

COLOSSIANS

Helpless Hopefulness &
Powerful Intercession



THE JOURNEY
CHURCH

SCRIPTURE:

Colossians 1:1-12

RECAP:

My daughter, Kaleigh, does competition dance. And I do pretty good overall, but when she does her solo dance it makes me a nervous wreck. I feel so helpless. I want to do something to help her (not that I could if I wanted to), but I'm stuck in my seat and can only watch and pray. It is a helpless intercession. The intercession itself isn't helpless, because God can answer. I'm the helpless one. Yet that helplessness doesn't render me hopeless. God can move powerfully through intercession.

This leads me to our passage today, and my message title. **Helpless Hopefulness & Powerful Intercession.** We begin a new series in the book of Colossians today. It is an incredible book. It is rich with doctrinal teaching and practical application for the Christian life. In fact, the way Paul writes this letter is similar to his other letters. The first half is primarily core Christian doctrines, and the back half is more practical application of living out your faith.

Background of the Church in Colossae:

Paul is writing for a jail cell in Rome around 62 AD. He is there because of his proclamation of the Gospel. This church in Colossae was a prominent city in Phrygia, in Asia Minor. It was directly east of Ephesus about 100 miles. This gospel was preached in Phrygia by Paul and Silas, Timothy too, in Acts 15 and 16. It's debated whether Paul actually made it to this city in his travels, and whether others took the gospel to this city. The occasion for his writing the letter resembles the letter to the Ephesians. They were dealing with different views and philosophies. There were different errors spreading throughout the region. They were also dealing with the influence of rites and customs from Judaism creeping into their practices. Understanding our relationship to the Law and Old Testament was a big issue for Gentile believers who were new to the covenant. Overall, the general aim of the epistle is to guard this church against errors and to demonstrate the superiority of Christianity and Christ over all philosophies.

Exegesis: Colossians 1:1-12

V1-2 -- Paul begins his letter with his customary greeting. He identifies himself as the author from the very beginning. He establishes his authority to write to them and instruct them. He's an apostle of Christ Jesus. This is not by man's will or some vote, but by the will of God. He also includes Timothy, not as a co-author, but as another leader this word is spoken on behalf of. The reason for this is Timothy was also well-known in this area because he helped pastor in Ephesus, which is about a hundred miles away from Colossae.

This is addressed to the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae. This doesn't mean it isn't for women as well. But more than likely the letter is addressed to the elders of the church. He greets them with "grace to you and peace from God our Father." This is a standard salutation from him.

V3-8 -- One of the things Paul is known for is his long run-on sentences. This is one such example. He loves to build thought on top of thought. So let's work through it a piece at a time.

"We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you" -- A few things to notice even from these words. **1.** We see Paul say that God is the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. We'll see later in this letter the deity of Christ proclaimed. But you notice his theology of One, with distinct persons stated in this sentence. Jesus is the eternal Son of the Father. **2.** We see the habit of Paul and his companions to pray for churches. Particularly, in this verse we see their habit of praying with thanksgiving for this church. He saw himself as a spiritual father to this church (no doubt), but there is something in him that should be present in all of us: a desire to see churches be biblically solid, and bearing fruit as they obey the Great Commission. We should pray for more churches with a genuine desire to see them flourish in the gospel. Let me make a quick qualification. I did not say we should want to see every church flourish. We want them to flourish if they're healthy, biblically sound churches. So our prayers can be for their soundness, and then for their fruitfulness.

"since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints" -- Paul had heard about their faith in Jesus. A few things on this that are noteworthy: **1.** We don't think Paul had actually met this church. So his hearing of their faith is literally the only knowledge about them he has. **2.** Hearing of their faith may mean that they came to faith in Christ or it could mean he has heard of their demonstrations of faith, or their lived out faith. One of the things he has heard about is their love for all the

saints. We don't know exactly what examples he has or knows about but he commends it. It is a fulfillment of the Great Commandment to love God and love your brother.

1 John 3:14 -- *We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death.*

One of the evidence that we truly belong to God is that we love brothers. In this case, "brothers" is short-hand for believers, for the church.

"because of the hope laid up for you in heaven." -- Friends, the subject of Heaven isn't the focal point of this passage, but notice how its reality is just assumed by Paul as a natural part of the Christian's hope. Heaven is a reality. God dwells there. When we die, we will join him there. Our hope (our expectation and confidence) is laid up there. It is anchored there.

Are you living a faithful life here on earth because of the hope laid up for you in Heaven? Is the hope of Heaven something that is relevant in your life, driving you to faithfulness and steadfastness? It should be. Remember your inheritance. Remember what has been purchased for you.

"Of this you have heard before in the word of truth, the gospel, which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing" -- How did the church come to this hope laid up in Heaven? They heard it in the word of truth, the gospel. The gospel came to them and bore fruit, just as it was doing around the rest of the world. During the lifetime of Paul, the gospel had spread throughout the entire Roman Empire. I love this. He's letting them know,

"Hey, you are part of something bigger than yourself." "You're part of a movement of God in the world."

I also want you to see that phrase "the word of truth, the gospel." This word of truth is objectively true. This isn't subjective or relative to people's opinions or feelings. We live in a culture where truth is discussed as some personalized perception of reality. No, there is a fixed reality. There is what is true and what is false. You are either in alignment with the truth or you are not. You wouldn't think this needs to be stated, but in our day, you do have to state it. This gospel they received is the word of truth.

