



“Faithful & Fruitful”  
Colossians 1:1-8  
November 21, 2021

Good morning, brothers and sisters. It is good to see all of you. I want to let you know that I have been looking forward to saying the following words to you: Please open your Bibles to the book of Colossians!

We are starting a new series and digging into this New Testament letter written to a church in an ancient city called Colossae. Our new series is going to take us right through Christmas, leading us right up to the precipice of Resurrection Sunday. Let me start by giving you a summary of what the book of Colossians is all about.

The book of Colossians is all about Jesus! That is a wonderful topic. Do you want a more extensive summary of what this book is about? I will give it to you. The Lord Jesus Christ! The Master. The Savior. The Messiah. The Second Person of the Triune God, through whom all things were made and by whom all things hold together. This book is about Jesus from beginning to end, and about the churches union and the life that we have in Him by God’s grace.

The book of Colossians, it is a letter of high Christology. It is such a pure and elevated view of Jesus Christ the Son of God that we receive in this letter. We read about His deity, the fact that He is God; His incarnation that He is God in a human body; that He is in fact Creator; that He is in fact Sustainer; that He is Redeemer; that He is Lord of all.

The book of Colossians contains such a pure and high and elevated view of Jesus. The irony is that this letter, with this portrait, was originally written to one of the least impressive churches of all the New Testament churches.

In fact, one commentator even said that this was the least important church that the Apostle Paul ever wrote to was that little country church in Colossae, and I think that is so cool. Such a magnificent view of Christ for such a humble body of believers. It reminds me about the night of the birth of Jesus Christ.

Who did the Lord send angelic messages to first to tell them what just happened? Those humble shepherds! Then those shepherds spread out, like the Colossians spread out in their region and telling everybody about an awesome King by the name of Jesus Christ. It is such rich, rich knowledge of who Jesus is and what He does that we receive in this letter.

This morning as we move into the time ahead of us, I want first for us to get to know that town of Colossae a little bit better. We are talking about a letter written to an actual church in an actual region with actual people that lived on this earth.

I was a geography major in college at Long Beach State and I think there is so much meaning in understanding the situation that they were living in. So we will start by getting to know where these people lived—the city of Colossae.

Then we will see how the Apostle Paul opened his letter to them and in noticing some of the details of how Paul opened his letter, we will also perceive how this church was founded and what Paul's situation was as he wrote the letter to them, addressing the situations they were in.

Then we will draw from the opening eight verses of the book of Colossians. We will see how thankful Paul was as he wrote this letter and we will pray that that same gratitude will fill our hearts as we think about basic gospel realities for the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

First, let's begin by talking about Colossae. Let me ask you this: how many of you have ever heard of a town that is called Radiator Springs? Yes, I see a lot of hands waving, so many of you are familiar with the Disney Pixar animated feature film called Cars, featuring the race car Lightning McQueen himself. That movie is situated in a little Arizona town called Radiator Springs. It was once thriving and booming and bustling as it was situated on Route 66. But developers came in and built an interstate highway ten miles to the north of that town. So slowly but surely Radiator Springs which was once booming, declined and declined and declined as the people of that town went to where the opportunities were. Some of the people remained behind thinking that it was all depressing.

Colossae had a similar story. Something comparable happened in the life of that town. The city of Colossae was located in the Lycus Valley in Asia Minor in the First Century Roman world. We think of Asia and we think about it as being way to the east. However, Asia Minor is comprised of what is now Turkey.

Colossae was near Ephesus. Colossae was situated near another town called Laodicea, which was about ten miles to the northwest. Then a little bit further to the north was Hierapolis. All of these cities were situated on the Lycus River Valley in what was and was a beautiful location.

This was where Colossae was situated and it was at one time the prominent city of that region. In the Fifth Century, a Greek historian by the name of Herodotus mentioned Colossae as a great city of Phrygia; Phrygia being a region within Asia Minor.

Then a hundred years after that, another Greek historian by the name of Xenophon described Colossae as a populace city. Wealthy and large. A lot of money in that town. Booming. Lots of structures with a lot happening there.

It was the chief city of the region and positioned in just an idyllic setting. It had a textile industry from all of the wool that came from the sheep that they were raising there. It was a beautiful town, but there were a couple of towns close by Colossae. They were Laodicea and Hierapolis.

