

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

“Thank God!” There’s a phrase we hear nearly every day. I’m afraid more often than not, people say, “Thank God!” as an expression of relief rather than a prayer directed to the one true God. Perhaps we’ve even been guilty of saying a mindless, “Thank God!” However, it is a very good thing to “thank God” when we are thinking about the one true God and are offering to him our gratitude and thanks. We truly ought to thank God every day for many things.

So... what is it you “thank God” for? Let me give you a quick moment to make a list in your head... or jot it down if you want... of things you thank God for. “Lord, I thank you for...” quick finish that sentence a few times in your mind right now....

So what do you thank God for? It wouldn’t surprise me if you thought of family or health. Maybe you thanked God for being in his house right now. All great things to thank God for. Let me ask you this. In those brief moments I just gave you, did you think to thank God for what he’s done for someone else? A family member, a friend, a fellow member here at Good Shepherd? What would you thank God for when thinking particularly about others?

In our text today, the apostle Paul, along with his companions, report how they pray to God frequently. And when they pray, they thank God. And when they thank God, it is particularly or what he did in the members of the church in Colossae. Listen to the text once again in Colossians 1:3-8 and listen for what in particular they thanked God.

**We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints— the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel that has come to you. All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God’s grace in all its truth. You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.**

Paul and his companions thank God... for the Colossian Christians. For what in particular? 1) For their faith in Christ Jesus. 2) For their faith in action as evidenced by their love for their fellow Christians. All of this because of the eternal hope that was their stored up in heaven. And all of this caused by hearing God’s Word of truth, the Gospel.

Now let’s take a closer look at this all again, and God will teach us about thank-you prayers for others.

Paul was thankful to God for what he had done for the Colossians. And all the things he was thankful for had one starting point... one root cause. A chain reaction of incredible blessings was started among these people, all because God’s word of truth, the gospel, was proclaimed to them.

Colossae was a trading city of decreasing importance. The congregation there seemed to have been made up mostly of Gentile Christians. What did they have of lasting importance before Epaphras shared with them the life-changing Gospel of Jesus Christ? Ultimately, they had nothing. Perhaps some earthly wealth. Perhaps a faith in a higher being. Perhaps some idols

around the house. But ultimately they had nothing that would do them any good in eternity. They carried around with them the guilt of their sins. Their relationship with the true God was broken. They were headed toward an eternity separated from the source of all that is good.

But all of this changed when Epaphras came to them proclaiming a message from God. He would have said something like, “The true God is holy, righteous and just! Your sin and rebellion has put you in danger because he is angry. Repent! Turn from your wicked ways and live! Turn to the Lord Jesus Christ who is the Savior God promised from the most ancient of times. This Jesus was holy, just as the heavenly Father is holy. His will, his words and his ways lined up perfectly with the heavenly Father’s. He taught God’s Word and healed the people. This Jesus was then nailed to wooden cross by wicked men, and was put to death. But his death has great meaning for us, for God in his love placed the sin and rebellion of us all on him. The death he died was the one we were supposed die. He made full payment for our sins. And this Jesus I tell you about did not remain in the grave. He rose triumphant. He ascended to the Father’s right hand where he lives exalted, ruling over all things. It is through Jesus and Jesus alone that our sin is removed and God grants full and free forgiveness. Through Christ, we have an inheritance in heaven with God forever.”

This is the word of truth, the gospel, which the Colossians heard and believed. It was this word of truth that gave them a hope stored away in heaven. No matter what the problems, challenges, heart aches or sufferings of this world, they knew that tucked away in heaven with God was a sure hope that could never be taken away. From this hope sprang two more important blessings. We’ll talk about them in just a moment.

Paul thanked God that the Colossians had heard the word of truth, the gospel, and that they had this sure hope in heaven. Friends, that very same hope is yours. You also have had the high and mighty privilege from God almighty to hear God’s Word of the truth, the Gospel. Some of you have heard it since birth. Some of you heard it later in life. Some of you may have drifted away from this word of truth for a while. But right now, you’re HERE. You are hearing it! That very same word and the very same hope preached to the Colossians almost 2000 years ago. The Lord Jesus Christ has removed your sin and guilt too. His death was for your sins. His resurrection means your forgiveness, your salvation, and your life. He reigns on high exalted, and that means you have a sure hope stashed away in heaven as well, in spite of circumstances or challenges or difficulties you face right now.

