

The Root which bears fruit

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Preacher: Brian King

- [0 : 0 0] And let's pray. Let's ask God for his help. Heavenly Father, I just pray now that as I proclaim your word, I pray that I will proclaim Christ.
- ! I pray that indeed our eyes will be drawn to him, that we will have a fresh appreciation of him. And more than that, the preaching of your word today will help us to take one step forward towards maturity in Christ.
- So I pray that your spirit will be at work amongst us this morning. I pray all this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Have you ever felt like you were missing out spiritually?
- I remember a friend telling me about her friends who kept inviting her to revival conferences to receive the anointing from the guest speakers. And although they never said so outright, they hinted that her Christianity was not enough.
- Sure, she was a Christian. But didn't she want to become part of something better? Didn't she want to become a really spiritual Christian?
- [1 : 1 1] Experiencing things like visions and revelations. Or to pursue prophetic empowerments and dreams. And that left her unsettled.
- What if they were right? What if everything she heard and knew about Jesus wasn't the full picture? And she was in need of a spiritual booster?
- That can be unsettling, can't it? I've been there myself. After 27 years as a Christian, I still have moments when my faith feels stale.
- When my Christian life feels like it's lost a bit of its oomph. And I'm thinking, oh, maybe it's all because I'm missing out on something. So when someone comes along promising a spiritual silver bullet, I can wonder if that is actually what I really mean.
- That was more or less the situation in Colossae as well. Now, Colossae was a bit like Kuching. Not quite KL, but certainly not a kampong either.
- [2 : 2 3] Being located on an important highway, its population was pretty diverse. Made up of many Gentile people groups and a good number of Jews as well.
- And this city had Christians. It had a church. But interestingly, it wasn't a church that Paul himself planted.
- In fact, when he wrote this letter, he had yet to even visit. His connection was most likely through a man named Epaphras, who is mentioned in verse 7 of our Bible reading today.
- It appears that Epaphras was discipled by Paul in nearby Ephesus. And when he went home to Colossae, he brought the gospel with him and the church was born.
- But now, a few people have started turning up since Epaphras first went home. And they have gone to church, talked to a few Christians, and started making some insinuations.
- [3 : 3 2] We get some insight into the sort of thing they were saying later in the letter. For example, in Colossians chapter 2, starting at verse 16. Listen to what Paul writes here on the screen.
- So, reading these verses, we can piece together what these people were likely telling the Colossian believers.

It was something along these lines. Oh, it's great that you've come to Christ. That's fantastic news. But honestly, you need more.

You need our spiritual life hacks, our religious practices, and if you follow them, you will have amazing experiences, perhaps even visions and encounters with angels.

Now, doesn't that sound just like what my friend heard? There really is nothing new under the sun. And that is exactly why Paul writes this letter.

[5 : 12] You see, Paul is concerned we might choose to follow these guys. because we fear missing out. And that would be heartbreaking, because basically that means we are getting scammed spiritually.

We are receiving something useless. That's what Paul will also say in chapter 2, which we'll look at in more detail in a month's time.

So, Paul writes to urge us, don't be taken in. Instead, remember this, Colossians 2, verse 6 to 7.

So then, just as you receive Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

That is going to be post-truth. That is the theme verse of Colossians. Because Christ is all-sufficient, stay rooted in Christ.

[6 : 24] Because Christ is God's complete fullness, continue on as you began. That is what we're going to unpack over the next two months.

But before getting into all of that, Paul's opening move is simply to offer gentle reassurance. That is his big aim for today.

To anyone feeling like their Christianity isn't enough, or that they might be missing something, he says, I just want to ask you three questions.

And if you can answer yes to these, like the Colossian believers can, then you can be absolutely confident.

You have no reason to be unsettled. You are not missing out on anything. What you have is all you need. Your Christianity is genuine, and you don't need to add extra flavouring.

[7 : 27] So here is Paul's first question for today. Have you got the fruit? Have you got the fruit? Paul begins, as he often does, with thanksgiving.