Hierapolis had been paralleling the history of Colossae. It was a center of tourism, known for its beauty and its healing hot springs, which are still found bubbling forth from the earth in that region even today.

By virtue of the fact Hierapolis was beautiful and they had natural Jacuzzis' and those Jacuzzis' were thought to heal, lots of traffic went through Hierapolis. They even had one of the premier theaters, and you can still see the ruins of it. They are still standing. Hierapolis was just about twelve miles to the north of Colossae.

However, what led to the economic decline of the city of Colossae came in the Third Century BC when a Greek ruler by the name of Antiochus built the town of Laodicea. Laodicea was named for his wife and he invested in it significantly. Laodicea also got into the garment industry, drawing from the economy of Colossae.

Laodicea also had a school of medicine and it became the judicial center of the entire district. So Laodicea rose in prominence. With the growth of these cities, Colossae, which at one time was the booming town, soon began to resemble the Calico Ghost Town. People started departing from that area to go to places of greater opportunity.

Colossae became the place that you stopped at as you were going to a greater destination. I know that recently Barstow has been developed but when I was a kid, Barstow was the place that you stopped in to get gas on your way to Las Vegas. Or like going to Lake Havasu, there is a little town you pass through called Needles. What's going on it Needles?

That is kind of how Colossae became. It just declined. People left and it became a small town on the way to the more prominent towns. So in Romans times just before the coming of Christ and the sending out of His apostles, another ancient geographer by the name of Strabo spoke of it in his writing as only a small town in the Lycus Valley.

It was the commentator J.B. Lightfoot who said, "Without a doubt Colossae was the least important church to which any epistle of Saint Paul is addressed." And even to this day, barely any excavations have taken place at the site of Colossae.

Colossae has basically been left untouched so as it was in New Testament times, so it remains. All the action was elsewhere. Lightfoot said there were still some people there, but it was the least significant church that the Apostle Paul ever wrote to.

While I understand Lightfoot's sentiment, I don't appreciate his language. I don't like the kind of talk of the least important church. I don't think that we speak in those terms in relation to any church. Every church, whether it has a thousand members, five hundred members, two hundred members, or twenty members, it is an important church.

It was important to the heart of God. He knew the people in Colossae, and He reached them with His gospel. It was important to the Apostle Paul because the Apostle Paul was filled with the Spirit of God who was about the business of planting churches and building up their people. So Colossae was an important church and the gospel when there.

We don't know exactly what the population was at that time, but the church of Colossae was very unlikely to be larger than our church. It was probably smaller than our church. Paul dealt with some bigger churches in some bigger cities, but this church lit his heart up with joy because of the way that they were being steadfast through some of the challenges that they were facing and because their faith was so authentic, as Paul was hearing reports of it.

Let's start by seeing how Paul addressed them. Pay attention to what is here because as we read about what he said, we are going to hear about a certain man who was used of the Lord to evangelize Colossae and to plant that church.

We are going to think a little bit more about the setting of Paul as he wrote this letter and the setting of the church that he addressed. I do believe that as we see Paul's gratitude for what was happening there, we are going to find some relevance for our church too because we are of the same body of Christ that they were.

There is rich language here so let's see how Paul opened the letter that he wrote to them. Colossians Chapter 1 and Verse 1:

**<sup>1</sup>Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother.**

**<sup>2</sup>To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.**

**<sup>3</sup>We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, <sup>4</sup>since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, <sup>5</sup>because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, <sup>6</sup>which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth, <sup>7</sup>just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf <sup>8</sup>and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.**

I love those at the very beginning in Verse 3:

**<sup>3</sup>We always thank God...**

Then Paul talked about why he was so thankful for that church. Now let's understand Paul's situation and the situation of this church that led to the writing of this letter, there in that very small and largely forgotten town.

Picture with me in your mind's eye the Apostle Paul, he was in the great capital city of Rome. He was confined to a small apartment, chained to a Roman guard at all times. He was on house arrest and awaiting trial before Nero himself, the emperor of Rome—all based on some false charges that were trumped up against him years earlier.

Paul was there and could not leave that apartment, but he did have faithful friends that were there with him; his son in the faith, Timothy, and others that he would name at the end of the letter.

There was Paul and out of nowhere, without receiving an email prior from a friend of his telling him of his coming, suddenly into the apartment appeared Epaphras, the Colossian; a man who heard the gospel from Paul; a man who was trained and disciplined and mentored by Paul.

