

Title: Above All: Why Do We Celebrate the Gospel?

Text: Col 1:3-8

Date: March 7, 2021 at FBCW

INTRO. We are people that love to celebrate. Our lives are filled with celebrations. And celebrations fill our lives from birth to death.

- At birth – congratulations on the birth.
- At death – we don't prefer to call it a funeral, it's a "celebration of life."

In between, moments like these are celebrated:

crawling...walking...kindergarten...sports...recitals...book reports...first date...first car...first job...college...marriage...kids...promotions...raises...buying a house...anniversaries...retirement...milestones...your team...your company...your wins.

There's something in us that wants to win...something wants to celebrate.

But here's a question: the second after you die, what matters? Where are you going?

- There is nothing wrong with all of these human celebrations. But note this, all of these celebrations are **earthly**.
- What Paul is celebrating in Col 1:3-8 is **eternal**.

This is the backstory of the Colossian church.

- The Gospel changed Paul (Acts 9).
- The Gospel changed Ephesus after Paul visited there (Acts 19).
 - Twelve disciples of John the Baptist received the Holy Spirit.
 - For two years, Paul lectured in the synagogues and Tyrannus Hall of Ephesus.
 - The Spirit was on Paul in a mighty way.
 - Facecloths/aprons that touched Paul...touched the sick...and healed them.
 - Jewish exorcists tried to copy Paul's power (the seven sons of Sceva).
 - "I command you by the Jesus that Paul preaches..."
 - "I know Jesus, and I know Paul, but who are you?"
 - The evil spirit in one man jumped Sceva's seven sons and overpowered them.

Two key verses from Paul's ministry in Ephesus:

Acts 19:17, *When this became known to everyone who lived in Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks, they became afraid, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high esteem.*

- Only Jesus Christ had the power to address the evil practices of the city.
- Nothing else worked!

Acts 19:10, *This went on for two years, so that all the residents of Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord.*

- What a testimony! Literally every person in Asia heard the Gospel.
- Sometime during Paul's ministry in Ephesus – Paul's preaching impacted Epaphras of Colossae...who happened to be visiting in Ephesus.
- Epaphras takes the message of the Gospel from Ephesus back to his hometown of Colossae...and the rest is history.

FACT. In order to reach many...you've got to first reach one!

FACT. You never know who might be in the audience when the Gospel is shared!

First, note Paul's heart for prayer (v 3). There are many reasons to pray. We should always be grateful when someone says they'll pray for us. Shame on us when we say we'll pray for someone...but we don't actually do it.

What is prayer? Prayer is heartfelt communication with God.

- Prayer is something we can do anytime...but most of us rarely prioritize the time.
- Prayer – perhaps the most under-utilized privilege of our lifetime.

The opportunity to pray → is ours through Jesus Christ, our Mediator.

- The name "Christ Jesus" is our access.

To participate in prayer → what a glorious privilege.

Notice Paul's language in Col 1:3, "*When I pray for you, I'm grateful.*"

Q: Am I, like Paul, praying for those under my spiritual authority with intentionality?

Q: When others pray for me...can they be truly grateful for my progress?

When things are going well – let us be prayerful with gratitude.

When things are not going well – let us be prayerful with desperation/urgency.

To be prayed for → what an honor to know others are praying for you.

- ILLUS: to be a reference for someone...to write a recommendation letter...to be put in touch with someone famous; but none of this compares to receiving the blessing of Christ Jesus.
- What an honor to know when others are praying for you – that they are grateful for you.

Second, note the Inspiring Reputation of the Colossian Church (vv 4-5a). This is an important word: Verse 5 is actually the key to understanding Verse 4.

- When you know your salvation is actually settled in heaven...it changes how you live.
- A fixed/certain future should create a focused/calm present.

FACT. Heaven is not something we talk about too frequently.

A. Let us be assured of our home in heaven.

John 14:2-3, In my Father's House are many mansions, if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go to prepare a place for you, then I will come again, to receive you until myself, that where I am there you may be also.

