



**Series:** Colossians: Before All Things

**Date:** January 7, 2024

**Speaker:** Pastor Spence Shelton, Lead Pastor

**Text:** Colossians 1:1-14

### Intro

Good Morning Mercy Family and Happy New Year! We are in 2024 and I am excited to see what God has for us this year. As you saw in the video we have Starting Point today. At all campuses right after service.

Hey before we get into our sermon I do want to take a moment and celebrate your generosity towards our Christmas Missions Offering. Our previous record was 130k and All told you gave 198k to the Christmas Missions Offering! Praise God. Not only that, our total giving in December was more than twice any other month of 2023!

Listen we just want to highlight how the Christmas Missions Offering helps our partners advance the gospel around the world. Some of it will go to partners right here in Charlotte like Congregations for Kids and Alongside Families and Queen City Pregnancy Resource Center.

Some of it will go to our church planting efforts Internationally Like Mercy Nairobi.

COOL GIVING MOMENT.

Today we kick off 2024 in a series of sermons in the New Testament book of Colossians. **And I need to take about 5 minutes and introduce the book to you.** Then, we'll get into the first few verses.

### SERIES

OK The MAIN IDEA of this book that we will chase over the course of the next 7 weeks comes from something Paul says about Jesus in the first chapter. He says

17 He is before all things, and by him all things hold together.

18 He is also the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he

---

might come to have first place in everything. --  
Colossians 1:17-18

Paul says Jesus is before all things and it's a play on words. Not only that he WAS before all things. though verse 16 says he did in fact exist before the foundation of the universe. In fact, he created the universe. But look at the wording. He IS before all things. He remains before all things. And THAT clarifies his AUTHORITY. He is IN CHARGE OF THE CHURCH. He is not just the beginning of the universe but also the new beginning. The firstborn from the dead. That's referring to His resurrection. He is not just the author and source of LIFE. He's the author & source of NEW LIFE. That idea is going to be BIG for us in this series. Because some of you need to receive NEW LIFE. And it's found in Jesus.

And the reason he founded the universe, the reason he holds the universe together, the reason he rules the church, the reason he resurrected from the grave... look at verse 18 - is so that **he might come to have first place in everything.**

So the theme of our series is **Colossians: Jesus before all things."**

He IS first, so we must put him first.  
There will be 2 themes running through this book. A Belief theme & an action theme. FIRST - Do you believe Christ is before all things? Do you believe he is the

author of life and of new life? Man I want us to just look into the glory of God seen in the gospel and I believe its going to be worshipful. I want your hearts FULL!

And then the action part is simply a response to the belief part. If you believe He is before all things, Put Jesus in first place in everything. In every arena of your life. Because belief that doesn't translate to action...is not belief. It's just sentiment. Belief **CREATES ACTION.** So we will explore what it means to **actively** put Christ in our individual lives where he exists in the universe - **FIRST**, before all things.

Our discipleship team has put a companion workbook together for this series called "My Discipleship Plan." The idea is each week you will build a part of the plan so that by the end of the series you will have a plan for 2024 to actively and intentionally put Jesus first in every arena of your life. Not just nod your head, but take some real tangible steps. And since everyone is in a different place with Jesus, everyone's steps will probably look a little different. That's why it's a workbook. So you can build it to help you where you are.

Here's why this matters to me - As your pastor I want **THESE TWO THINGS** for you if you are going to belong to Mercy. **FIRST**, I want your heart **FILLED** with increasing Love & Worship & Awe by encountering the

---

AMAZING GRACE of God directed to you. God Loves YOU so much. And I believe the Christian life should be lived saturated by his love for you. SO I want your hearts filled. BELIEF

But I also want you to be equipped to be a people of ACTION. Christ calls His followers disciples. A disciple is trained, and developed, into someone more than they used to be. As James says we aren't just hearers of the words but doers also. So I want your heart full AND also your hands full. Equipped with tools to grow. And that is what this workbook is. A tool for you to grow this year. It's nothing revolutionary. It's a simple, clear plan that you will create filled with small steps. And it's always small steps that achieve big goals right? So take this to group and let's grow together this year.

You will get this NEXT week. Our Community Group Leaders will get it FIRST. Now that's not because God loves them more than he loves you. It's because I love them more than I love you.

They will get it TONIGHT at our leader gathering. And they are going to get training on how to use it. If you want early access like them, Our groups director Tanner Powell would love to talk with you about leading a community group.

OK, COLOSSIANS INTRO OVER. Jesus Before All Things.

Let's get into the letter. Colossians 1.1-14  
TODAY Paul will introduce the letter and give us really a simple idea we need to walk into 2024 with.