It would seem that this man Epaphras was one of Paul's most attentive students during his years in Ephesus. We read in Acts Chapter 19 and Verses 8 through 10 that after preaching in the synagogues for several weeks, Paul got kicked out because they didn't like the message about Jesus that Paul was preaching.

But there was this hall that belonged to a man named Tyrannus that was opened during the siesta hours of the day and instead of going to sleep, Paul went and he was teaching Christ, opening the Old Testament, proclaiming Jesus. It says in Acts that through that ministry of teaching, all of Asia Minor was reached with the gospel.

This is what it says about Epaphras in Colossians Chapter 4 and Verses 12 through 18

**<sup>12</sup>Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God. <sup>13</sup>For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis.**

Epaphras was a man of the Lycus Valley. He was a traveling man and he was there in Ephesus and by the grace of God, he happened to enter into the hall of Tyrannus where Paul was teaching about the Jewish Messiah, Jesus. There in that hall of Tyrannus, it would seem that Epaphras heard a message the likes of which he had never heard before in his life.

Epaphras heard of One who is prophesied throughout the pages of the Old Testament prophets. He heard of a King who came into the world performing miracles, even raising people from the dead. He heard of One who was spreading goodness and grace and truth, and healing all throughout the land of Israel.

He heard of One who was crucified on a cross as a sacrificial lamb as a substitute for others. Epaphras heard of the One whose blood makes sinners clean. Epaphras heard of the One who covers sinners and have been cleansed in His righteousness, qualifying them for Heaven.

Epaphras heard of this Jesus who rose from the grave and who is coming back to this earth in power and glory and the heart of Epaphras was beating with glory and new life. He was born again. He had eyes to see the Kingdom of the Messiah. He had the eyes to see that he entered through faith.

Epaphras was a new creation in Christ and he went back to his home town and he shared the goodness and the Gospel of Jesus Christ everywhere. That was how that church was planted. These are the puzzle pieces that we put together.

This man Epaphras, he heard about his beloved mentor, Paul, done wrong and on house arrest and awaiting trial. Paul's life was on the line. Epaphras had to go. Epaphras was sent by the church, probably not only with his relational love, but some supplies and monetary assistance so that Paul could stay in that apartment, rather than going down to the dungeon. Epaphras was going to minister to the Apostle Paul.

What do you think pastors talk about when they get together? I meet with pastors and we talk about each other's lives and we talk about the lives of the churches that we are serving in. I'm so thankful to meet regularly with some pastors in our network. Pastor Roger Bishop from Redemption Hill, he always starts the conversation like this: what is bringing you joy and what is keeping you up at night?

Whether you believe it or not, pastors are very able and ready to talk about both things. Often it gets weighed toward the things keeping you up at night, though, because we are all kind of geared to have things that weigh on our hearts and minds. We need to be spurred on to thanksgiving and we need to be reminded of all the things that we are thankful for.

However, sometimes there are some pressures that are faced and Paul was asking how it was going in Colossae. And Epaphras had a glowing report. It is evident all throughout the letter that Epaphras was just so thankful for the body of Christ in Colossae; their maturity; their doctrinal strength; how firm and stable they were, but Epaphras was also letting Paul know about an encroaching threat upon the church.

Remaining in the city of Colossae there was also a form of false teaching knocking on the door of the church. Paul dealt with this head-on in Colossians Chapter 2. What we find as we think about the details of what was there is that it was some form of Jewish mysticism.

We know it was Jewish because they were stressing Jewish Law and dietary restrictions and holidays and holy days and Sabbath days. But it was a form of Jewish mysticism because they were also talking about visions and even the worship of angels and fixation upon angels.

What Paul heard from Epaphras was that while the church itself was remaining steadfast in the gospel, there was a threat. There were some who were coming in and trying to deemphasize the centrality of Christ in theology and in worship and even in the growth of the church.

Christ was being pushed aside in favor of these other things, so Paul with his friend Epaphras and with Timothy by his side, they said, We can't have that. They started writing this letter and responded to that teaching with one of the most exalted and elevated Spirit-inspired and richest doctrinal books about Christ in the pages of the New Testament. It is glorious.