But he's not just offering polite greetings. You see, what we give thanks for reveals what we treasure, doesn't it?

We don't thank God for things that we consider trivial. We thank him for what we consider valuable. So what does Paul consider so remarkable that he is moved to give thanks?

It is the fruit he sees in the Colossian Christians. We learn in verses 7 and 8 that Epaphras has brought back a report to Paul.

And the good news is, their spiritual lives are showing every sign of maturing. Because, first of all, verse 4, Paul has heard of their faith in Christ Jesus.

[8 : 36] That is the first piece of fruit he sees. Now, what is faith? Faith. Simply put, faith is trust.

But trust is never abstract. It always has an object. In other words, we don't just trust in general. We always trust someone or something specific.

And we see that in everyday life, don't we? We trust the car to get us to work. We trust our appliances to function. We trust the barista to make our coffee properly.

Or the office boy to deliver the document on time. Faith is trust. And we trust someone or something. And that is what these Christians were doing.

They were trusting not just a principle or an idea, but a person. King Jesus. King Jesus. But what kind of trust is this?

[9 : 41] It is not merely intellectual ascent. Real trust is shown in action. As the Christian philosopher, Travis Dickinson puts it, it's on your handout.

We never have faith in something from a distance. When we genuinely place our faith in an object, we always venture something. So here is what he is getting at.

If you say you trust the safety of the plane, but you never get on board, you haven't really placed your faith in it. You only show faith when you dare to risk your well-being by actually getting on the plane.

Similarly, when you have faith in Jesus, you are getting on board with him. Not just nodding at him from a distance.

That's what the Bible means by faith. Faith is trust. And faith in Christ Jesus means entrusting your entire self to him.

[10 : 51] You are venturing yourself, your present and your future into his hands. So you're entrusting yourself to Jesus, when you do live like taking up your cross is the best investment you can make because he said so.

You are entrusting yourself to Jesus when you make it your priority to grow in patience rather than prosperity, or when you seek more self-control rather than control over others, because Jesus says, that's the right priority.

And you are entrusting yourself to Jesus when you stop relying on your spiritual performance and rely instead on his death on the cross to bring you near to God.

And Paul says that is exactly what these Colossians have. this kind of active, self-entrusting faith in King Jesus.

And if that is on display in your life, you have something immensely valuable. Why? Because, remember, the question isn't whether we trust, but what we trust.

[12 : 11] And if our trust isn't in Jesus, but in a spiritual experience, a religious rule, or even ourselves, then we are settling for something less, not more, less.

because anything we trust other than Jesus is, by definition, inferior to him. So, if you do have this kind of faith in Christ Jesus, even if not perfectly, even if not totally, because we are all still works in progress, you have absolutely nothing to be unsettled about.

You are genuinely connected to the best person in the universe. You are authentically Christian. You are not missing out. You don't need anything extra.

But that is not the only piece of fruit Paul mentions. Look at verse 4 again and notice what else he thanks God for. the love the Colossians have for all God's people.

Now, at first glance, that doesn't seem so remarkable. The atheist, Richard Dawkins, even likes to rubbish this particular fruit because, he says, what is so special about Christians loving other Christians?

[13 : 42] What is so special about loving people just like you? But wait a minute. Let's not forget who this church is.

Who decides who belongs to the church? It's not actually us. It's God. He is the one who saves, not us. And that was exactly the case in Colossae.

You see, it didn't matter if you used to be a Jewish mystic or a Gentile idol worshipper, a business owner or a janitor, someone thriving or someone struggling with mental health.

If God save you, then you're in. You're family. And here is the remarkable thing. Even though the Colossians came from all kinds of different backgrounds like these, they genuinely love one another.

They didn't just love the people who were like them, despite what someone like Richard Dawkins might assume. No, they love across differences.

[14 : 57] Why? Because they knew exactly who they were. Verse 2, brothers and sisters in Christ. They were diverse, yes, but they had one thing in common.

they were God's holy people. He was their heavenly father, just as he was Paul's and Timothy's. And Paul asked, have you got this fruit?

