with what you need to walk worthy of the Lord. THIS IS HUGE. Because this is over and over the way the Bible talks about spiritual transformation in your life. Your knowledge of God is what leads to living a life worthy of him. Your knowledge of God leads to good works. Good works doesn't lead to increased knowledge of God.

You gotta see the difference here. I can't see you in your living room, sittin on your phone in your bedroom, wherever you are. I can't tell if you are getting this but I need you to nod your head as a way of signaling to the Lord YES. I am tracking with you God on what you are saying here in your word to me. Knowledge of God leads to a transformed life. WORKS do not get you to God. This is MASSIVELY important. It's everything. Example: Let's say you've got a life dominating sin or struggle. And you own it and you are like ok I'm going to beat this thing.

Let's say you even get outside help like counseling or recovery program or something. IF you approach that with a mindset of "I'm going to beat this problem" and its YOU...struggling against the struggle. And you are motivated because once you beat this you'll be able to know God better...that right there is a false religion.

And what happens is we just keep trying to modify our behavior. And maybe we fix it for a little while but its usually only a little while. And then the struggle comes back. Sometimes rages back. Sometimes in a new form or sometimes just twice as bad as it was before. And we throw up our hands and say "I'll never beat it. Its just who I am."

that's like playing spiritual whack-a-mole. You know what whack-a-mole is? Back when there were places to go to there was this game where you had a padded hammer and these moles would pop their heads out of the hole and you hit it. But then another one would pop up. You'd have to hit it.

When all along God says STOP trying to do God's WORK in YOUR Strength. You look ridiculous. And you are only furthering your problem. START with the knowledge of God. You want to break free from that struggle? GO SPEND HOURS WITH GOD. DON'T LEAVE. MAYBE GET A CUP OF COFFEE AND GET BACK THERE. CONSUME THE PSALMS AND PRAY THEM BACK TO HIM. GO TO THE GOSPEL AND RECEIVE FORGIVENESS. JUST SWIM IN THE OCEAN OF GOD'S CHARACTER AND HIS GOODNESS. Take a day off of work and just go meet with God. I'm serious! Tell your boss it's a self-care day and go sit in a room with the bible a journal and a pen and say God I'm staying right here today.

Ok now I want you to look at verse 11 there is a colon right after it says fully pleasing to him. That's because he's now going to describe what this worthy walk looks like. This is what he prays their lives will look like. It's a prayer for us as well as we move forward with Jesus at the center of our lives. Some are external...obvious to others...some are internal...obvious to you and to God. First two are bound together so I want to talk about them together:

bearing fruit in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God,

If this feels a little circular at this point...that's good. That means you are catching how critical knowing God himself is to any kind of transformation in the Christian life. Back in verse 6 he said the gospel is bearing fruit all across the world! He's celebrated the fruit of the gospel in terms of the advancement of the mission. But now he's praying that same gospel will bear fruit in their individual lives. That they have been created by God for good works. Ephesians 2.10 says

10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time for us to do. -- Ephesians 2:10

One of my main jobs as your pastor and as a pastoral team is to help equip you to do these good works and to tap you on the shoulder and say since the beginning of time God had prepared this moment to do something in this world THROUGH YOU for his glory. These good works are the fruit of the gospel at work in you.

I think of a guy in our church who decided to become an older brother figure to a couple of teenage guys in our community. To train those guys to love Jesus. This requires sacrifice and love and kindness and faithfulness. That's a good work God had prepared for him since the foundation of the world. And the gospel is bearing fruit through their lives as well.

Paul is using this image of bearing fruit to help us understand that when we make our home in God...it will start to show. Like when a plant is rooted in the soil and is healthy...the evidence will be the fruit. Like an apple tree or a strawberry plant. When we are rooted in the gospel...in the knowledge of God...we will bear fruit. Which is why he prays we keep growing...IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD. Because that's our life source. That's why it feels circular. The same water that produces the fruit is the same water that keeps us alive now.

- Fruit is forgiving people who hurt you. Fruit is gentleness with people where harshness was once your norm. Fruit is thinking of how you can serve others before yourself. Fruit is peace that comes from an identity rooted in Christ. You aren't enslaved to work or opinions of other people anymore...I'm telling you that will be VISIBLE. People will say "you've changed." That's fruit they are seeing. And as you grow...more fruit will come. And if you cut yourself off from the life source, fruit will shrivel up and no more fruit will grow.
- Listen one road you don't want to travel down is trying to produce fruit on your own strength ok. That would be like gluing strawberries onto a dead strawberry plant. First it would look dumb. Second the

strawberries wouldn't last. And third – would you trust good looking strawberries that come off a dead plant? NO. Fake fruit isn't helping anyone. Go to the father and let him do his work in you.

Ok just like the first two, the next two are bound together. An internal change with an external change.

11 being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, so that you may have great endurance and patience,

Colossae...you've got a road ahead. And you are going to need strength. The kind of strength that only God can give. That is beyond your power. It's the power that is in accordance to God's glorious might. Like the difference between a AA battery and a Nuclear Power Plant. God supplies the strength. That's huge. You want God to bear fruit in your life you have to stop trying to do it in your own strength. You've got nothing more than AA battery strength. God has unending strength. He's offering it to you.

Why: So that you may have God sized....ENDURANCE AND PATIENCE!

