

## **Prayers of the Saints – Colossians 1:1-14**

*10/10/2021 AD – St Mark's Northbridge*

**Reflection Q's:** How do you want the gospel to further shape your prayers? This week, who can you be praying Colossians 1:3-14 for?

**BIG Idea:** God's people are engaged in thanksgiving and petitions to Him.

### **Sermon Outline:**

*What to pray*

*Gospel-formed people (v.1-2)*

*Gospel-shaped thanksgiving (v.3-8)*

*Gospel-driven petition (v.9-14)*

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### **Pray.**

#### **What to pray**

If you've been around churches or spent time in Christian circles, then you may have come across the term 'prayer warrior'. You may have heard someone described as being a 'prayer warrior'. Someone who's an earnest and dedicated person of prayer. Maybe there are people in our church that come to mind when you hear the term 'prayer warrior'.

You see, we admire these people because of their example and commitment to prayer. We look up to these 'prayer warriors' because we know that praying to our Heavenly Father is an important part of our relationship with Him, as we bring our requests. And these brothers and sisters are models for how to pray, especially when prayer can be a struggle. I'm sure I'm not the only one who struggles with: setting aside time to pray, feeling like praying, or knowing what it is we should actually pray for. Take for

example when a friend asks, “can you pray for me?”, or you tell someone: “I’ll be praying for you”, we can wonder: what should I pray for? What would be the most helpful thing that I can pray for that person?

So it’s no surprise that as Christians we need to be taught how and what to pray. That’s what Jesus does with his disciples. And that’s what the Apostle Paul does in this letter to the Colossians. In these opening verses Paul shows us as Christians what we can be praying for, no matter what our individual circumstances are.

So if your prayer tank is feeling empty, or that your prayer life is running dry, then this passage helps fill up the tank. It’s a rich part of Scripture full of things that we can pray for ourselves and others. And if you’re feeling established in your prayer life, then Paul’s priorities which we see in his prayers are a good self-assessment of the things we currently pray for.

### **Gospel-formed people (v.1-2)**

So as we come to this passage and consider our prayer life as God’s people, we firstly see in the opening verses that this is a letter from the apostle Paul and his young protégé Timothy. And they are writing to the church in Colossae – to God’s holy people in as we see there in verse 2.

What we see from these opening verses is that Paul, Timothy, and the church in Colossae have been formed and brought together by the gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel of grace and peace. Grace from God in His Son Jesus and the peace which he brings.

So the gospel of Jesus Christ is what forms us as Christians and us as a church. It's the foundation we stand on and it is what unites us no matter where we are, or what we have done in the past, or our present circumstances.

We read later in this letter that Paul is writing while he is in chains for the gospel.<sup>1</sup> So he's writing to God's people in another place and to people who he has never met. And yet they are his brothers and sisters in Christ. They are family. Paul, Timothy, and the Colossians are all united in the common faith and gospel message of Jesus Christ.

And isn't this a good reminder of who we are as Christians. That we are formed and united through this gospel message. That no matter our present circumstances, or wherever we find ourselves – both far and near, we are God's people. Which means that our identity as the church is not based on common interests or hobbies, or in whether we are vaccinated or not, but it is found in the gospel – as brothers and sisters in Christ.

So Paul and Timothy, and the Colossians are God's people united and formed by the gospel of Christ.

And it's out of this relationship that Paul overflows with thanksgiving for these fellow Christians. What follows is a lesson from Paul in how to pray. We get to see a 'prayer warrior' at work. We get to see this model pray-er in action.

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<sup>1</sup> Col. 4:3

### **Gospel-shaped thanksgiving (v.3-8)**

Paul says there in verse 3:

<sup>3</sup> *We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you,*

You see, he wants the Colossians to know that he is incredibly thankful to God for them. And he is thankful for the way the gospel has shaped and been at work in their lives. From verse 4 those three words capture this: faith, love, and hope.

Paul is thankful for the Colossians and their **faith** in Jesus, their **love** for God's people which stems from their love of God, and the **hope** they have stored up in heaven. These things are all shaped and flow from the gospel. Faith, love, and hope – they are a neat summary of the Christian life. They are the marks of a Christian who has understood the gospel of Jesus Christ. Faith, love, and hope. Faith in Jesus, which leads to love, while being grounded in the certain hope of heaven.