1 John 5:13, I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

B. If you know heaven is where you're headed...it will impact how you live on earth. If heaven is real...why would you invest so much in earthly goods?

Matt 6:19-21, Don't store up for yourselves treasures on earth...But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven...for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Col 3:1-2, So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

ILLUS: If you know that a certain stock, or real estate property, is going down, would you invest there? Of course not! But all investments into the Kingdom of God – wow, what an ROI!

C. The two key ways that the Colossians were heavenly minded: their faith in Jesus Christ, and their love for the saints.

Faith in Jesus Christ – if we can just get people to Jesus...then Jesus can fix them!

- Jesus knows where I am.
- Jesus has a purpose for everything.
- Jesus can fix my specific issue.
- Jesus is one day coming for me.
- The Bible gives us this one picture: our God is able!

Love for all the saints...Love for others.

- Why love others? Because God made them.
- Give people this permission: you don't have to be/believe just like me.
- Love is the best reputation of all (John 13:35).
- If you can't love someone that is challenging? Wow...what a small view of God/love.

(ILLUS: my recent conversation with another pastor about “the big front door”)

Third, note the Great Power of the Gospel (vv 5b-8). The Gospel is God's great news...it will bear fruit.

FACT. Jesus will save anyone who calls on Him...AND...many, if given the opportunity, will call on Him. → The only possible disconnect? People that profess to have Jesus, but they don't share Jesus. Tragic!

ILLUS: Mark 4, Jesus's Parable of the Sower. A Farmer spreads the seed (the Word of God).

- Some seed lands by the roadside – Satan comes and steals the seed.
- Some seed lands on rocky ground – it looks promising, but has no roots/depth, and fades.
- Some seed lands among thorns – but the worries of the world, like thorns, choke it out.
- Some seed lands on good soil – hears the word, welcomes it, produces fruit!

Yes, the devil will try to steal some...and some won't persevere...and others get distracted by the world → but we must preach the Gospel → because some will hear it, welcome it, and be transformed!

This is how the Gospel got to Colossae:

- Paul ministered in Ephesus.
- Epaphras was in Ephesus, heard the Gospel, and got saved.
- Epaphras heard the Gospel and returned to Colossae to spread the good word.
- Many in Colossae heard and believed.
- And Paul says this pattern was happening all around the whole world.

A believer shared...

A seeker heard...

New life springs up in the seeker.

Others notice the seeker's change.

God is glorified...the Gospel continues to spread.

Notice this about the Gospel:

- It's personal – to you.
- It's local – in Colossae.
- It's global – it is worldwide.

I love this about the Gospel –

- It is truth (words are true, Col 1:5).
- It travels (it comes to you and the world, Col 1:6).
- It transforms (it brings forth fruit, Col 1:6).
- It is trustworthy (Epaphras, it spreads, etc. Col 1:7-8).

The bottom line → Paul commended the Colossian church for welcoming the Gospel and the transformation the Gospel brought.

BIG IDEA. We celebrate the Gospel because it has the power to change anyone, any place, at any time.

The Gospel is God's great news! If it has touched you – you must share it.

These are the two essential questions that determine everything:

1. Do I believe the Gospel?
2. If so, am I sharing the Gospel?

Application –

How did the Gospel get to you and me personally? Appreciate, honor, and thank the Lord for the one that God used to bring the Gospel to you!

Am I certain I'm going to heaven? If I am certain about it – who am I seeking to bring along with me?

Am I earnestly praying for those under my spiritual care? What defines my prayers?

- Gratitude about the good things.
- Urgency about the unfinished things.

What is the reputation of our church? Are we known for these two key things? (nothing else matters) → but these two things matter:

- Faith in Jesus.
- Love for others.

CONCL. Romans 1:16, *For I am not ashamed of the Gospel, because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, and then to the Greek.*