

**Read:** Co 1:3-8.

**Illustration:** Preaching Today – Ellen Vaughn, *Radical Gratitude* (Zondervan, 2005), pp. 217-218

In her book *Radical Gratitude*, Ellen Vaughn tells the story of a family friend named Jerry:

Some years ago Jerry was in Russia on a short visit with Prison Fellowship International. He and a group of friends visited a number of prisons, and finished their work a few days early. They asked their hosts if they could go visit children in the hospital.

They were taken to a 750-bed hospital in Moscow at the end of the Leniniski Prospect. Most of the beds were empty. This is where children with cancer and blood diseases came to die. There was a cafeteria but no food. No trained nurses, no laundry, no disinfectants, few medicines, no lab work. The children's families brought in and prepared food for them in the empty hospital kitchen.

This was the national clinic for children, where patients came from all over the Russian Federation. A staff person brought a young girl in an old wheelchair to Jerry. She was about 14-years-old, with thin brown hair and dark circles under her eyes. “She has about 4 months to live,” the woman told Jerry. “We have no medicines to help her.”

“What is her name?” Jerry asked. He bent down to the girl's level. “Eugenia,” the woman said.

Jerry rocked on his heels. Eugenia was his daughter's name. What if his Eugenia was dying and needed medicine? What would he do? What would this Russian Eugenia's dad do for his daughter if he could?

The staff people told Jerry that the drug protocol for Eugenia would run about \$18,000 (U.S.). Jerry is not a man of wealth, but he turned to a buddy with him, a cattle rancher. “Ed,” said Jerry, “if we can't find someone to donate the money to help this little girl, I'll sell my car, if you sell your truck, okay?”

“You drive me crazy always trying to swing these deals,” Ed said. “But that's why I come on these trips with you. Okay.”

But selling a car and a truck would only take them so far. There were lots of kids who needed help. Jerry returned to the U. S. and got on the phone. Within two weeks, a prominent children's clinic had given him tens of thousands of dollar's worth of drugs packed in cooler boxes with dry ice, and Jerry was on a plane back to Moscow.

Jerry and his friends raised millions of dollars, and the clinic became world-class. Furthermore, they teach nurses and doctors who travel all over the Russian Federation.

Eugenia's cancer went into remission. Vaughn tells what happens when Jerry and the others got back to Moscow with the first planeload of medicine: “When he and his buddies walked into the hospital in the night, Eugenia's mother saw them coming. She ran down the dim corridor, her face incredulous, and burst into tears. 'You are Jesus, are you not?' she exclaimed in broken English.”

Every man, woman and child born on this earth has a terminal illness as a result of the disease of sin. Jesus is the only cure and we as believer’s in Jesus Christ have this life saving truth to share with those who so desperately need to hear it and receive it.

Paul begins v3 by stating that he was thankful to God for five significant characteristics in the lives of the Colossian believers: The first five are found in vv4 though 7 and the sixth is in the last verse, v8. Paul was thankful to God for:

1. Their faith in Christ Jesus (3-4a)
2. Their love for all the believers (4b)
3. Their hope of heaven (5a)

4. Their trust in the Gospel (5b-6)
5. Their openness to the Gospel message (7)
6. Their love in the Spirit (8)

Paul explained where their faith and love came from in v5 and the first part of v6. He went on to describe the impact the Gospel of Jesus Christ was having around the world of that day and around them in vv6-7 and finally how they themselves had heard the Gospel message from a fellow Colossian who had reported to Paul all that was happening in Colosse and the surrounding communities.

How are *we* doing as a church family? If a fellow Christian were to write about us as a body of believers here at WBC what would his or her words reflect?

We're going to be taking a deeper dive into what Paul is saying here in a moment, but let me first point out what isn't so obvious from our English Bible. Vv3-8 are actually one long sentence in the Gr. NT. Paul was so grateful to God for what He was doing the lives of the Colossian believers that he couldn't contain his excitement and he wrote one long continuous stream of thoughts one right after the other.

Gratitude to God for His grace gifts to us puts who we are in Christ and all that we have in Christ in proper perspective. Paul said it well in 1 Co 15:10 "By the grace of God I am what I am." Who was Paul? – a child of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

There's an interesting connection in thought between the last part of v2 and the first part of v3. Paul says, "Grace and peace to you from God our Father." Verse 3 starts, "We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. As a result of our faith in Jesus, we have the same Father as Jesus.

The Colossian believers to whom Paul was writing were children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. The word "faith" means 'to be persuaded that something is true and to trust in it based on fact and grounded in evidence.' Jesus died to pay the penalty for our sin so that we wouldn't have to – that's fact. The Bible states this emphatically in Ro 4:25; 2 Co 5:14,15; 1 Thes 5:10; 1 Pe 3:18 to cite just a few of many references), that's evidence. He 11:1 brings out the *supernatural* element of faith which the writer describes as "the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen."

This is what distinguishes Biblical faith from all other faiths. Not only is it founded in the factual truths recorded for us in the Bible that occurred in the past, the results of which we are experiencing in the present, but in the factual truths recorded in the Bible that are yet future.

