

Keynotes from Tim Gamston's am Sermon on 7/11/2021

Text: Colossians 1 v 1-14

Series: "More on Missions"

"The Gospel – the only hope for the world and church"

Scripture references from the ESV

Colossians 1:1-14 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,² To the saints and faithful brothers^[a] in Christ at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.³ **We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you,** ⁴ since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, ⁵ because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, ⁶ which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth, ⁷ just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant.^[b] He is a faithful minister of Christ on your^[c] behalf ⁸ and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.⁹ And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰ so as to 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; ¹¹ being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; ¹² giving thanks^[d] to the Father, who has qualified you^[e] to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. ¹³ He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

The world is currently facing many difficult issues, from climate change to Covid, racial tensions and abuse of power, as well as the ongoing debates over assisted suicide, abortion and gender. As a result, we are being bombarded with messages from many different directions. Our government leaders tell us how they plan to solve the problems, journalists give their opinions on what has been said and social media offers a vitriolic commentary on everything. We chat with our friends who have their own views on what is happening and what should be done.

These issues are dominating our lives, and, although they are important, they are also deeply divisive and cause fear, frustration, confusion and anger.

The result is a world that is disunited and fearful. Sadly, the church is not immune to this, and these issues are starting to drive the agenda and the thinking within churches. Congregations want their pastors to take sides on issues like climate change, race and Covid restrictions. However, no pastor can win – whatever stance he may take on any of this, he is bound to offend someone, and if he says nothing, he will offend everyone! Sadly, too, the sort of vitriol that comes from social media is now coming from Christians in the form of angry letter-writing and sarcastic comments, causing churches to split and pastors to leave their ministry.

That may sound like something that couldn't happen to us at BBC, but we all have opinions on these issues and can easily find ourselves judging one another.

Additionally, the Covid crisis, livestreaming our services, the new building and changes in our congregation and leadership have meant that we have had to make changes to how we do church.

Those changes have led to issues which, if we dwell on them and allow them to fester, will create tribes and factions within the church. In the process, we may lose sight of what unites us, and what the world most needs to hear.

We need to have our hearts recalibrated to cherish the one message that will unite all people and deal with the fear and anger that has taken hold of the church and the world.

- **That message is the Gospel (v5 above).**

Paul is writing this letter to deal with the Gnostic teaching that was creeping into the church. The Gnostics denied that God was creator and sustainer of the universe.

- They couldn't believe that a spiritual God would create a material world and because of that they had an unhealthy interest in the spirit world and mysticism
- They couldn't believe that Jesus could be both God and man, and Saviour and believed they needed to be their own saviours through their own efforts

We see something of this today.

- Our world denies the God of the Bible as creator, even denying his very existence. Therefore, they don't know what God has promised about this world, nor his plans for it.

- Instead of seeking God about how to govern it, people are blindly trying to be their own saviours.
- Despite denying the existence of God, people are looking for meaning in life and turning to Eastern mystic religions.

Paul dealt with Gnosticism by preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, helping the church to have confidence in it to unite people and take away fear. This is the answer for us too. We need to be totally focussed on the gospel of Jesus Christ.

- We need to be fully confident that this message of God's grace will unite us to God and each other.
- We need to be fully confident that this message of God's grace will take away the fear that the world has and provide answers to the complex issues it is facing.

Paul gives us two truths about the Gospel to help us in this (v6 above).

1. **The Gospel is growing** – the Gospel has come to the whole world and it is bearing fruit and increasing.

Jesus told his 11 disciples that they were to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

- By the time the last apostle died, it is estimated that there were half a million believers and by February 2020, that number had grown to 660 million evangelical Christians worldwide, many of whom live in countries where authorities have tried to silence the gospel. There are believers in every continent.

