

May 9th 2020

Series: Colossians: Moving Forward

Sermon: Colossians 1.1-14 – Thank You Jesus

Good Morning Mercy Church and Happy Mother's Day! There is no harder assignment God gives on this earth than being a mom and we honor you today. We should honor you every day. Forgive us where we don't. I gotta give a shout out to Julie Shelton from her favorite son. I've got two brothers but...they aren't here. I'm the first born. Happy Mother's Day mom.

And then I gotta reserve my biggest Praise to the one and only Courtney Shelton. I've watched her level up time and time again in the mom game. She's now at ninja level. I could not ask for a better partner in raising our children. Happy 12th Mother's Day Courtney. I count the one where you were pregnant with our firstborn. Cause if you are pregnant you are a mother. No doubt. Happy Mothers day to pregnant moms. Happy Mothers day to moms with little ones. And happy mothers to Single Moms working SO hard. Listen right now if you are with your mom...Just STOP what you are doing right now and go over and HUG your mom. If you aren't with her you need to pause this sermon and call your mom. MOM I LOVE YOU. THANK YOU. Call or text your spiritual mothers in the faith.

And if your mother's day is hard for you. A day of mourning instead of a day of celebration. I want to say humbly God loves you and can meet you in your grief today. We lost one of our children in miscarriage and so mothers day and fathers day are a mixed bag for us. We feel thankfulness and grief at the

exact same time. And that leaves us thankful that God is in control and not us. We rest in his care for us and you can to.

PRAY FOR MOMS

Intro

Ok if you have your bible get it out and get to the book of Colossians. Over in the New Testament. Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians. Thessalonians you are close just turn back a page. If you are seeing things like Habakuk & Obadiah...you've still got a ways to go.

Now if you've been with us as a church you know we've been in the book of Acts ever since we were put under the Stay-at-home order. Because we needed to hear that even though the church building is closed, that doesn't mean the church is closed. The book of Acts helped us see that a scattered church can be a powerful witness of the grace of Christ and scattering doesn't slow down God's work, it actually multiplies his work as believers walk with Jesus in those new spaces.

A couple of weeks ago I read Colossians in my reading plan and just felt like God has something for us in here. That as our society starts to turn the page on the COVID Crisis we need to consider what moving forward looks like. And as I was reading I saw this rhythm to Colossians where Paul talks about how GREAT Christ is and then he urges them to walk forward with their hearts set on Christ. **See Jesus, set your mind on Jesus, and move forward in obedience to Jesus. Move forward with Jesus.**

We are going to need God's help moving forward with life after all this. Initially I thought "man God I need your help to get through this." And I did and still do. But what we are realizing now is that this isn't a switch that is going to flip and then we are out of it. We went into it with a switch flip. Like boom. Stay at home. But whenever we come out of this...its going to be gradual. And it won't be a return to the old way of things. We aren't returning, we are moving forward.

And you have the opportunity You basically never get. You have the opportunity to take these next 8 weeks or so and decide I am going to build my life on the foundation of Christ and his work instead of trying to fit Jesus into the margins when I can. You have the chance to let some old habits die. You have the chance to install new rhythms of grace into your life that you will carry forever.

It's kind of like we are all the class of 2020. A LOT of college graduations usually are right around this time. Graduates I do hate it for you that you are missing graduation. Grieving for you. I'll go ahead and give you one line from the speech you would have heard. After the tears about freshman year and the laughs about "Not blowing up Mr. McKinsey's chemistry lab" your class valedictorian would look out at you and say this is not really the end...it's the beginning. The beginning of the next season of life. And the possibilities are endless. And they are right!

And I think this moment in history all of us have the chance to get in on that with you. We all have the chance to move forward. To see the days ahead as a beginning and to move forward as changed people who have decided to trust Christ.

So I want to invite you to join us these next couple of months as we walk through the book of Colossians and see what it means to let God set our steps moving forward. And what we are going to see at the heart of this letter is the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ. He is king over us and he alone is enough to transform us into the people God is calling us to be.

Today is real simple. The flow of the first chapter is praise, prayer, praise. Instruction doesn't come until chapter 2 verse 6. It's all praise & prayer until then. It's going to take us 3 weeks to get through that. I hope you see something in that. Before you do something for God you must surrender yourself to God in prayer. And before that....we praise him for who he is and what he's already done. We often skip to "ok tell me what to do." NOPE. You need to praise first. Then pray. Only then will your soul be ready to move forward with Jesus.