Colossians 1.1-14 Main Idea: Fresh Fruit comes by Fresh Faith

See Paul is going to say what has happened in their church is awesome. God has blessed their faith. They BELIEVED...And God bore fruit from their belief. And then he says...BECAUSE YOU'VE SEEN FRUIT...I'M PRAYING FOR YOU. We usually think prayer should come because we aren't seeing fruit. "Things aren't going right, I need God's help. I messed up again I need God's help." BUT

Paul says I'm PRAYING for you BECAUSE you've seen fruit. Here's why - FRUIT is the result of our two things we are talking about - Belief and Action. We believe the gospel, we take steps of faith in light of that belief, and then God bears FRUIT in our lives

- Ex: We read philippians 4.4-7 do not be anxious about anything. But instead give everything to God in prayer. & the peace of God that transcends all understanding will guard your heart & mind
  - Belief - God is in control & he is good. Evidence: He sent his son to pay for our sins thereby granting us forgiveness. SO, that leads to an

- 
- action: Prayer - entrusting God with things outside of my control.
  - FRUIT: PEACE instead of worry.

But here's the thing. While that experience should lead us to depend more on God, & pray more, One of the great dangers of the Christian life is to see spiritual fruit and then STOP depending on God. And we coast through long periods of time living off of old fruit. **And we are back into the same old battles wondering why we don't experience fruit that lasts. And often what we really are after is fruit that doesn't require faith today. We want to store up fruit. When we need to depend on God for fresh fruit today.**

I prayed for my lost friend in college, I shared the gospel with him, God saved him (Fruit). And I'm 40 years old and haven't shared the gospel with anyone since. I'm just living off old fruit.

We celebrated and then didn't put our hands back to the plow. We didn't ask for more. What ends up happening is a lot of us try to live off fruit memories. And the PRESENT reality is we are spiritually dried up because we stopped trusting God with fresh faith TODAY. We stopped depending on him and we got spiritually comfortable.

Mercy Church I believe God has so much to do in us and through us but we better guard our hearts against living off of old fruit. We should celebrate it. Put up Ebenezers and commemorate it. Last year was a BANNER YEAR in the life of Mercy Church that I will remember for a long time. Record attendance, baptisms, planted Union County, doubled our seating capacity across the board. Awesome year.

BUT - man how easy would it be to STOP. To say GREAT! FRUIT HAPPENED! ALL DONE! That's exactly what the enemy wants from you. If he can't stop fruit from growing, he can try to trick you into thinking you don't need any more. to lead you to think you've arrived and don't need to depend on God for more.

So Paul prays for them to keep going. He prays for fresh faith that will produce fresh fruit. And maybe as we open 2024 that's what you need to be encouraged in. There is MORE God wants to do in your life. And the key to unlocking it is fresh faith. I want this year to be FRUITFUL for you and For us but that means we need to be FAITHFUL. We need MORE dependence on God not less.

So I'm going to walk through verses 1-14 and show you how he celebrates their belief. Celebrates how they have put Jesus first before all things. Celebrates the fruit. And then SECOND, I'm going to show you his prayer for fresh faith. And the way we are going to walk

---

through the prayer is I'm going to build a prayer for fresh faith that you and I can pray this week. Each Morning.

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by God's will, and Timothy our brother: 2 To the saints in Christ at Colossae, who are faithful brothers and sisters.

Right out of the gate, you can feel that it's a letter. Paul says he is an apostle of Christ Jesus "by God's will." Here's why he said that. Paul's backstory is WILD. He was the guy who HATED Jesus. Hated Christians. Actively oversaw the murdering of Christians. AND NOW...loves Jesus SO MUCH he plants churches and receives the very persecution he used to dole out. That is called life change. And what any Christian in here will tell you is that ONLY God can do that. There's just no other explanation. GOD changes hearts. It's what helps me feel freedom in preaching to you. I can't change your heart. ONLY God can. But listen - he LOVES changing hearts.

And he and Timothy are writing to the church in the city of Colossae. For a frame of reference - Colossae was 9 miles from Laodicea. And that note helps...nobody. Mind's eye - go to the Middle East. And look at the country of Turkey. It's southern central Turkey. And the letter is called Colossians because that's who it's to. That's the same way with all of his letters. Ephesians,

the church in Ephesus. Galatians, the church in Galatia. Etc.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

Grace and Peace - Grace is the root & peace is the fruit. Grace is what we receive from God. It's what we believe he gives us. And the FRUIT is peace. And Paul greets them with that gospel hope. Then from verses 3 - 8 he celebrates what God has done in them. He encourages them. Watch this -

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 and of the love you have for all the saints 5 because of the hope reserved for you in heaven.

Do you see how Faith precedes fruit? Faith in Christ Jesus. Faith - the hope reserved for you in heaven. And in the middle is the fruit - your love for all the saints.