So in Chapter 1, Paul talked about the preeminence and the deity of Christ who is not to be marginalized. Then he dealt with the heresy head-on. It does seem that it had not made its way in yet but it was at the door, and Paul dealt with it and equipped them to deal with it as well.

Then Paul went into the glory of the church's union with Christ and how it is through our attachment in Christ, that we have all that we need for life and godliness and we will grow and mature and bear fruit by God's grace through union with Christ.

So Paul wrote this letter and it was preventative, not curative. There was an infection all around the church and Paul was looking to boost their immune system with the glory of Jesus Christ. How we need this because there is this wretched Christ-plus syndrome that has been spreading through the ages, throughout the Kingdom of Christ on this earth.

Christ-plus, Christ-plus, Christ-plus and that is what was happening there in Colossae. So Paul wrote this letter, and we are going to be dealing with all of these things in the months ahead of us. However, for now I just want for us to see what Paul was thankful for when he thought about the Colossian church.

I want for us to see two aspects in Verses 3 through 8. It all begins by saying, When we pray for you, we pray with gratitude in our hearts. We are so thankful for what we are hearing about what is happening in your church. I want for us to see just what Paul was so thankful for.

We are going to take all these rich winding realities under two headings. As we do, let us pray that by the Spirit of Jesus, the same maturity that was rising up in Colossae would be rising up and increasing in Bethel Grace, so that anybody who is a part of Bethel Grace or thinks about Bethel Grace will be able to genuinely respond with the same kind of gratitude that Paul responded with when he thought Colossae.

We are going to think very profoundly about two basic realities of the Christian church. Paul was so thankful for the Colossae's genuine faith in Christ, and Paul was so thankful for Gospel growth throughout the world.

We see that he talked about these things and rejoiced in them. As we take in these things, we ask the Lord to produce these things in us as well. As it was in Colossae, let it be like that in our midst to His glory.

Let's give thanks to God:

### **1. For Living Faith in Jesus Christ (1:3-5)**

Let's pray that God will do this in our church as well. Paul said this:

**<sup>3</sup>We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, <sup>4</sup>since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, <sup>5</sup>because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel**

Paul was describing the living faith that was there present and thriving in Colossae; living faith that we can be so thankful for in our midst by the work of the Holy Spirit among us.

Notice that their faith was in Christ Jesus. They were trusting in Christ and in Christ alone. They were trusting in Him for their salvation before the holiness of God. They were trusting in Christ for their forgiveness; for their reconciliation with God; for their newness of life. They were trusting in Jesus who was saving them from their sins and cleansing them before the holiness of the Lord.

We are going get to this part when we celebrate Christmas. What did the angels say to Joseph about how that child would be named? The angel said, You will name him Jesus. That name means the Lord saves. You will name Him Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.

Jesus came to deliver us from peril. He came to save us from the judgment and the wrath that our sin deserves. He came to save us by dying on the cross, taking the judgment of God for us by averting it from us and taking it upon Himself. He came to save us.

So the Colossae church was trusting in Christ. They heard this message of a Savior. They understood their own sin and culpability before the holiness of God and their hearts believed and rested in Christ Jesus. In this, their lives were made new.

They were born again. They were joined in union with Christ. So that which was vertical, their relationship with God, issued forth in something that was horizontal which is a demonstration of true living faith of people born again.

What was that horizontal affect that it had? Love for all the saints! Do you see this in the text?

**<sup>3</sup>We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you,  
<sup>4</sup>since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints**

The Lord's love for them was issuing forth from them into the lives of others. They were being filled with the love of God, and it was being demonstrated in their love for the other followers of Jesus Christ and for the people that needed to come to know Jesus Christ as well.

But there was this primacy of their love for the church. They were thankful for the people of God. Agape! They had love rising up in them. Agape is self-giving, sacrificial commitment to the well-being of other people.

This must be a work of God in me because left to my natural sinful self, I am most committed to the well-being of myself. This is true for all of us. We all have the remnant of that in us and the Holy Spirit starts reorienting us as we are joined in union with God. He works His grace in us, so that we have eyes to see the needs and the concerns of the people around us.

Did you notice that this text says Paul was so thankful that he thought about their genuine faith and their love for all the saints? All the saints, he said. Not some of the saints. They had love for all the people of God.

