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(Introduction - Gospel)

Slide -1 Well, it's good to be together again, and we are on the front end of a new series in the book of Colossians. And last week James started off our series by walking us through the background of Colossians, as well as the background of the apostle Paul who wrote this letter. It was great context, and a great encouragement for this church planting journey that God has us all on. And so this week we're going to dive deep into the text of Colossians.

There are four chapters in the book of Colossians. Chapters 1 & 2 are big picture, they're theology, they're about the foundation of our belief as Christians. And chapters 3 and 4 are the application; the everyday impact of the theology in this letter. And so these first few weeks while we're in chapters 1&2 we'll be talking about the foundation for us as we plant this church. This is the critical stuff to make sure we are all on the same page before the application portions in the later weeks of the series.

Now, because we are planting a church, I tend to read a lot of books on how to plant churches and the strategy behind planting. And one of the best writers on church planting is a guy named Ed Stetzer. And Stetzer once wrote about a time when he spoke at a church planting conference. Stetzer says he loves church planters because they are so focused on reaching the lost and starting new churches. And at this conference he asked the audience of over 500 people to answer these three questions.

First, he asked them to tell the person next to them what their new church was doing to be culturally relevant. And immediately everyone did. He says a distinct roar of enthusiasm filled the room... how to be culturally relevant **Second**, he asked them to tell one another what their churches were doing to engage their communities. Once again, they immediately turned to one another and talked passionately about engaging their communities. The roar gained momentum as each person took a turn answering the question.

Then, he simply asked his **third** question, which was... **"What is the Gospel?"** And an eerie silence fell across the room. You would think if ever there were a moment where church leaders and church pastors would answer with a roar of enthusiasm that it would have been then. But there was silence. And Stetzer goes on to write that it's great to seek cultural relevance. It's critical to be in our communities. But that he wishes these leaders would have defined the gospel with the same passion that they answered the other questions with.

And I think it's fair to say that we assume too much sometimes in the church. Especially when it comes to gospel. We assume that people understand the gospel message, we assume that people can articulate the Gospel message. And Paul basically starts out in his letter to the church in Colosse with a description of the message of the Gospel, with examples of the power of the Gospel, and details as to the Christian's roll in the Gospel.

Scripture

So let's turn the Colossians chapter 1, starting in verse four. If you are using the bibles under your chair we will be on page 902. And I want to encourage you guys start bringing your Bibles. We really believe that what is written in this book is from God. We really believe this is God's message to us. So it would be great if we would all bring our Bibles to church, bring a pencil so you can make notes in it for when God puts something on your heart in regards to a specific verse.

Honestly, part of me really hates having a screen and a projector up here, because in so many ways that's the reason most of us don't bring our Bibles to church anymore. And honestly that's a shame. So a friendly encouragement, maybe reminder, for you to bring your Bible here each week. If you don't have a Bible you are more than welcome to keep the one under your chair. We mainly teach from the new living translation. There are other great translations, but the NLT is the primary one that we've chosen to use here at Riverside.

Now, as I read this passage, I want you to think about the gospel message. A more common way of saying this is; I want you to observe all of the things Paul writes about the message of our faith, what are the fundamental, nonnegotiable things in the message of the Christian faith. So, that's the lens I want us to look at this passage through tonight. So, Colossians Chapter 1, verse 4 **Slide - 2** :

4For we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and your love for all of God's people, **5**which come from your confident hope of what God has reserved for you in heaven. You have had this expectation ever since you first heard the truth of the Good News. **6**This same Good News that came to you is going out all over the world. It is bearing fruit everywhere by changing lives, just as it changed your lives from the day you first heard and understood the truth about God's wonderful grace.

7You learned about the Good News from Epaphras, our beloved co-worker. He is Christ's faithful servant, and he is helping us on your behalf. **8**He has told us about the love for others that the Holy Spirit has given you. **9**So we have not stopped praying for you since we first heard about you. We ask God to give you complete knowledge of his will and to give you spiritual wisdom and understanding. **10**Then the way you live will always honor and please the Lord, and your lives will produce every kind of good fruit. All the while, you will grow as you learn to know God better and better.

11We also pray that you will be strengthened with all his glorious power so you will have all the endurance and patience you need. May you be filled with joy, **12**always thanking the Father. He has enabled you to share in the inheritance that belongs to his people, who live in the light. **13**For he has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into the Kingdom of his dear Son, **14**who purchased our freedom and forgave our sins.