Now... take a look at the person next to. And in front of you. And behind you. Thank God that the people you’re looking at around you now have heard God’s word of truth, the gospel. Thank God they have a sure hope in heaven just like you do. Thank God for them every day.

Now, back to our text. There were two things in particular that Paul especially thanked God for when he prayed for the Colossians. Paul wrote, “**We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ... because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus.**” So imagine Paul praying, “Dear Lord God, heavenly Father, I thank you for my brothers and sisters in the city of Colossae. I thank you for their strong faith in the Christ Jesus.” Paul recognized that this faith in Christ Jesus was what made the eternal difference in the lives of these people he cared for. When it comes to getting into a right relationship with God, there are only two ways it could possibly happen. One way is that I somehow do it myself, and meet God’s holy requirements. And we all know that’s not going to happen. We haven’t been and can’t be holy and perfect as

God requires. The second way to get a right relationship with God is if God does it. The gospel tells us that in Christ Jesus, God did it. He removed my sin and guilt and declared me holy, and his child. And so trust in Christ Jesus is a full reliance on his work and his life and his holiness and his death... all on behalf of me, to accomplish for me complete deliverance. Paul rejoiced because he heard the good news that the Colossian Christians were trusting Christ.

Again, look at the people sitting around you today. That they are here today is their declaration that they trust Jesus for salvation. Thank God! Thank him now and every day. So the first thing Paul is especially thankful for is their faith in Christ Jesus. Now the second thing: **“We always thank God... because we have heard of... the love you have for all the saints.”** Faith and love just go together. Where there is a living faith in Christ Jesus, there will also be a visible, observable love for God’s people. Countless places in Scripture speak of this. Galatians 5:6 says, **“For in Christ Jesus... the only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.”** And in 1 John 3:23 it says, **“And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.”** And 1 John 4:20: **“If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.”**

Here’s why faith and love go together. If we know our sinful, rebellious nature and that we deserve God’s anger and punishment... and if we believe that God loves us in spite of ourselves and that his love moved him to offer his very own Son on the cross for us... then that love of God permeates us and changes us. If God so loved us that he gave his Son for us, isn’t showing love to our fellow believers the very LEAST we could do? And if we are unable to show love for our brothers and sisters in Christ, isn’t that a clear warning sign that our reliance on Christ is severely lacking? This is exactly what James is warning about in his epistle when he writes (2:14-17): **“What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, ‘Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”** A faith that doesn’t show love for all the members of the body of Christ is a dead faith... in fact, it’s not really faith at all.

So, for this reason, Paul thanks God that not only has he heard the report that the Colossians fully rely on Jesus, he has also heard reports of their love for the other believers. This indicated to Paul that their trust in Jesus is real, living and active. And that’s a good reason to thank God continuously.

Take one more look at the people around you. And also think about the many children and adults and children who attended VBS this past week. And in your prayers this week, would you pray for them as the apostle Paul prayed for the Colossians? Thank God. Thank God they have heard his word of truth the gospel. Thank God that they have sure hope stored up in heaven. Thank God that from the hope has come a full reliance upon Jesus for forgiveness, life and salvation. Thank God that this trust in Christ Jesus shows itself every time those people around you show love for others. But don’t stop your prayers “here”... because this same gospel is being proclaimed around the world. Thank God for your fellow believers everywhere! Wherever the gospel is proclaimed there is fruit. The kingdom of God is growing.

One final question to take with you and think about. Wouldn’t it be great if we could thank God for even more people? What if 10 or 20 or 50 or 100 more people came to Good Shepherd, having heard the gospel, trusted in Jesus and loved the saints? What if more

congregations were formed in the United States and around the world? Wouldn't it be great if we were constantly adding more people to our list of thank you prayers to God? Who might you share the gospel with this week? Who might you invite to next Sunday's service? How might you better support the worldwide gospel ministry our church helps with as members of our Synod, the WELS? Brothers and sisters, in your prayers, and with a gospel witness, and with your time, talents and treasures: THANK GOD! Amen.