Paul is thankful to God for the work of the gospel in the lives of these Colossian Christians. But he also knows that the work of the gospel is much bigger than just these Christians. He says there in verse 6 that:

*...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.*

You can feel Paul's enthusiasm and excitement here. He is thrilled and thankful that the gospel is advancing throughout the world and the way the gospel is bearing fruit in many places. These Christians who he's writing to are one small piece of fruit on a

massive tree that is bearing so much fruit. In previous times before certain events came upon us, you might describe this movement of the gospel as going viral.

This work of the gospel in people's lives and across the world as it takes root in people's lives leads Paul to thanksgiving.

But this isn't all that Paul is thankful for. He's also thankful for those who have brought that gospel message to the Colossians. We are introduced to a man named Epaphras there in verse 7. He is the one who brought the gospel to the Colossians and the one who they learnt the gospel from.

And that is how God works in bringing the gospel to the world. He uses ordinary people to bring this extraordinary message and model and teach the gospel-shaped life to others. You see, every Christian has an Epaphras in their life. That person who taught us the gospel. It might be a friend, a parent or family member, a colleague, or someone who someone who randomly walked up and shared the gospel with you. We all have an Epaphras in our life. And they are someone who we are incredibly thankful to God for.

And here Paul is thankful for Epaphras and his work in teaching the gospel to the Colossians.

In these opening verses as we see Paul abounding in thanksgiving for the Colossians it shows that our prayers of thanksgiving to God can be shaped by these gospel realities too. Even if we are struggling to be thankful to God, Paul models some things we can be thankful for. And we see this in a few concrete ways:

Firstly we can be thankful to God for the way He works as the gospel grows around the world. As we read and hear about the gospel bearing fruit across the world, doesn't that make us lift our eyes to what God is doing as his gospel word goes out. It reminds us that this global gospel movement is much bigger than our city, or even our country. So next time you hear news of the gospel bearing fruit amongst different people in different places from a missionaries prayer letter or elsewhere, we can give thanks to God. Thanksgiving is an appropriate response to hearing what God is doing around the world.

A second way that we can be thankful to God is for the way He has and continues to work in our own lives as well as in our brothers and sisters. We can thank God for the faith, love, and hope of our fellow Christians. It's quite an easy prayer to pray: "Dear God, thank you that my friend has faith in Jesus, that he loves God's people, and has his hope set in heaven. Amen". You can pray that prayer for any Christian!

And a third way that Paul shows how we can be thankful in our prayers is for the people who God has brought into our lives and who we have learned the gospel from. So it's worth stopping and thanking God for the people in your life who you learnt the gospel from and continue to learn the gospel from. It's worth asking, who is the Epaphras in your life? Well you can thank God for them.

Thanksgiving is an important part of the Christian life, and it's the work of the gospel which shapes our thankfulness to God.

### **Gospel-driven petition (v.9-14)**

But the gospel doesn't just lead us to thanksgiving. It also drives us to bring our requests before God. Since the Colossians have grasped the gospel, Paul prays that they would grow in the gospel. And this leads him to make petitions to God for them when he prays.

There in verse 9 we read that Paul '*has not stopped praying for the Colossians*', and that he is continuing earnestly in prayer. When Paul says that he "has not stopped praying", I don't think we're supposed to picture Paul as doing nothing but pray – not that there would be anything wrong with that! But it's more getting at the idea that he has not finished praying for them. That he is still contending for them in prayer. He hasn't given up and is continuing to pray for them.

And Paul has two things that he prays for these Christians: knowledge and power.

So firstly, knowledge. Have a look at verse 9:

*...We continually ask God to fill you with the **knowledge** of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives...*

This is a prayer for followers of Jesus to have knowledge and wisdom. And not just any knowledge or wisdom. But the knowledge of God's will. It's a prayer for God's people to know what God wants and desires. And God's people can know God's will because

He has made it known to us in the Scriptures. God has given us His will and has told us what He wants and desires, in His word.

So this is a prayer for God's people to be filled and come to a deeper understanding of His will.