Paul would have had in view their love for the global church—Jews, Gentiles—the Christians in Jerusalem being harassed and troubled for their faith in Christ as Messiah. Paul would have had in view the brothers and sisters in the sister churches there in the Lycus Valley.

The people in Colossae were not viewing the church of Hierapolis or Laodicea as the competition, but as brothers and sisters that they were joined together with. And the Lord was giving them love for all the saints in their own church.

Would you believe me if I told you that the church of Colossae was filled with all of the same personalities that any church is filled with? Isn't the church filled with interesting personalities? Would you believe that a church is a hospital filled with people that are saved by grace and being renewed in the image of Christ, but they are still growing.

Their might even be some who have irritating tendencies in their personalities. Furthermore, you might have irritating tendencies in your personality. I didn't mean that to anybody in particular, but all of us collectively. I have used this old rhyme before, and I will probably use it again:

To live above with saints we love, that will be glory but to live below with the saints we know, that's another story!

People with flaws. People with foibles. People that are sometimes just clueless that their words are irritating and sometimes hurtful. People who still blow it and sin. People that that sin against others. And Paul was saying, But the Spirit of God is producing within you a love for all of the saints. This is the work of the Holy Spirit.

If we are going to be a church that evokes thanksgiving among those who are connected to it, let us pray that the Spirit will teach us how to love. We human beings, we just pat ourselves on the back—well, I'm a very loving person. Yea, right! We are so oriented toward self-love. And the Holy Spirit is turning it around, working in us to help us to love others, even in all of their imperfections.

So let us call upon God to help us at Bethel Grace to produce this kind of love in increasing measure; the kind of love that goes the first mile and reaches out to people different from us. Paul said that these people had joined into the vision that he expressed in Chapter 3—here in the body of Christ there is not Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, nor barbarians or Scythian. All are one in Christ.

Let us go the first mile with the Spirit's power, reaching out to people that may be different from us. Let's pray that the Holy Spirit will help us go the second mile and reach out to people who seem downcast or alone or discouraged or beat up, evidence that they are hurting.

Let's pray for the Spirit's power to love our brothers and sisters with Agape love. Let us call upon God to fill us with love to go the third mile, the kind that practices forbearance and longsuffering and patience, meaning that it overlooks irritants.

Next week we are going to talk about how Paul was stacking up all of these qualities of mighty the power of God, so that we could practice what? Patience! Paul used a couple of words, one that addresses difficult situations and the other one that addresses difficult people. Let us call upon the Lord to overcome our selfishness and our tendency to recoil within ourselves and to hold grudges.

Let Him do the work of the Spirit. Let us go with what the Spirit is doing, that we might even go the tenth mile and practice forgiveness, letting go of grudges; practicing reconciliation; seeking the good in our brothers and sisters in Christ—even to those who may have hurt us—because this takes us to the very foot of the cross of Jesus Christ. Colossians is going to lead us there, where it says to forgive just as you have been forgiven.

Paul was so thankful for the love that was rich in this small little country church for those who had eyes to see it radiating with the presence of Heaven in their midst. What was all this love based on?

**<sup>4</sup>since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, <sup>5</sup>because of the hope laid up for you in heaven**

What was producing love like this? Well, it was the work of the Holy Spirit as the Holy Spirit was generating this living hope that is stored up in Heaven, the promise of things to come.

The hope that is laid up for us in heaven speaks to us of the full blessedness of life to come through all eternity in the Majestic Messianic Kingdom of Jesus Christ our Lord. Full blessedness forever and ever and ever is to be experienced by the body of Christ. That is the hope laid up for us in Heaven.

When we think about hope, we are talking about a future-oriented hope that comes with the return of Jesus Christ. Hope is a confidence word, not a doubt word. Biblical hope comes not with a question mark, but with an exclamation point so when our hearts are being filled hope, we don't have our fingers crossed. We have our fists pumping.

Hope pumps the fists, saying, Christ is coming back. His Kingdom is forever. Our reward will be with Him. He showers us in grace. Our place is in Him. He is our hope. This hope of Heaven, of things to come, energizes love in the midst of all the complexity and the thorniness and the difficulty of life in this world.

We are not living in full blessedness yet. We are still navigating the curse that we read about last week. The church is the place where the Spirit is going to empower us to love each other through the hardships that we face.

Who is the Lord putting on your heart? Pray that the Lord would put people on your heart. people that you will join with in close intimate Agape love. Pray that the Spirit will put this all throughout the church, that we would truly learn to love one another as it is energized by a living hope.