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

---

So Paul reminds them of their own story and connects it to the movement of God beyond their region. The gospel is bearing fruit around the world. So you might feel a little like you haven't seen fruit in your life...you need this encouragement. God is working around the world! Mercy Nairobi baptized 15 people in the second half of last year. That's one other church. We are a part of a network of about 80 churches. There will be one more when pastor Joseph plants next year. Those 80 churches baptized a little over 1000 people last year. Here's why that matters - you need to hear God is alive and moving and YES he is working in your life even if you are in a season where you feel like you aren't seeing fruit.

Paul says you already heard about the hope of heaven. That hope was a part of the word of truth that was preached to you called the gospel.

YOU don't bear fruit. GOD bears the fruit. And Paul says in Romans 1 that this gospel contains the POWER of God to save. So we major on the gospel here at Mercy Church. One of our core values is that we keep the gospel at the center of all we do.

**Mercy Core Value: We Keep the Gospel at the Center of all we do**

WE do that as a church because we believe every family should keep the gospel at the center of the

home. And every believer should keep the gospel at the center of their life. Because that's the means of faith that will bear fresh fruit.

Jesus says in John 15 I am the vine and you are the branches. Abide in me and you will bear fruit. FRUIT comes from faith placed IN the person and work of Jesus.

So let's be clear on the gospel. The gospel Epaphras (v.7) preached when he planted it. It's the message that You and I were created by God with purpose and value. You are valuable to God and meant to know God. To talk with God and be led by God through the world he created so that you can flourish in it. BUT, you and I each rebelled against the loving rule of God over us. We chose our ways over God's ways. The Bible calls that sin. And our sin has estranged us from God. We ran from God and created a rift in the relationship WE cannot repair. Only God can repair it. So he sent his son to build a bridge between us and him. Jesus came and PAID for our sins with his very life. He died for us. Then he resurrected from the dead. So here's the gospel in a sentence. Romans 6.23

**23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. -- Romans 6:22-23**

IF you believe you are a sinner and if you RECEIVE Christ's GIFT of salvation, you too can have the hope of heaven this church had & mercy church has. It's here

---

for you. TODAY! And to the Christian - this is where we ABIDE! We make our home HERE. In this gospel. We never grow BEYOND the gospel. That's where a lot of our problems happen. We stop abiding in Christ. We abide in interesting theological factoids and forget he's a person we are to have a relationship with.

Why I tell you guys the gospel is not ONLY the front door to the christian life. AS if you walk through it and leave it behind. IT'S THE HOUSE! ABIDE THERE! Wake up and make the gospel your central fuel for TODAY! And you will bear much fruit.

And Paul says that's what's happened in Colossae. The Fruit is awesome, its everywhere. So, like I said at the beginning...he prays for them.

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

HE celebrates the fruit and then with urgency prays for them. And tells them his prayer. Because it's so tempting to live off of old fruit.

So here's what he prays for: Fresh Faith and fresh Fruit. And I want us to not just HEAR this prayer, but PRAY this prayer. Let's kick off 2024 BELIEVING what God started...he will continue. Before we get into a workbook where we are building out our next steps to take, let's pray! Let's be a people of fresh faith!

We are asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding,

That's the prayer for fresh faith. They are already filled with this. He's asking for the Lord to fill them anew. He's asking for God to continue filling them with more and more knowledge of HIMSELF. Because this is the fuel faith runs on. **Abide in Christ**. Get to know him. Get to know how he works. This phrase - Spiritual understanding...that's just getting more familiar with how God works in his world.

So let's build this prayer of fresh faith that I believe God will use to bear fresh fruit.

A Prayer of Fresh Faith

God, I want to know you better today than I did yesterday (v.9)

I'm not living off old knowledge, I want to BUILD ONTO old knowledge. I want to KNOW YOU. You can't grow beyond this right here. The Christian faith is a RELATIONAL faith. You must KNOW GOD.

10 so that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God,

---

He prays they would have fresh faith SO THAT they walk worthy. SO THAT at the same time, their life is characterized by bearing fruit and growing in the knowledge of God. Because that's what happens. Healthy faith reveals itself through the fruit of good works worthy of the Lord.

#### A Prayer of Fresh Faith

God, I want to walk worthy of you today. Help me. (v.10)

There is a desire there. I want to bear fruit but I know God is the one who bears fruit THROUGH my faith. But each step I take in this "walk" is a step of faith. So help my steps. Let me walk worthy of you. When my flesh wants vengeance, Spirit help me to forgive. Because that's worthy of you. Worthy of the gospel. When my flesh wants apathy, give me endurance. Because that's worthy of your endurance on the cross. When my flesh FEARS what people think about me - God help me to walk in the PEACE of being called son or daughter of God. Because that's worthy of what you did for me. When my flesh wants to isolate with the people I already know, give me the courage to talk to the newcomer who needs a friend. God, I want to walk worthy of you today. Help me.

