
Colossians

Sermon • Rev'd Andrew Hoggan • 11 October

John 3:16-21 Colossians 1:3-14



Outline:

Colossians in a nutshell: Jesus plus nothing = salvation.

John 3:16-21 We have a savior and why we need one.

Colossians 1:3-14 Paul's prayer of thanksgiving for the hope we have

Grace and truth in the Gospel. Vs 3-6

The effect of this. Vs 9-11

Our thankfulness. Vs 12

Perspective shapes us. Vs 12-14

May Gospel truth shape our understanding and our behaviour, amen.

"We have heard of your faith and love. We know you have hope because you have heard the Gospel and it is bearing fruit. We can't help but give thanks to God for these things." If our bishop, Peter, wrote a letter to our church, and it stated with what I just read would we not be both encouraged and thankful?

No doubt about it, to be commended for faith, love and hope would be most encouraging. But there is even more encouragement to be found in the first section of this letter. I start that way not just because it fits with the letter, but because in little old NZ we are living in days where faith, love and hope are in short supply.

I was watching the leaders debate on TV and I couldn't help thinking, yep you might have "some answers" to some of the problems or challenges we face, but do you have "the answer"? As I hear the various leaders telling me why I should vote for them, I can't help but think that so much of what they offer is temporary and transient. Further, what they offer as a solution to our ills does not address "the problem behind the problem."

In some cases what they offer is a problem in itself because they themselves are shaped by secularism, and in some cases atheism.

Before we look at the Colossians passage, why John 3:16-21 as my accompanying passage? Because John is clear about the problem behind the problem and he gives us a solution.

In both the passages we heard this morning John and Paul talk about the saving work of God in the person of Jesus.

- In both passages God is the instigator.
- In both passages Jesus is the agent.
- In John the point is made that everyone needs saving.
- In Colossians the point is made that Jesus is fully up to the job.

There was a reason Paul had to make that point and we will get to that. First though, a little on how the John passage points to the problem we have. The real problem. Let me illustrate with a story.

In September this year, the general SYNOD of the Anglican Church was held in Samoa. After the SYNOD several members chartered a couple boats. In one boat was Bishop Peter. In the other his wife Teresa.

Unfortunately Teresa's boat sank and a load of folk spent half an hour or so clinging to various floatation devices till they were all rescued. Teresa was telling me she was very thankful that everyone was rescued.

Here's the thing. Many people in our world don't realise they need rescuing. That is certainly not helped if preachers are happy to talk about vs 16-17, "For God so loved the world" etc..... But they don't go on to talk about, and unpack vs 18-21.

The point of John's passage taken as a whole, is that our starting point as individuals, outside of faith in Jesus, is that we stand condemned. Vs 18, those who believe in him are not condemned but those who do not believe are condemned already because they have not believed in the name of the only son of God.

Vs 19, and this is the judgement, that the light has come into the world and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. Now we might try to let ourselves off the hook by comparing ourselves with a “real sinner”. We are on very shaky ground if we play the comparison game. That’s all well and good if we compare ourselves to Hitler. Not so much when we compare ourselves to Jesus.

As it stands, according to the gospel, we stand condemned. Further, John, points to the problem behind the problem. He tells us that we are not open to the answer. We prefer darkness to light. The reason? Because the light will expose our sinfulness. We are like the hungry person that goes to the food bank but wants nothing to do with any kind of budgeting advice.

Back to Teresa and all those who found themselves in the water. Their circumstances necessitated rescue. Just so, all humanity is, aside from the saving purposes of God, and the saving actions of Jesus, flailing around in the water. And the sharks are circling.

To link into Colossians. If we were to sum up the book in a sentence this is the sentence. Jesus is our full and sufficient saviour. That was the assurance that some in the church needed to hear. They needed to hear it because there were some that were teaching a kind “Jesus plus” message.

A Jesus plus message is not the Gospel, and only the gospel will result in faith, love, hope, and the fruit of the Spirit in our lives.

In the Colossians context the Jesus plus message could well have been Jesus and circumcision. That is to say you have to rely on the outward signs and practices of religion. Paul knew the signs. After all prior to his meeting Jesus, Saul too had misread the story and was relying on the traditions and practices of the religious system.

That is until he met Jesus and was re-educated and had his thinking recalibrated over a 17 year period. Following that work of the Holy Spirit he was equipped to proclaim the Gospel, and refute false teaching. He was able to recognise the signs that God was truly at work in an individual or a community.

So, if we want hope and assurance, if we want growth and maturity, if we want joy and a thankful attitude because we know our future is secure in the purposes of God, we need look no further than Jesus. That’s Paul’s point.

Paul begins his letter to the Colossian believers with a prayer of thankfulness as his starting point. Vs 3-6 His prayer is shaped by the generosity and goodness of God that is showing itself in the lives of the Colossian believers. And just as love was the prime motivation of God sending Jesus into the world, so too love is the sign that Jesus has been accepted and is working in the lives of believers.