Is Casey a place where we love people not like us? Because if we do, that means we are not missing out spiritually.

Quite the opposite in fact. Because authentic love like this can only be supernatural. Look down in verse 8 and notice Paul and Epaphras call such love love in the spirit.

Because such love across differences can only have a spiritual source. I used to be involved in international student ministry quite a long time ago now.

[16 : 13] And I was constantly amazed that I could sit down with a Japanese person, a Chilean person, a Zimbabwean person, and despite the language barrier, somehow it all worked.

We accepted one another. We tried to support one another. And if any Christian group has that kind of love for one another, that is way better than seeing a few angels for a few seconds.

But how is it possible for us to bear this kind of fruit? What is the secret source? Well, that brings us to the second question Paul wants to ask us today.

Have you got the root that bears fruit? Have you got the root that bears fruit? You see, Paul knows that this fruit didn't just appear out of thin air.

It has a source, a root, and he is confident the Colossian Christians have it. Just follow the logic of verse 5 with me.

[17 : 27] Notice how Paul says there are faith and love, spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven. So in other words, it is this heavenly hope that gives rise to their faith and love.

But where does this hope come from? Verse 5 again, it is the hope which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel that has come to you.

So here is the chain. gospel gives birth to hope and that hope in turn produces faith and love.

That is the root that bears the fruit. Not effort, not emotion, not experience. It is the gospel Epaphras first brought them and it is the same gospel we still have today, 2,000 years later.

So, have you got this root that bears fruit? Lots of people think they do. But sometimes people might confuse the gospel with something else.

[18 : 39] So here is how to check. First of all, is your gospel the word of truth? You see, that is how Paul describes the gospel at the end of verse 5.

it is a true message. So that means the gospel isn't an emotion. It is not those warm and fuzzy feelings you feel inside.

It should produce an emotional response but it is not in itself that emotional response. Neither is the gospel a lifestyle or an ethic.

Now, the gospel, of course, has profound implications for how we live but it isn't in itself simply a moral code.

No. It is a true message. Something with fixed content. Something we cannot just twist into whatever we want it to be.

[19 : 41] But what is it a true message about? Well, I think it's a truth about two things. number one, it is a message about a true event.

Jesus is someone who is truly God, who truly became man, who truly lived here on earth, and who truly died, and who truly rose again.

This isn't a made-up story, this is real history. but number two, it is also a message about a true accomplishment.

You see, these events truly accomplish something. It achieve something. It accomplish the payment of a debt. Our sin is truly paid for.

It is done. We'll see that more in chapter two. And so it accomplishes reconciliation with God. It brought us back to him.

[20 : 43] We'll see that later in chapter one. And that is what the death and the resurrection of Christ has truly accomplished. And here is the thing.

Since the gospel the Colossians heard is the word of truth, that means that if someone comes along bringing something that doesn't match up with the gospel, Paul says it should be rejected.

it shouldn't unsettle us. We have the genuine article. But how else do we know if we have the correct root?

Well, let's ask second of all, is your gospel a transforming hope? Remember the chain we saw earlier in verse 5?

Through this gospel, we discover that we have a sure hope, which in turn leads to faith and love. So what hope is Paul talking about here?

[21 : 49] He is not talking about wishful thinking, like when we say, I hope Malaysia will win the World Cup. He's not talking about something that we simply desire, like when we say, let's hope for the best.

rather he is talking about something we know we have for certain because it is not based on our wishes or desires.

It is based on the word of truth. And it is a secure hope because the Lord himself is safeguarding it for us in heaven.

And what exactly is our hope? Well, the rest of Colossians 1 clues us in. Look down at the end of verse 6 and notice it is the hope of God's grace.

It is knowing that God's favour will rest on us when we stand before him one day because of what Christ has done. And that hope is powerful because it frees us from trying to cover up our sin, from pretending that we are better than we really are.