My prayer is that your soul will be stirred to thankfulness today.

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by God's will, and Timothy our brother:

Our author is a Paul who is accompanied with Timothy who is a younger pastor-in-training. Paul is an apostle of Christ Jesus because while he once was persecuting Christians God interrupted his life and overturned it. He is an apostle of Christ by God's will. God had a different plan and God's plan is the plan that unfolded. Even right here in Paul's acknowledgment of his authorship I think there is a reminder for us that no one is beyond saving and everyone has a story that can be redeemed and used to bring about good things for God's

glory. And God's will is stronger than your will. God can overturn your life in an instant. His will is good and you and I should welcome whatever he wants to do in us.

2 To the saints in Christ at Colossae, who are faithful brothers and sisters. Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

His letter is to the saints. To the holy and set apart ones. That's his way of saying to the church. The church is not a building but instead a group of people who have been made holy not by their own merit but by Christ. The saints are *in* Christ AT Colossae. And I think those little positional words are super helpful for us. Because our first location, our first home, is not IN Charlotte but instead it is IN Christ. That's not just who we are its also positionally where we are. Paul is going to say this in a few verses but when you become a Christian your citizenship is transferred into heaven and that is how you begin to identify yourself. As one of God's people.

at Colossae. This is a metropolitan city in what we now know as Turkey. It was on the river about 11 miles east of Laodicia. Now you understand right? Paul didn't plant this church and has never been there. Most believe a guy named Epaphras, mentioned in verse 7, planted it.

7 You learned this from Epaphras, our dearly loved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, 8 and he has told us about your love in the Spirit.

Epaphras has reported to Paul & Timothy the good news of what is happening. Why doesn't Paul just go see it for himself? He's in jail in Rome. Paul has been caught for preaching the gospel. He doesn't talk about it much though. There are only

two references to his situation in the whole letter. A vague reference to his sufferings and then the very last thing he tells them is to remember my chains. Otherwise, Paul is focused on THEIR faith.

He knows this is a young church in a city filled with other options than Jesus. Filled with more familiar options than full fledged devotion to Jesus. And in that way, its just like our city. These faithful brothers and sisters needed encouragement. It's hard sometimes following Jesus when you are surrounded by people who don't.

On top of that, there is something happening inside this church too. There is a false teaching circulating and Paul is going to correct it. It's a subtle shift from the gospel. But the most dangerous counterfeits are always the ones that look like the real thing right. Colossae was a mix of jews and greeks and so was the church. You had some greeks who were saying yes I believe in Jesus and he will fit in nicely with these other gods I worship. I'm so thankful to add Jesus to my collection. Which you might chuckle at but we do it today. We compartmentalize our lives and create little gods we serve in each one. Instead of statues we have apps. But then on the other side you had the jews who were saying yes I believe in Jesus and his salvation is a great addition to all of God's laws one must observe. So its great you believe in Jesus. That's a great start. But you've got to still live according to God's laws. Two factions. Both subverting the gospel by trying to conform Christianity to their prior forms of worship.

So Paul says externally they are faced with the loneliness of being a Christian in an unchristian world, internally there is

confusion brewing. And Paul's answer is the supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus. Jesus is KING – better than your old religions. You don't conform the king to your ways, you conform to his ways. And He's ENOUGH – better than the ways of the world.

He pours out promises about the surpassing worth of knowing and following Jesus. And he reminds them they are not alone even when they feel alone in their faith. And then he is going to pour out promises about the surpassing worth of knowing and following Jesus. Which is why some of you need Colossians. To be reminded you are not alone, that Christ is King, and that Christ is better.

CELEBRATION

Then Paul turns and celebrates what God is already doing among them.

3 We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, 4 for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus

Which by the way just as an aside...when you pray do you begin with thanksgiving? Do you thank God for the work he is already doing in you? GOD before I come to you with this list I need I just want to thank you. Thank you that I'm a little more patient now. I see that as your work in me. So I'm not proud but I'm thankful.