When it comes to the subject of faith, what *determines* the nature of faith is its object – faith in what? The distinguishing nature of the Christian faith is belief in Christ Jesus as He is revealed in the Bible. "In" has the idea of 'coming to a place of security and anchor.' He 6:17-19 reads, "Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. God did this so that, by two unchangeable things (*His promise and His oath*) in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure." Genuine faith in Jesus Christ results in a changed life, 1 Co 5:17 describes it this way, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"

The level of our experience of our security in Christ is evidenced by the level of service we exercise toward others. Let me say that again. The level of our experience of our security in Christ is evidenced by the level of service we exercise toward others. Ga 5:13 states, "You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love."

We are saved by faith to love by grace. Our security rests in Christ to freely love those around us and to care about them unselfishly. Paul pointed to the love the Colossian believers had for all the saints as a practical expression of their faith in Christ Jesus.

The Gospel is a matter of what is to be believed not a lifestyle that is to be followed. A Christian lifestyle is the *result* of salvation not its *cause*. Martin Luther put it this way, “Good works do not make a man good, but a good man does good works.” How you treat others is evidence of the genuineness of your faith in Christ or the lack of it.

A person may say they have believed in Jesus, but what is it that makes their faith is real? It has been said, “If the evidence for your faith in Christ was presented in a court of law would it be enough to convict you?” Consider the following passages that address this: Jn 13:35 “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you **love** one another.” 1 Jn 4:8 “Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.” 1 Jn 3:10 “This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not **love** his brother.” 1 Jn 4:7,8 “Dear friends, let us **love** one another, for **love** comes from God. Everyone who **loves** has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not **love** does not know God, because God is **love**. 1 Pe 1:22 “Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere **love** for your brothers, **love** one another deeply, from the heart.” Ga 5:22 ... the fruit of the Spirit is **love** ...”

Love for others is the outworking of real faith. Paul puts it this way in Ga 5:6, “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.”

In v5 and the first part of v6, Paul explained where the faith and love of the Colossian believers came from, “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.”

“Hope” has a definite article, “the” ‘hope’, identifying it as a specific one of a kind “hope.” The hope referred to here, is the believer’s Christ-centered assurance. In Co 1:27 Paul refers to this as “Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

“Stored up for you” stresses the security of what God is reserving for believers. The verb “Stored up” indicates, ‘preservation without any possibility of loss.’ “For you” is on behalf of believers, literally “in the heavens.” Paul says in Eph 1:3 that we have been blessed “in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.” Our hope as believers is in a person, the Blessed Hope, our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ (Ti 2:13).

Our inheritance is reserved for us by God in heaven. Peter reminds us in 1 Pe 1:4 that we have “an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade – kept in heaven for *us*.” This is not something we make happen but something God makes happen when we believe in Jesus. The steadfast assurance of heaven is our hope in Christ and is a rite of sonship.

We live in the light of eternity, knowing that our citizenship is not on this earth Php 3:20, “...our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.”

In the remainder of v6 Paul goes on to say, “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.”

The universal impact of the Gospel is emphasized in Ro 1:8,18. The diffusion of the Gospel throughout the Roman Empire was indicative of its spread throughout the world. The Gospel is God’s message of hope in Christ Jesus for all people in all cultures.

The Gospel had produced fruit wherever it had gone into the world – the benefits of Christ’s death are universal in scope and are available to everyone – this refuted the false teaching of the exclusiveness of salvation for some but not for others. The gift of God is offered to all but not all will receive it. John says in his Gospel, “He (*Jesus*) came to that which was His own (*the nation of Israel*) but His own did not receive Him. Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God.” (Jn 1:11,12).

The lives of the Colossian believers reflected their relationship with God and they demonstrated the characteristics of being children in God's family. They were growing in their faith and bearing spiritual fruit.

They had heard and understood the Gospel of grace i.e. the significance of Christ's death and resurrection. They possessed a thorough and accurate saving knowledge.

Understanding is the work of the Spirit of God in the life of a believer as 1 Co 2:14 makes abundantly clear, "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he, *notice*, cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned." What exactly does this mean? It means that if you've never believed in Jesus Christ and accepted Him as your Lord and Savior, the Bible won't make a lot of sense to you.

The Gospel produces fruit in the lives of individual Christians as well as within the body of Christ.

Grace is the heart of the Gospel (Ti 2:11-12, "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age.").

The importance of sharing the impact of the Gospel message in your own life is one of the most powerful ways you can share the Gospel with those around you. Ro10:14 challenges, "How, then, can they call on the One they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the One of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?" If we reverse the order of these questions, this is what we have, "If you don't tell others who Jesus is and how He has changed your life, how will they know who they need to believe in and how to ask Him to come into their lives? How you live your life – what you say and what you do is the most convincing piece of evidence you can present to a watching world.

The grace of God is His sovereign love in action toward the undeserving. God is sovereignly merciful and sacrificially forgiving. We are to be like Him – loving, merciful and forgiving.

Paul is careful to reassure the Colossian believers of their standing in Christ and to confirm the message brought to him about them by Epaphras, v7 "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."