That is the power of the Gospel

Gospel growth globally has come at the cost of human lives – lives laid down so that the unreached could hear the good news that Jesus saves sinners eternally. During the 1800s, the average life expectancy of a missionary in West Africa was 2 years, because of malaria, but despite this, the western church kept sending missionaries to Africa and elsewhere. When you consider the Gospel, this is a natural outworking.

The Gospel is a message of one man, Jesus, laying down his life to save many

The most effective and beautiful way for that message to be proclaimed is when God's people lay down their lives so that others will hear this message and be saved. This may be a literal laying down of life, but it may also mean:

- Denying ourselves certain western comforts so that we can financially support mission
- Giving up lucrative careers so that we can go with the gospel to the unreached
- Risking rejection from friends and family as we tell them that Jesus saves sinners
- Giving up our sons and daughters to go out on the mission field

People travel the world to take messages about climate change and so on, but the big question is

who will go and tell the world the most important message that it needs to hear?

- There is a holy God who is rightly offended by our sin and must punish us eternally.
- That God is a God of love who has punished his own Son in place of sinners
- Everyone who turns from sin and trusts in Jesus alone to save can be put right with God and have eternal life

The Gospel is the only religious message that can be believed, as Paul shows in his second truth.

2. The Gospel is fruitful (v6 above) - the gospel is not just a message for the intellect. Wherever the Gospel is preached and truly believed, it results in changed lives (bears fruit), just as it did for those in the church at Colossae. That fruit (faith, love and hope v5 above) showed that the Gospel was an authentic message from God, and that the people who believed it were the authentic people of God.

a) These believers had hope for the future, because the Gospel is full of hope. It offers the hope of:

- Forgiveness of sin, and being put right with God
- A renewed earth, free from any fears that currently beset us such as climate change, viruses and racial hostility.

When Gospel hope is controlling our minds and hearts, then we are truly free from all fear

b) These believers were a community that loved one another.

- Their hope for the future freed them to show love for all the saints not just locally but worldwide.

The Gospel creates a community where love is active so that

- despite differing views over world related issues, people still love one another and do not gossip or vilify.

When we realise that, for the whole of eternity, we shall enjoy rich fellowship with God and each other, free from all the frustrations of this life, which are only for a short time, then we will be set free to love one another.

This love comes from our faith in Jesus Christ.

We cannot claim to trust in Jesus Christ, who loved us and gave himself for us, and then show hostility toward others whom Christ loved and died to save. Faith in Jesus reminds us that we are all sinners in need of God's grace and that humbles us. It puts us all on a level playing field from which we can choose to love one another. This happens because

God works through the Gospel to produce this fruit in our lives.

Paul thanks God for this fruit in the believers' lives (v4 above) because

God is the author of this faith, love and hope in them

- Where the world's message and methods dominate, there can only be fear and disunity
- Where the Gospel dominates there will be the fruit of faith, love and hope that will lead to loving unity and freedom from fear

What are we to do in response to this?

- I. **Proclaim the gospel where it has been neglected** – perhaps in our own family lives and in our neighbourhood
 - **Every day, we need to preach the gospel to ourselves**, reminding ourselves of God's grace to us, sinners though we are. Our acceptance before God and in church and the world is based on what Christ has done for us and nothing else. Failure to hear this message on a daily basis may make us fearful and irritable.

- **Our conversation with others needs to be gospel focused** - we find it easy to chat about current affairs but what the world needs above anything else is to hear the message of what God has done for us through his son Jesus. Our neighbours need to hear and see our faith in Christ, our love for one another and our hope for the future.

II. Celebrate where we see the Gospel taking effect – we need to look for evidences of God’s grace in each other’s lives, rather than looking for their faults. The message of the Gospel is that God is changing us by his grace and as we see that happening in our brothers and sisters, we can give thanks to God for it.

As we focus on missions over the next two weeks, let us proclaim the message we have heard and believed, and celebrate the evidence we see of God’s grace, giving thanks to God that

The gospel has come to the whole world and is bearing fruit and increasing