[23 : 05] Instead, it causes us to freely confess our sin and freely keep turning back to God knowing he will not reject us. Because Colossians 1 verse 14, we have the hope of total forgiveness.

Our wrongdoing in the past will not be held against us forever. God doesn't bear a grudge for eternity. Look a little before that in verse 12, we have hope of an inheritance of something infinitely better awaiting us.

Or, to sum it all up, look down in 1 verse 27, it is the hope of glory itself, of sharing in God's future.

hope of God's hope of God's grace, glory above all. Now, that is the kind of objective, secure, transforming hope being referred to here. The sure hope of God's grace, full forgiveness, and eternal inheritance, and glory above all.

And the thing is, such a certain hope can only build our trust in Jesus, can't it? After all, if someone said he will be pierced for my transgressions, and proceeded to do so, why wouldn't I trust him?

[24 : 38] And if someone said he will defeat death, and proceeded to do so, why wouldn't I entrust myself to him? He's already shown me such things are not just a pipe dream.

That is how gospel hope transforms. Because he paints a picture for me of what my future in Christ looks like, and gives me conviction that future will come to pass.

Therefore, it gives me confidence now to bring before him all my worries and my anxieties, my concerns and my burdens, and to pursue the way of Jesus.

And this hope not only builds trust in Jesus, but also sparks genuine Christian love. Take, for example, the biblical call to keep no record of wrongs.

That is tough, isn't it? We all tend to remember when someone hurts us, or forgets to say thanks, or doesn't pull their weight. But if we know gospel hope, if we know God will right every wrong in the end, and has in fact shown us mercy when we did wrong, we can love others in ways we couldn't before.

[26 : 06] And so Paul asks, do you have this root that bears fruit? The gospel. If you do, no need to feel unsettled.

If this gospel is so powerful to make you trust and love this way, why think you are lacking something? Now you have what you need.

You just need to press deeper into the gospel if you feel your Christian life is lacking power. You don't need to go anywhere else.

So how can we ensure that we're staying constantly connected to this root? Well, this brings us to our third and final question Paul asks us today.

Are you receiving faithful ministry that roots you in Christ? Are you receiving faithful ministry that roots you in Christ? You see, what else does Paul give thanks for?

[27 : 12] It is not just for these faithful Colossian Christians. It is also for his dear fellow Colossian servant, Epaphras verse 7.

After all, the gospel can only bear fruit successfully when people are faithfully proclaiming it. And it is abundantly clear that the reason the Colossian Christians are bearing fruit is because Epaphras is faithfully rooting them in Christ Jesus.

In verse 7, Paul says they have been learning the gospel from Epaphras. But that word learn there doesn't just mean they absorb mental information. It is actually the Greek word *ematete*, which is the verbal form of the Greek word *matetes*, which means disciple.

So you could say verse 7 means something like you were being discipled in the gospel by Epaphras. They were learning how to live as gospel-centered Christians.

That was the kind of ministry Epaphras was exercising. And actually Epaphras is one of my heroes. We are told almost nothing about him in the Bible.

[28 : 33] We'll get just one more mention of him when we get to chapter 4. And I think he appears in Philemon as well. But every mention of him is positive.

He proclaims the gospel. He works hard for the gospel. He prays hard for gospel fruit in his people. That's basically what the Bible tells us about him.

And it must have been hard because he is from Colossae itself. he is a homegrown boy. And sometimes, and I think I know this firsthand, it is harder to minister in your hometown because people know you so well, your quirks and your inconsistencies.

But he kept at it. No wonder Paul is not hesitant to call him a faithful minister of Christ. But here is what Paul wants to know.

Are you receptive to any ministry like Epaphras' ministry? Are you leaning into faithful gospel teaching even when it's not always easy to hear?

[29 : 50] You see, a faithful ministry like Epaphras' always prioritises the gospel of God's grace. It proclaims it, it keeps returning to it, it keeps unpacking it from different angles so that we learn to live in light of it.