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

Ok what I love about this part of Paul's prayer is the relief it brings to folks like me who will try and WIN the Christian life instead of live it...will try and walk & bear fruit all in our own strength. And Paul prays not for them to STRENGTHEN THEMSELVES...but for GOD to STRENGTHEN THEM. And that endurance and patience will flow not from willpower. Parents Listen up this is why you need to pray this. Bosses listen up. Employees who struggle with their bosses listen up. Co-workers listen up. Spouses listen up. ROOMMATES for SURE listen up. Teammates listen up. Coaches listen up. The key to you bearing the FRUIT of endurance and patience is not your power, but GOD STRENGTHENING YOU with HIS POWER. How does that happen...you stay close to him. ABIDE in him and you will bear much fruit.

#### A Prayer of Fresh Faith

God, let me walk by your power today, not my own (v.11)

God I need your strength. Man, we all know this one. But then we take our eyes off of the Lord and we try to clench our teeth and gut it out. And listen I am HUGE on work ethic. I'm big on effort. I'm not saying you can get fresh fruit without effort. But man what if more of that effort was directed towards dependence on the Lord?

The hardest prayer for many to pray is the prayer of dependence. God I actually need you. I can't endure



---

without you. I don't have patience. What about other forms of spiritual fruit? Like love & forgiveness and gentleness? Where is that going to come from? YOU? Come on man. What we need, and truthfully what our community around us needs is for the people of God to walk by the power of God! The world needs to experience the supernatural power of God THROUGH the people of God. The CHURCH needs that.

We need to be the people who are abiding so closely to Christ that when you hurt me or I hurt you...WHICH WILL HAPPEN...we need the supernatural power of Christ that empowers us to say I FORGIVE YOU. and I MEAN IT. Because I draw from AN INCREDIBLE WELL OF FORGIVENESS! SO I can give to you what I have experienced and have drawn from again TODAY. This leads us right to where we'll wrap up today's prayer. with verses 12-14:

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

See what you will see in this letter is Paul never gets over Jesus. Never gets over the gospel. Just keeps diving deeper into it. And his prayer for them doesn't

really focus on them as much as it does Jesus. And that's the last part of our prayer for fresh fruit:

#### A Prayer of Fresh Faith

God today I thank you for the forgiveness & new life you give me through Christ (vv.12-14)

I JOYFULLY give thanks to God. With joy in my spirit TODAY I give thanks. That's fresh faith. Talked about this towards the end of last year but there is GREAT power in gratitude. A thankful heart walks into the day with a different perspective than an envious heart. Than a bitter heart. One of the fruits of fresh faith is thankfulness.

That's a prayer for fresh faith that yields fresh fruit. God, I want to know you better TODAY than yesterday. God, I want to walk worthy of you TODAY. God let me walk by YOUR power, not mine. God THANK you for forgiveness and new life.

The oldest fruit-producing vineyard in the World is in northern Slovenia in a small town called Maribor. The Zametovka vine. Planted in the late 1500s during the Ottoman Empire. It has survived A LOT. Big parasite spread in 1870 killing lots of plants but it survived because its roots were SO DEEP in the banks of a nearby river. And for the past 50 years, vine dressers have attended to it carefully. Every year they prune

---

it...they harvest grapes...and listen now after 50 years they've taken grafts they prune off it and other winemakers plant them elsewhere around the world so literally the fruit from this plant is growing all over the world. And it's HIGHLY sought after. POINT - OLD VINE PRODUCES FRESH FRUIT because it's tended to carefully. Fresh Fruit comes by fresh tending. If they didn't tend to the vine, it would not produce fruit. It would die.

Two takeaways - old vines need fresh care to produce fresh fruit. Some of you have been walking with Jesus for years and are coasting off of old fruit. Time to draw water from the river of life again and bear fresh fruit. Oh how valuable is fresh fruit from an old vine? I can't wait to see what God does in you this year.

But the great relief today is this - Jesus says he is the vine & we are the branches. Abide in him, & we will bear much fruit. ABIDE friends.

**PRAYER OF RESPONSE**  
**OUR WORSHIP TEAMS ARE GOING TO GET INTO**  
**PLACE TO LEAD US OUT OF THIS TIME OF PRAYER**

**A Prayer of Fresh Faith**

God, I want to know you better today than I did yesterday

God, I want to walk worthy of you today. Help me.

God, let me walk by your power today, not my own

God, today I thank you for the forgiveness & new life you give me through Christ

**AMEN.**