Ok there is an insanely obvious application but then some deeper ones too. Obvious: Does anybody need Endurance and Patience right now? Oh my goodness you better be sitting on your couch with a hand raised saying YES Jesus PLEASE. Jesus my AA battery ran out weeks ago and I'm ALL OUT of endurance and patience. I've got nothing left in the tank. Seriously raise your hand if you need it. Nobody can see you. Just between you and God.

But this is important in many spaces right? Paul prays for great endurance and patience...because he knows they will be in situations that are difficult THAT LAST A LONG TIME. OR THAT KEEP HAPPENING. He prays for endurance and patience because he expects the Christian life to be filled with hardship.

And I say that because there is a brand of Christianity out there that talks about God and faith as if its always about personal self improvement. And listen, part of that is true right. I mean we are talking today about God bearing fruit in your life. That's going to be better for you. BUT, your life is not a season of Wins and Losses where, with God's help...you can get a few more wins. You can even make the playoffs of life with God's help. And the type of teaching that focuses only on how to WIN at LIFE is so toxic AND so shallow. Because everybody has some losses. What's the deal there? WAS GOD absent? Or just not powerful enough?

EVERYBODY suffers right? Everybody bleeds. And sometimes what you need is GOD-SIZED ENDURANCE. You need God-Sized Patience. I wish the result of the pandemic was the complete annihilation of the prosperity gospel because I don't need always need to hear "man you are gonna WIN today if you will trust God!" No I need to hear "Hey, this is hard and I can't promise you its going to ever get easy and I know you feel like you just CANT RIGHT NOW and here in the bible is agreement with that feeling and an offering from God to supply you his presence and his strength." Man that MEETS ME. Ya'll I finally had that moment yesterday. And I said God I need to tap out here. This junk is hard. And that's why I love preaching cause I'm deep in the bible every week. It's not just

an academic exercise for me preaching it is the soul work that happens and sometimes its convicting and sometimes it is supplying. And yesterday was a supplying time where the Lord says yeah. You are finally at a spot where you are ready for me to do the heavy lifting. Bout time.

And then Paul says man I'm praying that when God supplies you with HIS power...with his endurance and patience...the manner in which you walk will be

joyfully 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the saints' inheritance in the light.

You won't be able to just endure. You'll be joyfully thankful to God. That's what he's praying for. You are bearing fruit, growing closer to God, receiving God's strength so you can have endurance and patience when you thought you had none and that is going to transform someone into a person who walks through hell JOYFULLY... giving thanks to God.

Listen to the non-christian world that is Joker level crazy. Seriously. Like why are they joyful in a pandemic!? The appropriate response is FEAR, exhaustion, anger, depression...why are they joyful and thankful!? Are they clinically insane? No. We are simply children of a father who has given us new life in him. Speaking of...that's where he goes next in his prayer for us isn't it. A reminder of WHO WE ARE. He reminds them who they are. And I want you to receive this spoken over you today.

13 He has rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son he loves. 14 In him we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

This is who you are in Christ. HE...God the father...has rescued us. That's the church. Not a bunch of religious elites. A bunch of RESCUED orphans who were prisoners of the domain of darkness. That's where we WERE. And God RESCUED us. But he didn't just bring us out. he brought us home. And sometimes I think we forget that part. Look at this transfer of citizenship that happens here. He has TRANSFERRED us into the kingdom of the son he loves. That's Jesus.

Jesus is the king of our kingdom. And in him we have what? REDEMPTION. This son Jesus...IN him we have redemption. We don't have redemption outside of him. We don't atone for our own sins and think our life is some Hollywood fairytale where WE WILL MAKE OUR OWN PATH OF REDEMPTION. NOPE. True redemption is made by God in Christ and what is that redemption?

The forgiveness of sins. Listen to that. This is Paul as he's praying over these Christians and calls them to remember Who God is and what he has done. Because the best thing for them is seeing the supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus as their king and savior. Forgiveness of sins.

You know what this means right? It means you are not your sin. Your SIN doesn't get to be your identity. And that takes a minute to truly receive. I bet you'd be quick to say those words to a friend..."oh man its ok I know that's not the real

you..." But what about YOUR sin. Is it starting to define you? Man in stay-at-home maybe your sinful patterns are running wild. Maybe you are eating all of your feelings. Escaping into food or drink. Online Alcohol sales are up 240% since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Maybe its impatience and anger. Whatever it is you can start to think it defines you. And Jesus says NO. That's not WHO YOU ARE. YOU are forgiven. You have been transferred out of the dominion of that darkness. You are in a new kingdom. My kingdom. And in Jesus' kingdom your identity is son or daughter of God.

And ya'll...all of the power you need is found in that identity. The power you need to walk forward...its in Jesus. Will you receive the forgiveness God offers you in Christ? Will you receive that right now? Christian will you embrace it again? This is where strength comes from. It comes from your new home.

SOULWORK - Last week I asked you to write out what you are thankful to God for. This week...I want you to write out 10 things you love ABOUT GOD.

SoulWork: Write out 10 things you love about God...and why

Use the bible. Make sure you aren't re-creating God in your image. Make sure what you love is actually true of God. And then WORSHIP HIM. If the power to change comes from GOD and not yourself...then GO BE WITH GOD. Embrace the supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus.