This past Monday night, at our monthly Nehemiah night, we actually prayed through this passage. Together we systematically prayed through the flow laid out in this passage. So tonight, instead were going to grab different pieces of this passage as we look at the Gospel message, we're going to jump around a bit. Now this term "**the Gospel**" basically means "**good news**"... good news **Slide - 3**. And we see it called that three different times in this passage. That this message of the Christian faith is good news.

Message of the Gospel

And what's the bottom line of this good news, this faith? We see that in verse 4, that the bottom line of the good news, the bottom line of the Gospel message is **Slide - 4** Christ Jesus. Paul writes "**4**For we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus..." which he then says in verse 5 that this faith in Jesus came ever since the Colossians "**first heard the truth of the Good News.**" And then he writes in v.6 that this message is "**the truth about God's wonderful grace.**"

There are other very important aspects about the gospel message in this passage as well, and those include the fact that this Gospel message tells us that Jesus **has rescued us**, which is seen in v.13, and is expounded upon in v.14 when Paul writes that this rescuing came because Jesus **purchased our freedom and forgave us our sins**.

So, you can see that the gospel is good news that Jesus Christ has rescued us, that he has purchased our freedom and forgiven us our sins, for those who have faith in Him. And we know he did this through his death, burial, and resurrection. And that's great news. Unfortunately, some people, even Christians, think of the Christian message, the Gospel message, as one of bad news or condemnation. But that's not the case here in Colossians, and is not the case in the broader Bible.

So lets look at some of the finer points about this Gospel message. **Slide - 5** **First** and foremost, we see that the Gospel centers on a person,... and that person is not you and it's not me. Instead, the Gospel centers on the

person of Jesus Christ. And next week we will look at just how awesome Jesus is. But it's key to note that the gospel message does not center upon emotions or philosophy, it's not a doctrine, it's not some nice theology or religious system. Instead, the Gospel centers on Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Secondly, Slide - 6 we see in the opening section that the Gospel is truth. In verse five, the NIV translation states it's the "word of truth." This means that this Gospel came from God and can be trusted. And I love how Warren Wiersbe discusses this, **Slide - 7** he says "Everybody has faith in something. But faith is only as good as the object in which a person puts his trust. The jungle pagan worships a God of stone; the educated city pagan worships money or possessions or status. In both cases, faith is empty. The true Christian believer puts faith in Jesus Christ, and that faith is based on the word of truth."

So we see that the gospel is centered on Jesus, and that the gospel is the ultimate truth in the world, and then we see that the gospel message is all **Slide - 8** about **God's grace**. And this is the key. **The reason the gospel is good news is because of grace.** And to be completely honest, I think most churches have lost, man they've lost, the practical message of grace. In my experience, the Christian message I most often hear from folks essentially concerns only how to deal with sin, how to deal with wrongdoings and how to avoid sinning. Essentially most Christians approach their faith with the gospel of sin management. Sin management... I'll just try harder to be a good person and not stumble. And more often than not, God's grace, and the transformation of our lives, and of our characters is left out.

Grace is an amazing thing. I think the theologian J.I. Packer said it best when defining grace, **Slide - 9** he writes: "In the New Testament, Grace means God's love in action towards people who merited the opposite of the love. Grace means God moving heaven and earth to save sinners who could not lift a finger to save themselves. Grace means God sending his only son to the cross to descend into hell so that we guilty ones might be reconciled to God and received in heaven."

And that's a great textbook definition of grace. But I also want to try and paint an illustration of grace for us in modern-day terms that we can grasp. And to do this, I'm going to borrow an illustration from a guy named Don Cousins, who illustrates grace by saying: "I have a mortgage on my house. Therefore I have a relationship of sorts with my mortgage company. They refer to me as a customer, and I write my customer number on every check I send in payment of my debt. But truth be told, I'm not a customer; I'm a debtor. Our relationship is based on my indebtedness. The company not only expects payback from me; it demands it.

Now imagine with me for a moment if the president of the mortgage company called one day with good news saying "Mr. Keith, we have an annual drawing in which we randomly select one customer whose loan we mark 'paid in full'. This year your name was selected. Therefore your debt is canceled."

If that were to happen, I would no longer have a relationship with them based on debt. Our future relationship would be based on the grace they displayed in forgiving my debt.