- Thank you that I'm a little more forgiving now. That's your work in me.
- God thank you for what you are doing in my family. My spouse is growing in compassion, my kids are growing in generosity...God I SEE YOU. I See what you are doing and I'M THANKFUL!
- God I see how you are changing my friend in my community group. Thank you for saving her! Thank you for saving him! I see their whole countenance changing. I see light in their eyes that wasn't there. I see love & joy that wasn't there and God...I just want to say I'm THANKFUL.

Sometimes I think we in our tribe do a good job of looking all the way back to the cross and we say YES I'm thankful for what you did Jesus. We remember when he saved us and we are thankful for that. But then we don't look at the rest of our timeline between the time he saved us and RIGHT NOW. And if we neglect being thankful...if we neglect recognizing the work we start to run the risk of doubting whether God cares at all about our life here.

Man I believe a key for many of us to see God change us is to take inventory of our lives and to start being thankful.

and of the love you have for all the saints¹

Listen there is an inseparable link between having faith in Jesus and loving the saints. 1 John says if a man loves God but hates his brother, he tells a lie and the truth is not in him. It's a direct link. And I say that to speak to an idea gaining traction

¹ Some of my reflections on vv 4-5 are inspired by a GREAT message on this passage from pastor Matt Chandler preached in 2010 at the Village Church in Flower Mound TX. Titled "An encouraging beginning."

in my generation that says well I love Jesus I just don't love the church. Well, God says you are a lying about your love for him. Listen I'm not saying we love everything about the church. Good grief no. BUT the idea that you can love God and yet not have a real and active relationship with other believers who are bound together in a local church under the care and shepherding of faithful elders...that is not something you got from the bible. In fact it's anti-bible. It's counter-biblical. It is an undoing of something God has bound together.

Man I am saying that to you with a little bit of force because that was me for a few years. And maybe you've been burned by the church like I was. I'm not invalidating your pain. I'm saying distancing is the wrong answer. You gotta go to the Lord and ask for help to love what he loves.

5 because of the hope reserved for you in heaven.

Ok this is pretty cool. They love the saints BECAUSE of the hope they have in heaven. Pretty cool right. Their hope is not reserved for them in EARTH. That would be silly. Their hope is reserved for them in heaven. Love requires sacrifice and they sacrifice their earthly selves with no expectation of quid pro quo. Loving the saints isn't NETWORKING. It's not you scratch my back I'll scratch yours. NO....its I'm giving to you because my HOPE, my treasure...it's not here anyway. So I can freely give things away here. I'll give my resources and my time and my relational bandwidth all to serve you.

So let me pause here and ask you something: IS YOUR HOPE IN HEAVEN? There is no doubt this pandemic has been hard. Like historic hard. And sad. One of the things it has done has

helped us all be acutely aware that we are all mortal. Why did we go into our homes? Because we were told if we didn't an unseen virus would spread faster overwhelming our hospital systems and more people would die than were already dying. And as we talk about re-opening over the next several weeks that's going to be the main thing driving decisions. We want to limit the death count.

Did you see the guy on the beach in florida in a grim reaper outfit? There to protest people being outside because by being out they may spread the virus and he was there to make them aware that DEATH looms. I know that because in the hilarity of it all he was interviewed by a reporter *who was standing less than 6 feet away*. But the one thing he does have right...death is real. And it doesn't just come for some of us. It comes for ALL of us. If not in the form of a virus, its coming in the form of murder hornets. Have you seen these things?

The reality that death comes for us all is not news. We are not all going to live until we are 90 years old either. So you need an answer to this question.

So where is your hope? Is it in "being a good person?" A lot of people put their hope there. That's a very subjective place to put your hope. Cause being good is entirely based on who defines good. You? Man what if the bar is higher than you thought? Read one pastor who said about this hope of heaven that the scariest thing about the bible is not learning that God condemns our sins, its that it tells us our righteousness is filthy rags. Its not just that our wickedness condemns us, its that our goodness does too. This is why we need a hope outside of ourselves.

Is your Hope in financial security? Whether you have it or you are striving for it...wealth can't supply you hope. Biggie already told you the problem with wealth. More money, more problems. You can never have enough. That's a problem. If you continue to need just a little more...that's a problem. If you are scared of losing what you have...that's a problem. Sounds like a really unstable thing to place your hope in. So where is your hope?