What did they learn from Epaphras? – the Gospel. In 1 Co 15:1-4 we have the simplest and clearest explanation of the Gospel in the Bible, "Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the Gospel I preached to you, which you have received and on which you have taken your stand. By this Gospel you are saved, *since* you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: (*Now here's the Gospel message*) that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures." This is what Epaphras had shared with them.

You cannot get right with God by doing right things for Him. The only way you can get right with God is to be in a right relationship with Him, Ti 3:5-7 "He (*Jesus*) saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by His grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life."

We are not saved by faith in our faith. Anyone who says that less or more than *faith in Christ alone* is required for salvation is presenting a false Gospel.

Our salvation is God's gift to us in Jesus Christ. Paul in Eph 2:8&9 writes, "For it is by grace (*God's undeserved, unmerited, freely given favor*) you have been saved (*from the death penalty for sin*), through faith (*believing that Jesus Christ went to the cross to die in your place, as your substitute to pay the penalty for your sin, He died, and was buried*

*and rose again from the dead signifying that God the Father accepted what He did as full and complete restitution for the sin of mankind) – and this not from yourselves (you did nothing/God did everything) , it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.”*

We should be as grateful to God for what He is doing in our lives and the lives of the believers around us as Paul is in this letter, after all, we are all members of the same body and are to care about one another and how we are functioning together. 1 Co 12:12-13 reminds us that, “The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.”

Since the theme of this letter is ultimately the preeminence of Jesus Christ, then it seems to me that our overarching concern and desire should be to give Jesus what He deserves from us above anything else – our unqualified devotion, praise, thankfulness, and dedicated service.

What difference does believing in Jesus Christ make in your life? So what if I don't believe in Him? The Bible states the consequence of not believing in Jesus Christ in 2 Th 1:8,9, “He, (*God*) will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of His power.”

**Illustration:** Preaching Today - “The Power of a changed life” from a sermon by Pastor Bob Page, Crystal Lake, Illinois (used by permission).

Pastor Steve Yeschek of Crystal Lake, Illinois, lost his sister, Judy, after a five-year battle with cancer. She was a woman who, as Steve described her, was a party animal—a big drinker with a self-contented lifestyle. She was someone everybody loved, because she exuded excitement and a thrill for life.

When Steve tried to share Jesus with her over the years, she would laugh it off and keep partying. But at the age of 44, her world caved in. She found out she had breast cancer. She later learned her husband had cancer, too. Adding to the devastation of these two blows, she discovered her husband was having an affair. He subsequently announced he didn't love her anymore and left her.

It was in that context that she began to ask eternal questions and soon prayed to receive Jesus as her Savior. From that time until her death, Jesus and his Word and purpose became her priority. With the same gusto she lived life as an unbeliever, she now approached her new life in Christ. Her greatest aim was winning others to Christ. She boldly shared her faith even as she was undergoing surgery after surgery, praying for a miraculous healing from the Lord.

Judy ultimately came to see that the greater miracle would be for her friends and family to come to know Christ. Even as she struggled for every breath, she talked her way out of the hospital about ten days before her death so she could be baptized and publicly proclaim Christ as the only way of salvation.

Judy invited everyone she knew to come to her baptism service. Under the Spirit's anointing, she powerfully and urgently shared her testimony. Her 84-year-old father came to faith in Christ that night and was baptized—along with her ex-husband, a number of nieces, a college roommate who was a New Age cultist, her aunt, her sister, and others.

Ten days later, Judy died. Even still, more people came to know the Savior. When Steve read the message she had prepared for her own funeral service, another 100 people prayed to receive Christ that day.

Don't underestimate the power of Jesus to change the minds and hearts of others through sharing with them who Jesus is and how Jesus has changed your life.

If you have not understood, before this moment, your need to believe in Jesus as something that determines your eternal destiny, I invite you to receive the gift of eternal life in Christ Jesus, right now where you are sitting. Ro 3:23

says that, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Ro 5:12 says that “... sin entered the world through one man (*Adam*) and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned.” Ro 5:8 says, “But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Ro 6:23 says “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Ro 10:9 says, “That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” Verse 13 adds, “For, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Jn 3:16 sums all of this up, “For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

If you want to accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior simply say these words in your mind and from your heart as I pray them to God for you: “Heavenly Father, I confess that I have sinned and that the only way to heaven is through faith in Your Son the Lord Jesus Christ who died on the cross for my sin, was buried and rose from the dead in victory over sin and death. I receive Jesus into my life and I thank you for the gift of eternal life and the certainty of heaven. Help me to learn to live as your child in ways that are pleasing to you and bring honor and glory to Your name. Amen.”

If you’ve prayed this prayer, I would encourage you to come and speak with me or with someone else you know who is also a believer.

**How** you live your life matters. **What** you live your life for matters more. **Who** you live your life for matters most.

Paul goes on to talk about the changes God brings about in the lives of believers in Jesus Christ in vv 9-14. We’ll look at these changes next time.

### **Benediction:**

“Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever! Amen.” (Eph 3:20, 21).