



## **Colossians 1:5–8**

5 the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel 6 that has come to you. In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world – just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God’s grace. 7 You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant,

who is a faithful minister of Christ on our[b] behalf, 8 and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.

## **Reflection**

It's the middle of the first century, perhaps as late as AD 60. If so, then the small agricultural town of Colosse has only one more year before it will be destroyed by the earthquake of AD 61, never to be rebuilt. Situated on the southern bank of the Lycus River in modern day Turkey, around 180 kilometres east of Ephesus, Colosse is the smallest and most insignificant of the cities that Paul writes to in the New Testament. In a year it will be no more, and yet Paul's letter to this young church has survived two millennia. An outsider would claim an accident of history. But

this letter, intended to be read out loud to the new believers in Colosse who apparently were few enough to worship in Philemon's house, by God's sovereign design, has been poured over for centuries by millions and millions of believers from every nation on earth. In it they've found some of the highest Christology in the Bible, some of the most powerful and reality re-defining teaching about the supremacy of Jesus Christ. Because the Colossian problem is the problem shared by every single believe. Our vision of Jesus is too small so Paul writes to raise our vision of Jesus to appropriate heights.

Last week the apostle Paul – one of thirteen or so men, with unique apostolic authority given to them by the risen Lord Jesus and whose writings make up the New

Testament – started his letter by rehearsing his daily prayers for the Colossians within their hearing. We've already been gripped by the richness of Paul's prayer life. And through mirror-reading Paul's words, that is, inferring the situation in Colosse from what he writes, a picture is beginning to develop in our minds as to how this young church is travelling. Clearly Paul has received news, perhaps from Epaphras who is with him in Rome and who founded the church in Colossae after he had been converted by Paul in Ephesus. It might be that the news was sent by Philemon, the wealthy businessman, in whose home the Colossian church meets. He too it appears to have come to Christ through the ministry of Paul. Paul's never visited Colosse but the connections run deep as we can hear when Paul speaks about his

prayer life. Let's read what Paul prays for the Colossians, Friday's passage as well as today's,

3 We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, 4 because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people – 5 the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel 6 that has come to you. In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world – just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God's grace. 7 You

learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, 8 and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.

Paul has been told of the Colossians faith, hope and love in the Spirit, a love that is transforming them and spilling over into tangible and visible love for all of God's people. And Paul rejoices and thanks God daily for the work that he is performing in their hearts and community. Today Paul reassures them that this same, wonderful transformation is occurring all over the world. Verse 6,

In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world – just as it has been

doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God's grace.

The gospel of Jesus Christ – not so much an invitation as a declaration; a command to be obeyed and a power let loose in the world – has swept across geographical and racial barriers and against all odds it has found ready acceptance in the world. The message of God's love for all human-kind and Jesus' sacrificial death to redeem by grace speaks into any language or culture. It speaks to the universal condition of every human being – male or female, slave or free, Jew or Gentile. And this same gospel is bursting forth in small groups of Christians not only in such vital centres of the Roman empire as Rome, Corinth and Ephesus, but also in declining towns such

as Colossae as well.

And two thousand years later the gospel is still bearing fruit in our world. In recent decades Christianity has experienced explosive growth in Asia, Africa and South America for example. What is the fruit of the gospel? It is people from every nation giving their lives over to Jesus and working with him on mission in his world; their hearts filled with the hope of eternal life, the message of the gospel never far from their lips, and their hands busy doing good in our world.

The gospel bear fruits, never more so than today given the sheer population size of our modern world. I went to a prayer meeting last week to pray for the work of the International Justice Mission. We

prayed for their work in Africa: the protection of widows and orphans from property grabbing and land left in Uganda; fighting against corrupt judicial processes in Kenya, and the saving children out of slavery in the fishing industry in Ghana, so far 100 children rescued this year. All the victims save by IJM are given over into the care and ongoing support of the local churches with many of them coming to faith in Jesus Christ. Verse 6,

In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world – just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God’s grace.

The Colossians first heard the gospel and

truly understood God's grace through the work of the missionary and church planter Epaphras. Paul celebrates his ministry in verses 7 and 8,

7 You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, 8 and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.

## **Think**

And this might be a good point today to step back and reflect over what Paul has been saying for yourself. Paul has been celebrating the spread of the gospel throughout the known world by the grace of God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, and through the work of countless missionar-

ies, like Epaphras, who took up the Great Commission of the first missionary, Jesus Christ.

When the first missionary, Jesus, returned home he left his followers with these words,

‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’

The apostle Paul followed suit and the church in Ephesus, amongst many others,

was born. Epaphras, converted in Ephesus, followed suit, and the Colossian church was born. And by the grace of God, the power of the Holy Spirit, and work of his people the gospel continues to bear fruit and grow throughout the world today.

## **Pray**

Pray today for the global church in all its diversity. Pray for our mission fields, both locally and globally. Start this week by remembering and praying for any missionaries you know and support. Is there some unexpected kindness you can show them this week that might raise them up? A friend of mine is in Afghanistan on mission. I once asked him what led him down this path. He said quite simply and humbly, 'When Jesus said "Go and make dis-

cipling of all nations” I thought it probably a good idea to go and do what he said.’ Pray over the response of your heart to Jesus’ command.

Pray also today for the work of Christian aid agencies like IJM who work for mercy and justice in our world bringing great glory to Jesus and making him known through their words, prayers, vision and deeds. Why not pray specifically for land grabbing in Uganda, the justice system in Kenya, and child slavery in Ghana today? And especially the embrace of the local churches as they bring healing and hope to victims, and share with them the reason for the hope they have in Jesus.