You have already heard about this hope in the word of truth, the gospel 6 that has come to you.

We need Jesus who pays for our badness and our goodness with his PERFECTNESS. The gospel is that Jesus has traded places with us. The word of truth is that he took our filthy rags and gave us his perfect righteousness. And in doing so we are now granted access to spend eternity in heaven with God the father. So when Christians die the hope of heaven awaits them. Eternity awaits us that is far better than anything in this world. And we love the saints with a love that springs from thanksgiving for our savior who created this hope for us. So my question is: Where's your hope? Gonna keep coming back to that. Because that hope is what will go to work on you when you make it the core of who you are. Watch...

It is bearing fruit and growing all over the world, just as it has among you since the day you heard it and came to truly appreciate God's grace.

This gospel is bearing fruit. Oh man isn't this great? The gospel is BEARING FRUIT all over the world. He's celebrating again. Remember all of this is thanksgiving for what God is doing.

In other words...GOD IS WORKING and if you could see what I could see you'd be celebrating like I'm celebrating. I'm in a prison cell. And I'm celebrating. Because the Holy Spirit is bearing fruit. People are getting saved, communities are transforming and redemption is spreading everywhere. Hope is spreading. Mercy we've been a church for less than 5 years but already I want you to know God has allowed us to be a part of his work in bearing fruit across the world.

- Sent several of our members to live long term overseas. And the gospel is bearing fruit among them.
- I think about the two churches we've helped plant in Brooklyn, NY. Including sending two of our own members last year to join the second one. And the gospel is bearing fruit in Brooklyn in a time of IMMENSE crisis. God is moving there. Working there.
- I think about the gospel bearing fruit in Cuba and how the Lord in his kindness has let us help catalyze the work there. I mean people getting saved left and right. You would NOT believe it. The circumstances are so hard and in that hardship the gospel is bearing incredible fruit.

And Paul says its bearing fruit in you. The same gospel working across the world...is bearing fruit right here. Mercy Church we've seen hundreds of lives transformed by the gospel in our first few years. We've asked for a gospel awakening and I think that is EXACTLY what God is bringing.

- Some of you were skeptics and God woke you up to who he is. And he saved you just like he did Paul. You

were headed a totally different way but God had other plans for you.

- Others of you were culturally Christian but spiritually pagan. You had some patterns of faith but your heart wasn't in it at all. And God has woken you up to him and you've given yourself entirely to him. And now God is making you into a totally different person. And I'm watching marriages change and families change and I'm watching you give God the glory and its beautiful.
- And some of us were already Christians and locking arms together in this mission to see an awakening has been like a refining fire for our faith. It's sharpened us. We haven't had the easiest ride as a church. No state of the art facility, nothing flashy about our ministry. Pastors doing 2-3 roles. Members carrying the weight of ministry like they were meant to. And GOD has made us more like Christ in the process!
- PRAISE GOD! you are not the same person you were the day God saved you. Praise God that since the day you came to "truly appreciate God's grace..." he has been changing you for your good and his glory.

Man I did not expect even when I started the sermon this week to take the turn that it did but I think its what we need. We just need to pause in the pandemic so that we can praise God in the pandemic.

That's not our first instinct. We want to go to God with what we need and I think that is completely legitimate. The amount of wisdom I need THIS WEEK. Ya'll our elders are finalizing our

re-opening plan for our church we are going to be rolling out to you this week and I need MOUNTAINS of wisdom. I need courage to lead you well. I need patience that this isn't going as fast as I'd like. I need grace and love instead of anger when people are upset with me or disappointed with me. I'm your pastor and I'm NEEDY. ALL OF US ARE.

But the way to build faith that God will meet those needs...is to look back at what he's done and be thankful.

Listen I have a homework assignment for you. Ok almost all work is homework right now and some of you parents just got a twitch thinking about it so let's change the name. Let's call it SoulWork.

I want you to write out 10. TEN things God has done that you are thankful for.

Soulwork: Write out 10 things God has done do that you are thankful for.

Give him the credit. We need to practice thankfulness so that's how we are going to do it. Get these ready for community group. Here's the catch. They have to be things in your life, or in the life of someone you know. Don't write God created the world and God created the

Close: God gets the credit because God saves. Nothing we do.