In the same way, in the spiritual realm there was a time when we were debtors in relationship to God. But with the payment of Jesus' blood, and our acceptance of it, our debt was erased and marked paid in full. There is no more payback. And now our relationship with God is based on that grace. We cannot pay God back for all he has done for us. To try is futile.

I love that illustration. And folks, to be completely honest with you, I'm not going to be part of a church that doesn't hold Grace as its highest virtue. I don't mean we're going to gloss over sin. I'm all for righteousness. But I want to be part of a church where Grace permeates the culture. Where grace is experienced and lived out in community. **Riverside is going to be a church where people are comfortable sharing their junk knowing that grace and love and truth will be shared and spoken.**

So in this passage from Colossians, we see that the Gospel message center on Jesus, that it's the truth about God's grace, and that this message brings redemption, it brings freedom and forgiveness of sin.

Some of my favorite scriptures in the bible about the gospel include:

1Cor. 15:1 **Slide - 10** Let me now remind you, dear brothers and sisters, of the Good News I preached to you before. You welcomed it then, and you still stand firm in it. 2 It is this Good News that saves you if you continue to believe the message I told you—unless, of course, you believed something that was never true in the first place. I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. 4 He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said.

What's the most important central message of the Gospel? According to this passage it's not try harder. It's not be a good person. **Slide - 11** It's that Christ **Christ died for our sins, ... that He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day.**

I love Romans 1:16, **Slide - 12** which says: **For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes—the Jew first and also the Gentile.** Why is the gospel good news? Because of the saving power it has. Because it's a message of grace. And because this message is so powerful and is the ultimate truth, it's a message that needs to be guarded and taken very seriously.

Gal. 1:8 **Slide - 13** says: **Let God's curse fall on anyone, including us or even an angel from heaven, who preaches a different kind of Good News than the one we preached to you. 9 I say again what we have said before: If anyone preaches any other Good News than the one you welcomed, let that person be cursed.**

So, how important is this gospel message, this message of good news? Very important, and it's a message that is critical that we as a church always ensure is shared with integrity and faithfulness in terms of content.

Power of the Gospel

So, that's a look at what the gospel message is,... but so what. I mean, that's great and all, but what kind of power and everyday difference can it make in my life and in our church's life?...

Well, for that lets go back to Colossians, where we see in our passage some amazing effects that happen when the gospel expands and takes root in people's lives. For example, we see in this passage that the gospel taking root leads to fruit **Slide - 14** in terms of **love** and **confident hope** in our lives. And not just in our lives, not just in our own experiences, but also, according to v.6, that this Gospel is **going out all over the world. It is bearing fruit everywhere by changing lives, just as it changed your life and my life.**

You see, this Gospel message has the power to change the entire world,... that's a big claim. And the reason it can change the entire world **Slide - 15** is that it **“enable[s] us to ... live in the light.** the gospel message is one that, when accepted, leads to people being **rescued from the kingdom of darkness and transferred into the Kingdom of [Christ].**

Now that is powerful. The gospel message has the power to turn the world completely upside down. It's the power, the only true power, which can ultimately rescue people from the bondage of sin & darkness and transfer people into light, into being part of a restored community of God's people.

Warren Wiersbe tells the story of a sermon he once heard, in which the preacher quoted **Slide - 16** John 3:16, “For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.” The preacher then asked: “If you were to give a gift that would be suitable for the whole world, what would you give?” He listed several possibilities and showed how those gifts could not suit everybody.

- Books (many people cannot read).
- Food (people eat different things in different parts of the world)
- Clothing (climates are different)
- Money (not every culture makes use of money)

And he came to the logical conclusion that only the Gospel, with its gift of eternal life, was suitable for the whole world, and he was right. Paul wrote to the Colossians that **Slide - 17** the gospel was bearing fruit in **all of the world**. That the word of God is the only seed that can be planted anywhere in the world and bear fruit.

And when I think of the power of the Gospel, I think “**why in the world we ever want to be about anything else?**” Seriously, **I like football**, but it has no power like the Gospel. **I like self-discipline** and tips and techniques that lead to a more enjoyable life, but I’d rather have something that leads to eternal life.

I think we should practice avoiding sin and fleeing from temptation, but I’d rather have the power that overcame death and that rescues us from temptation and from darkness, and instead transfers us into the light.

That’s the power of the gospel, it’s the only real power to change the world.