Vs 3-4 in our prayers for you we always thank God the father of our Lord Jesus Christ before we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love that you have for all the Saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven.

Faith, as they back look at the plan of the Father and actions of Jesus. Hope, as they look forward to that which is promised in the word of truth, the gospel. Can I make the point that truth comprehended is truth lived. I know an apple tastes good by eating it, and I eat it because it tastes good.

Vs 6, speaking of the truth of the gospel. Just as it is bearing fruit and growing in the whole world so it has been bearing through among yourselves from the day you heard it and truly comprehended the grace of God.

Truth comprehended is truth lived. If we really understand and believe something it can not but effect the decisions we make and the path we follow. Again that is why Paul is so keen to refute false teaching and build a true understanding and comprehension of the gospel. It matters for our life now and it matters on into eternity.

Verse 9 to 11 further unpacks something of how this good work of God will show itself. Knowledge, wisdom, spiritual understanding, so that they might live lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and grow in the knowledge of God.

“Knowing” and “growing” go hand in hand. Vs 10. As you bear fruit in every good work and grow in the knowledge of God.

And just as we saw earlier the fruit of the Spirit points to the actions and empowering of God. Vs 11 we are strengthened in order that we might have endurance, patience, and joy. Ultimately our endurance, patience and joy are supernaturally given by God.

I know folk think I’m a bit lively and a reasonably positive character, but sometimes I don’t feel joyful, or patient. Sometimes I feel discouraged and tired. Sometimes I look at the Anglican church, as it is mostly represented in NZ, and I can’t help but feel a little depressed.

But it's not about my feelings. It's about the truth of the Gospel and the sustaining empowering work of God. It's also about the one who said I will build my church and the very gates of hell will not stand up against it. As long that is as the church is preaching the Gospel, and leading people into maturity and truth.

In the final analysis its all about God and what he does through us by his power. To think, the same power that raised Jesus from the grave is the same power that is at work in us. There are so many ways in this passage that Paul is trying to draw our attention to the work of God last we are in any way tempted to focus a little to much on what we might think we need to do. We might not fall into the trap of thinking we need to be circumcised, or adhere to outdated religious traditions, but we might fall not the trap where we think how we feel has a bearing on the security of our salvation.

Lastly and thirdly, to end the passage. That our big picture awareness of what God had would result in "our" thanks for the salvation that is found in Jesus Christ. Vs 12, "giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins..

In vs 12 Paul having given thanks through the passage notes that the Colossians are also giving thanks. And how could they, and we, not give thanks when we see the big picture, when we have a true and hopeful perspective?

Let me illustrate the value and effect of perspective this way. Who has had the experience of travelling to another country seeing things that make you more appreciative of what we have here in NZ.

As we run up to an election we get the usual Argy bargy of politicians slinging mud and accusations at each other on the one hand and on the other telling us how marvellous things will be if we vote for them. The starting point in these debates often seems to be a description of how bad things are. How people are struggling. And for sure life for many can be pretty challenging.

Perspective. A couple years back I visited some of the squatter villages with a friend of mine who has been taking short term mission trips to Fiji. A bunch of folk, sometimes from retirement villages, will travel and take supplies for schools and medical centres. Mitch has also been setting up micro enterprises and particularly looking at how to produce mud brick bricks that can be locally produced and used in building cyclone proof houses for villages.

On this trip just Mitch and I went. We visited a bunch of Melanesian squatter villages. They are considered squatters and have no legal rights even if a village has been there for generations. This is the Fiji few people see and given the respect with which Mitch is viewed we were invited into these villages and spent time with the village chiefs and elders.

It was an eye opener for me. It wasn't just that the majority were living in tin shacks. They were very often rusty tin shacks. When I came home I felt like I was living in a mansion in paradise.

Perspective is a helpful thing when it comes to prayer and thanks-giving. Paul is trying to give us perspective by showing us the big picture in vs 12-14. We have been rescued from the kingdom of darkness. We have been transferred to the kingdom of light.

We could say it another way by saying "Saved from", and "saved for". John was clear as he pointed out the consequences of rebelling against God and going our own way. We stand condemned and are "saved from" the wrath of God. "Saved from" condemnation John 3. "Saved for" the hope that is laid up for us in heaven. Vs 5 of Colossians 1

The saving work of Christ and the full sufficiency of that work is where we put our hope. Hope that results in joy, endurance, and patience as we understand the gospel and grow in spiritual wisdom and understanding.

This is all through and made possible because of the grace and purposes of God and the action of the Lord Jesus. Our hope is secure. The salvation is complete. There is nothing that we need to add given the work of the cross. Our part is to be thankful, hopeful, joyful. Our part is to endure no matter what. We do that because we know that even our endurance is made possible because of the work of God in our lives.

Jesus plus nothing equals salvation. In that freedom we live.

Let's pray. Heavenly father we thank you for the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you for the empowering and enabling work of the Holy Spirit. We thank you for the gospel that which helps us to live in truth to live in faith and to live in. Hope, amen.