But you see this is not an end in itself, so that we would have our minds filled with more information. It's so that knowing God's will, it results in action, as we see in verse 10. Paul prays that knowing God's will Christians may:

*<sup>10</sup> ... live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God*

Our knowledge of God's will leads to a transformed life that bears fruit. That's what Paul prays for. And it makes sense, if you are to please God, then you need to know how He wants you to live. Our knowledge of God and His will leads to action.<sup>2</sup>

And so this should inform our prayers. That we would pray for a knowledge and understanding of God's will so that we live lives that please Him and bear fruit in every way. This is a prayer that God's word would take root in our lives and would flow into action. So that when we read God's word it isn't merely an intellectual exercise. And this is a prayer that transcends our individual circumstances because no matter where we are, our desire as Christians is always to please the Lord. So whether it's around the

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<sup>2</sup> And this is consistent with other places like Titus where we see this pattern of knowing the truth leading to godliness. Or when Paul writes elsewhere about the importance of our life and doctrine.

home, with family and friends, at school, or at work. In all of these places we want to bear fruit in good work. So we pray for God to give us wisdom and understanding.

And this prayer for knowledge and wisdom is one that you can pray for your brothers and sisters wherever they may be or whatever they may be going through. Again, it's amazing that Paul is praying this prayer for Christians who he hasn't met. But that doesn't stop him from praying for them! Because he knows that God, by his Spirit is able to open our minds and hearts to fill us with a knowledge of His will so we live lives worthy of the Lord.

So Paul prays for knowledge of God's will.

And the second thing he prays for is strength and power. That as the Colossians live lives worthy of the Lord, that they would be strengthened to do so. We see this in verse 11 as Paul prays for the Colossians to be “<sup>11</sup> *...strengthened with all power according to his glorious might...*”

It's a prayer for us not to look for strength from within but for us in our weakness to come to God asking for him to grant his strength and power to us.

And the purpose of this power from God, in verse 11, is so that Christians:

*...have great endurance and patience,<sup>12</sup> and give joyful thanks to the Father,*

This prayer for endurance and patience implies that Christians face hardship in their weakness. Paul wouldn't have prayed these things for the Colossians if they had everything in order. And we know that we don't have everything in order. We need

endurance and patience especially when we are tested and feeling under pressure. And in God's power He is able to give strength for endurance and patience. And that's why Paul asks the Lord to grant these things to the Colossians.

So when we petition God and bring our requests to Him, our posture is as weak and frail people in need of his strength.

This prayer from Paul for God-given strength and power is a helpful corrective to us when we are experiencing hardship. Quite often when we are in the midst of hardship or suffering or an unpleasant season of life, our prayers can be solely focussed on our circumstances. And that's not necessarily wrong because we can bring absolutely everything before our loving Heavenly Father who listens.

But it's interesting that here in the midst of weakness and a time of needing great endurance and patience, that Paul's focus and priority is for Christians to depend on God's strength, and for Christians to grow in His strength. Paul prays for Christians to have God's strength so that they would have endurance and patience and joyful thanksgiving. These are areas for God to help us grow in.

This is again a helpful reminder that no matter what our circumstances are, we can pray for God to work in us and our brothers and sisters to strengthen us in these things, including in times of hardship and trials.

And when we pray, we are praying to a mighty Heavenly Father. We ask Him for knowledge and strength, and we can come to Him in prayer because of who He is and what He has done, especially in His Son Jesus.’

And that’s what Paul directs the Colossians to at the end of this passage. We read there in verse 12 that: *the Father...has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light.*

By His almighty power, our Heavenly Father has made us one of His holy people, one of his children who lives in the light. And we see in verse 13 that:

*<sup>13</sup>...he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, <sup>14</sup> in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

We have confidence to petition our Heavenly Father because of our status as forgiven sinners who have been transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. And this is all possible because of what His Son the Lord Jesus has done. Through His death on the cross and faith in Christ Jesus, we are now citizens of His kingdom. This forgiveness is at the heart of the gospel message.

And it is this gospel that drives us to bring our requests to God in prayer. And it is this gospel of God’s Son redeeming and forgiving us that is the ultimate cause for our thanksgiving.

**Let’s pray.**