And sometimes people don't want that. They want the religious rules, they want the angelic visitations, but Paul says, this is the kind of ministry you want to be getting, because if you do, you lack nothing.

After all, look at verse 6. What is this gospel doing? It is having a global impact. It is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world.

This gospel, you see, isn't just something localised, it is something that bears fruit everywhere, in every culture. Think of it like this.

Ivan Chow is a Singaporean pastor, in fact he's going to be our next gen speaker this year, and one day I hope he'll come to Kuching too. He is married to a Hungarian, and he tells of a time when he visited a pastor in Hungary.

[31 : 16] And this pastor brought him to his father-in-law's house, and then they chatted for a while, when the pastor says, hey, do you want to come and look at my backyard? Now you have to understand, Ivan is a Singaporean, so you know their backyards have like one papaya tree at most.

So he says, sure, but when he steps out into the backyard, he is stunned, because this is no Singaporean backyard. This is a backyard the size of an entire football field.

There are at least a hundred apple trees, and on each apple tree, there are hundreds of apples. So there must have been at least 20 to 30 thousand apples all together in that yard.

And the gospel is the root that is producing all those trees. It is growing throughout the whole world, producing fruit.

Now, what an encouragement that must have been to the Colossians. remember, they don't have the internet. They would have had very little idea about how the gospel was doing in other places.

[32 : 33] But here comes Paul, who is widely traveled, and who can confidently declare to them, you know this ministry that Epaphras is exercising among you?

It is the same kind of ministry that is producing an entire backyard of abundantly fruitful apple trees. And if that is true, so what if some guys come into town and claim that their ministry can boost your spirituality and have some spiritual experiences?

No, you already have the root that bears fruit, abundant fruit. It is bearing fruit in Colossae and Ephesus and Philippi and Rome back then, and it is bearing fruit in Nepal and Iran and Nigeria and Brazil today.

So don't turn away from faithful gospel ministry if that is what you are receiving. And if that is what you are receiving, be reassured.

Notice at the end of verse 6 that this gospel is continually bearing fruit. They were not just fruitful on the day they heard the gospel and were converted. No, this gospel ministry is bearing fruit since the day they heard it, meaning that it is still going on.

[34 : 00] And my goal here at KAC is to try to exercise an epiphraze ministry. So my friends, as we finish, let me ask those three questions again.

Have you got the fruit? Have you got the root that bears the fruit? The gospel? And are you receiving faithful ministry that roots you in Christ?

If you can answer yes to all these questions, then you already have what matters most. I remember my friend at the beginning.

She was unsettled, wondering if she was missing something. But today, Colossians 1 shows her that it is not special anointings she needs, but a deeper grip on the gospel she already believes.

And the same goes for us. In fact, imagine a KEC so rooted in Christ that we don't need to chase anything else.

[35 : 15] Imagine a KEC where we trust Jesus more and more and love all of God's people across differences. Now, wouldn't that be amazing fruit to have?

But that can only happen if we commit ourselves to listening to gospel teaching and living out that gospel teaching. So, don't be unsettled, but let's not settle either.

Our roots can always go deeper. Now, maybe today you are someone who has recently been uprooted or you have never planted yourself in Christ at all.

But, whatever the case, even if that's you, the invitation is still the same. Receive Christ as Lord, stand firm in him, and let his gospel bear lasting fruit in your life.

Shall we pray for that now? Let's pray. Amen. Heavenly Father, I just pray, Lord, that the word that was just proclaimed would indeed would be taking root in our lives, that it would not be snatched away by Satan or fall on rocky soil, but I pray that that word would be heard loud and clear by all of us.

[36 : 47] And I pray that we would be grateful for the gospel and we would allow your spirit to work in us so that the gospel might keep on bearing fruit in us, in the way we trust you, in the way that we love others, in the way that we want this gospel to shape our entire lives.

Just pray that that would be the case. And Lord, if we are tempted to go somewhere other than Jesus, help us, Lord, to resist that temptation but to stick to you. All this we pray in Christ's name.

Amen.