That was true 2000 years ago when the apostle Paul wrote this letter, and the same is true today. Today, in 2010, there is an explosion of church planting and of the gospel expanding in China and Africa and around the world. Planting churches in America is starting to gain a lot of steam. Did you know that last year there was a new church planted in Granger, and on March 7th of this year there is a church plant launching in Mishawaka? Even in our own area God is planting new churches and expanding this gospel message, as well as around the world. The Gospel message is a powerful message that we get to play a part in.

Our Role in the Gospel (application)

Which leads me to the third and final lens I want us to look at this passage through tonight. We’ve looked at the “Message of the Gospel” and the “Power of the Gospel,” and now I want us to look at what our “Role in the Gospel” is.

Now, before I make any assumptions and get ahead of myself, I think **verse 5 Slide - 18** makes it fairly clear that if you haven’t yet accepted the grace and the power that comes from the Gospel message, that you are really missing out. **V5** says that first and foremost we have to have put our hope in the gospel message, put our hope in Jesus. And just because you are here tonight doesn’t necessarily mean that you are a Christian.

Just as if you sit in a garage that doesn’t make you a car, and just as going to a wedding doesn’t make you married, attending church and being a good person doesn’t necessarily mean you are a Christian. The first and foremost role we have in the gospel is to accept it into our lives, to let it change us. Have you fully embraced and accepted the gospel message? Are you not sure? We would love to talk with you and help you flesh this out; as the good news really is the hope of the world and the hope for every person in the world.

And once we have accepted the Gospel message, we are to then faithfully proclaim it. We see this in verse 7. We see **Slide - 19** that the Colossians **learned about the Good News from [a guy named] Epaphras**. And that this gospel sharing from Epaphras was propped up by the power of the Spirit and by the fact that others were

boldly praying for the Gospel to take root in Colosse. Guys, seriously, there is nothing else in the world that is going to last longer and shine brighter than the fruit that comes when we pray and then boldly share the Gospel.

We've talked about this a lot, that this church plant, that Riverside is not going to be founded upon great programs or teaching or music or a building or my personality; but rather, that Riverside is going to grow because of each person faithfully praying and sharing the gospel just like this guy Epaphras did 2000 years ago. And if you are wondering how to do that, I would strongly encourage you to go to our website and listen to our sermon series on evangelism. Talk to your home group leader about some potential resources that can help you grow in your evangelism proficiency.

And lastly, I think, and this passage in Colossians confirms this, that for us to be faithful and to bear fruit from the Gospel, that we must continually let it change us from the inside out. One of the greatest and most foundational things we can do as followers of Jesus is to consistently be reminded of the Gospel message and how it's to play out in us and through us. I love how versus 9&10 put this **Slide - 20**, they say:

... We ask God to give you complete knowledge of his will and to give you spiritual wisdom and understanding. **10 Then** the way you live will always honor and please the Lord, and your lives will produce every kind of good fruit. **All the while**, you will grow as you learn to know God better and better.

I see these three next steps that we just talked about here. That first we need to have complete knowledge of the Gospel and the wisdom and understanding that comes when we surrender our lives. Because THEN, v.10, says that will lead to our lives honoring God and to fruit that will last, and here is the key, the key is that ALL THE WHILE we are to continue to remain faithful to learning and getting to know God better and better. In other words, we should not only bear fruit, but we should also be continually growing in knowing God. We can't be stagnant in our faith and expect to bear fruit as we plant this church.

And we are most often reminded about the Gospel and learn more about God by spending regular time with Him. By faithfully and regularly spending time with God and in His word. That is why you've heard us regularly talk about how important it is to have a consistent devotional life. The bottom line is that for us to remain faithful to sharing the gospel and faithful to consistently grow in Christ, we must have a consistent devotional life & prayer life, that is in the context of a strong broader community.

We (vision)

Seriously, can you imagine if our entire church dove into the word and prayed like these leaders in Colosse did? Can you imagine if we prayed like v. 9 for our area; **Slide - 21** where Paul writes that they "have not stopped praying for you since we first heard about you." We need to pray for NW SB like we have never prayed before... If we want to see the Gospel move in our church and through our church as described in this passage, we need to be praying like these leaders were in this passage, and consistently yielded to God and His word.

Conclusion/Communion

Slide - 22 And just as having a regular devotional life reminds us of the gospel message, the power of the gospel message, and our role in the gospel, ... regularly celebrating communion as a church is another way that we remember and celebrate this amazing Gospel, this amazing message and truth of Jesus.

... **communion represents**... **formal liturgy**

--SONGS--

Closing