"as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth, just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf and has made known to us your love in the Spirit" -- The word of truth, the gospel, was spreading and growing in Colossae. It began the day they heard and understood the grace of God in truth. Again, there's that word "truth." And who did they hear and learn the truth from? From Epaphras. He was a fellow servant along with Paul and Timothy in sharing the gospel. He is a minister of Christ on behalf of the church.

V9-10 -- Paul says they haven't stopped praying for the church ever since they heard about the work of God's grace in the church in Colossae. But notice the content of their prayer: "asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding." Paul and other leaders pray specifically that the believers in Colossae will be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom. There is wisdom we gain as we grow in the knowledge and understanding of God's will as He has revealed it in Scripture. But catch it...they don't have God's Word. They don't have the Scriptures. So Paul is praying that God will give them knowledge of His will so they can have spiritual wisdom and understanding.

And for what reason? (V10) So they can walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. This is so important to see catch. Paul is praying for their knowledge of God's will to grow so they can live their lives in a way pleasing to the Lord.

They are Christians who have believed the word of truth, the gospel. But they need to grow in the knowledge of God's will so they can have understanding and live lives that please the Lord. Friends, there are ways of living that are pleasing to the Lord and ways that are not pleasing. He is writing to them to help them grow and learn. But he also prays for them. But catch this important point. There is a standard of living in holiness that pleases the Lord that is expected of the true Christian. And we have the privilege of having the Word of God to know what God requires of us. This is why we need to be in the Word, and study the Word, and hear the Word preached. And this is why we need community because we're helped as we walk with others bearing fruit.

V11-12 -- These verses read like a benediction. They are a declaration over the church. "May you be strengthened with all power." This power is from the Holy Spirit. "According to his glorious might." They need God to supply the power. This shows us that in and of ourselves, we are weak. We are incapable. This is why we need prayer. This is why we need the power of God.

"For all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light." This power helps us stay the course as we make our trek to the hope we have laid up in Heaven. We should give thanks to God the Father. Why? Because He has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He saved us. He qualified us for eternal inheritance. We were once unqualified but the Father qualified us by sending His Son Jesus into the world to save us.

Application:

1. Pray for other believers and churches.

Notice Paul prays for them. He hasn't met them. He did not do the work of preaching to them. Yet he still has a genuine love for and concern for these believers. Friends, this is something we should have. We don't want to compete against other churches. We are going to spend eternity with brothers and sisters from around the world and across the street. So let's start praying for them now.

2. Tell others about the word of truth.

How did the church of Colossae begin? They came to faith through the word of truth, the gospel, preached through Epaphras. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. You never know how you can be used of God to bring others to Jesus and salvation. Speak about him to others. Talk about his goodness and faithfulness in your life to others. Share God's Word with others.

3. Walk in a manner worthy of the Lord.

Paul prays that they have the knowledge of God's will so they can walk in a manner worthy of the Lord. There is a way of walking that pleases God. Holiness of life is something we are called to. We're not free to live how we want. Our lives are not our own. We've been bought at a price. The blood sacrifice of our Savior to purchase us from Satan's grasp not only forgives us of our sins, but frees us to sin no more. How can we be purchased from Satan's grasp but still live like Hell.

4. Serve the Lord despite your trials and afflictions.

Paul is serving the bride of Christ from his jail cell. He's undergone so many trials and afflictions, yet he serves the Lord. Friends, I know many of you have hardship and troubles. There will always be those. If you're waiting on a perfect time to serve the Lord,

you'll never find it. Life always brings trials. Serve Him despite your sorrows and afflictions. This is exactly how Jesus served us.

5. Live in gratitude to the God who qualified you for the inheritance.

Our passage today closed with a haymaker. Paul references the thankfulness we should live with since the Father qualified us to share in the inheritance with the saints. We have eternal life in Christ Jesus because the Father qualified us. We were disqualified for Heaven. Our sins made a separation between us and God that we could never repair. But God! God, rich in mercy with the love with which He has loved us, made us alive with Christ! By grace we've been saved! All of this from God. The Father has qualified us.

What does it do to your heart that the Father qualified you. How does it stir your soul to know what future awaits you? It should be gratitude and thanksgiving. We couldn't give it to ourselves but the God of tender mercies saved rebels and made us friends. He qualified us!

Paul is sitting in a jail cell in helpless hopefulness and his hopefulness is rooted in the power behind his intercession. He cannot be with the church in Colossae, but he is crying out on their behalf to the Lord. He alone can answer and strengthen. This fuels Paul to pray all the more for the things we've looked at today.

May we model the same posture in our own lives. Let's always be hopeful because the God we serve has the power to do all things and He is the One who qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

QUESTIONS:

1. How did the church in Colossae hear the gospel? Who shared it with them?
2. What makes Epaphras a faithful minister?
3. Why should we pray for others to be filled with the knowledge of God's will?
4. What are some of the ways Paul describes walking in a manner pleasing to the Lord?
5. Do you live in a manner that would cause others to hear about your faith in Christ Jesus and your love for the saints? Why or why not?
6. Spend some time praying for other Christians that are walking in a manner worthy of the Lord.
7. What can you start doing today to help the gospel advance and bear fruit?