Paul was so thankful for the Colossians living faith. They was resting in Christ alone. They were not trusting in themselves for salvation, but they were trusting in Christ for forgiveness and being right with God. That was issuing forth in other aspects as well.

We can also thank God:

## **2. For Gospel Growth Throughout the World (1:5-7)**

Paul said:

**<sup>5</sup>because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, <sup>6</sup>which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth, <sup>7</sup>just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant.**

Paul declared that the Gospel was bearing fruit in Colossae, the message about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for sinners like us. It was bearing fruit in Colossae and it was bearing fruit all throughout the world. Stating this, Paul would have had the Roman Empire in mind.

This was the realm that Paul lived in. He lived and did his ministry in the Roman Empire. Paul saw the Gospel vine spreading and spreading and spreading and increasing and increasing and bearing fruit in the big cities and in the little cities; in the urban areas, in the countryside. Everywhere.

The fact that this Gospel was spreading throughout the world, underscores the fact that there is one Gospel for the whole world. The grace of God in truth comes by one message. The message of Christ and Christ crucified for sinners and risen from the grave. Without trusting this message and this Savior, one will not go to Heaven.

There is one way and that way is Christ and Him crucified and risen from the grave. Christianity was not a regional religion or a local sect, it was a global movement as it is to this day because there is one way to be right with God; one way to the Father. Jesus said, I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Understand as Paul spoke of this Gospel growth throughout the Roman Empire, the circumstances in the Roman Empire were detrimental to Gospel growth. We think it is hard to be a Christian in some ways here in Southern California, but just increase this by a hundred times in the Roman Empire with the rise of Nero.

Christians were already being ostracized by Greeks in the Jewish world. Paul was already in prison for his faith. Soon Christians would become under fierce persecution under the persecution instigated by Nero. Yet, the Gospel kept advancing and growing and expanding and kept bearing fruit all throughout the world.

Paul was speaking of the Gospel in the present active tense. It was ongoing. It was increasing. The Gospel always was and always is bearing fruit. It never becomes paralyzed. It never becomes frozen. It never becomes inactive. It is always at work. It is always plugged in. It is never unplugged.

All throughout the world, even now, people are coming to know Christ as Savior. Brothers and sisters, Bethel Grace, we are a part of this. We are joined to a movement that has spread all throughout the earth, bearing fruit. Brick walls can't stop it.

Paul wrote this on house arrest. You read the parallel letter to the Philippians and we see him in that room, chained to a Roman guard at all times, and you must believe that it was all he could do not to chuckle with a face full of delight when he realized that the Gospel was reaching the entire pretorian guard as a result of him being there.

God's Word is not chained! It has a perennial power that keeps on going. It is not stopped. It is not thwarted. Walls can't stop it. Chains can't stop it. Gag orders can't stop it. Regulations can't stop it. There is no holding it back. It cuts through and it bears fruit; it is going and going.

And we are part of this. We get to be a part of Jesus saving sinners and with them, the message that just keeps spreading and saving more sinners, bearing the fruit of new life and new love within them.

As we close, let's think about a couple ways in which we participate in the Gospel as well. Understand this: the Gospel does not stop its ministry once a person comes to new faith in Jesus Christ. That's just the beginning of its ministry.

The grace of God for sinners like us is to make us new, to bring us forgiveness, and newness. It is like the milk and the meat. It is ongoing. We minister the Gospel introducing Jesus to people who don't believe, and we speak Gospel grace to those who do believe that we might be fortified and have medicine that keeps us from getting infected by the sins of false teaching in the world.

So we read in Colossians Chapter 3 and Verse 16:

**<sup>16</sup>Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thanksgiving in your hearts to God.**

We are vine workers ministering Gospel grace to one another the very Word of Jesus here in the church. Then among people that are in our SOIL, our Sphere of Influenced Lives, Colossians Chapter 4 and Verses 5 and 6 tells us to:

**<sup>5</sup>Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. <sup>6</sup>Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.**

This is the work of God's grace in the church and out in the neighborhood. We are part of this vine that is growing. This is something that we can be so very thankful for.

With this, will you please join me in prayer as I ask God to produce qualities among us that will produce much thanksgiving in all of those who are a part of the church and those connected to the church.