

Thank God for the gospel

Colossians 1:1-14

I imagine its hard being a SALMON. Apparently, apart from the fact that you might end up as a John West product. If you're a SALMON....you've got a long hard road in front of you.

Things don't start off too badly. After you're hatched you float downstream to the ocean. You have your fill of whatever it is that Salmon eat.

But maturity for a salmon means one thing. It means. A long tough journey. Up to 1000 milesUPSTREAM. To spawn. And to die.

And apart from the distance. Apart from the fact that it's ALL UPHILL. You don't eat along the way.

Then theres the obstacles. The rapids. The logs fallen in the water. The waterfalls. You've got to get past them. Then there's the predators. You've got to get past Yogi bear. Who's keen on some salmon for lunch. And if you get past all of that. You lay your eggs. And then you DIE.

I imagine... it must be hard work.

And I wonder. What is it that keeps them going? Is it the teamwork factor? We all do it together one challenge at a time. Now the rapids. Here's the plan. Now the bears. You go that way I'll go over here.

Do they egg each other on to get to the end. Is that how they do it?

Or..... is it just this powerful internal urge. That keeps them going, going, going

I'm guessing....I imagine...it must be hard being a salmon.

But I don't have to imagine. I KNOW IT'S HARD. Being a CHRISTIAN. It's a bit the same.

There's a Chinese proverb that says even a dead fish can go with the flow.

But if you're going to follow Jesus in Aussie culture. In the city of Brisbane. You're going to have to go against the flow. If you're going to do that for the rest of your life. You've got a bit of a journey in front of you.

The culture says God's dead. And if you're not quite up to speed with that you're a bit of a dinosaur. The culture says God's irrelevant. The culture says truth's just relative. And if you're going to follow Jesus. If you're going to stand up and be counted as a follower. You're going to have to swim against the tide.

It's HARD WORK. How we going to make it to the end? And not just to get there. But to POWER ON TO THE END?

And we have here a letter before us here. That is basically an encouragement to do that. to KEEP GOING. To POWER ON following Jesus. To keep swimming against that flow of the culture.

If I had to describe what Paul's letter to the Colossians was. That's how I'd describe it. In fact let me take you first of to the verse that most people see as the key. IF you've got your bible open I'll just get you to turn to chapter 2 and verse 6. And Paul says there. Key verse.

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

Just as you received. Continue. Strength to strength. Keep going.

.....rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

It's a great picture.

Especially when they're words from a guy writing from behind bars. Which Paul is.

But look at how he introduces himself. Stripped of his freedom. For speaking about Jesus. And probably his dignity. Maybe even sitting next to the town wino. Listen to what he says.

Paul. An apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God.

Paul's life is driven by one thing. And that is following Jesus and making him known to others.

And he's writing to the church in the first century, and to us in the 21st century, to say KEEP GOING. To say this is what God's called us to do. To say it's absolutely worth it. To say DON'T GIVE UP.

And we're just looking at the first 14 verses this morning. And what we're looking at is basically two different kinds of encouragement.

Firstly the encouragement of AFFIRMATION.

And if you've done any sort of teaching or coaching. You'll know the value of AFFIRMATION. You're on track. That's affirmation. You've got it right. That's affirmation.

This is how it works. You teach something. Or you demonstrate it. And then you get the person to do whatever it is. And when they DO IT. You jump up and down and say well done. You did it. It's parenting 101. It's coaching 101. It's encouragement by AFFIRMATION.

And there from verse 3 Paul says to the Colossians. HE says from what I hear about you. You've got it dead right. Thank God he says.

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your FAITH in Christ Jesus and of the LOVE you have for all the saints.

FAITH. And LOVE.

When you see that. Paul says. Take a snapshot. Because there's the evidence of God at work.

When you see someone who's willing to say "I'm a Christian I actually think differently about that issue." Paul says thank God.

When you're a Christian and everyone at work knows it. Paul says thank God.

Ravi Zacharias has written a book called deliver us from evil. It's about the gradual exorcism of God from the western conscience. He talks about the ideas that are shaping our values.

About secularization. Which is basically our bold confidence in ourselves and our technology. That says we've explained away the supernatural and the transcendent. Which means we've explained away God. It's like we've grown up now we don't need him anymore. He says.

"Religious ideas have been knocked senseless in the social arena by gladiators of the intellect."

Scary when you think about the ethical implications. Who's to say what's right?

Who's to say what's wrong?

Secularism says. No God. Existentially. Reality is what you can see. And what you can put under a microscope and measure. So there's no God. We sacrificed him on the altar of progress. And no anchor for a fixed morality.

And then there's Pluralism. Which is another fact of life. There's lots of different cultures and religions. So we'll say all truths are equal. Which is a logically bankrupt concept. How can they be. And so the biggest pho par these days is to make any sort of absolute truth claim. Like saying Jesus is Lord.

And what you end up with is a secular world view that says. There's no true morality. And a pluralistic ideal that says all truths are equal. Which really means there's no truth.

And they're the truths on which we live and make our important decisions. It's quite scary when you think about it.

Reason and human technology were supposed to bring about a sort of utopia.

Unfortunately the 20th century was not a very good advertisement for our new world view. The 20th century was the bloodiest century ever. In the 21st century there are over 70000 abortions per year in Australia alone. The police are inundated by domestic violence and violent crimes.

The further we are from God. The further we are from our life source. From the order and design of the one who made us. The further we are from God. The darker it is.

Thank God Paul says when people turn to Jesus in faith. Who put their hand up and say. Excuse me. There is truth. Who by standing up for it...offer hope to a world that's fast losing it.

We thank God for your faith in Christ Jesus and the love you have for all the saints.

The faith and love that are the by-product of the HOPE OF THE GOSPEL.

The faith and love that spring up from the HOPE that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth.

Those things Paul says. Your faith in Christ. Your love for one another. They come from they have their source. Their fuel...is your hope of heaven.

A couple of weeks ago at Bible study I asked the question. What are you looking forward to?

Someone said. Coffee. I think that might have been me. Someone else said sleep. I'm sure that was someone with young kids. We all had pretty different short term things we were looking forward to. But we all agreed. Long term. As Christians we all said. The hope of heaven.

And it's that certain hope. Looking forward. That makes all the difference.

Otherwise why not just live for now. Why not just do what pleases me.

Here's the conclusion I come to about you Paul says to this church. When I hear about those things. What's happening in you. Is exactly what's happening all over the place. And that is the gospel is growing and bearing fruit.

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.

What an encouragement. Especially if you're getting a bit tired of all the upstream swimming. To hear about the people in Rome, and Galatia and Philippi and Corinth. Who heard the same message as you. Who are struggling with you. Who are standing with you. And growing with you. And hoping with you. Dying with you.

Keep going. There are plenty of others swimming with you.

One of the best reasons I reckon to go away on camps like men's convention or easter conventions or women's camps. Is the encouragement of standing together with hundreds or even thousands of brothers and sisters. Under one roof. Even Baptists. Even Anglicans. Brethren.

There's a great big banner in the big shed up at Mt Tamborine that says ALL ONE IN CHRIST JESUS. And you look across the sea of heads. And it's encouraging. It's strengthening.

(Wilston). All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing. We can see that under one roof right here can't we. For some reason I have no idea why. Just thank God for it. Wilston pc seems to be the home for stray travelling Christians. Christians here from Zimbabwe. From America. From Holland. From Mexico, from Brasil. From China. From Korea. EVEN NEW ZEALAND. All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing. It's true.

So that's Paul's encouragement of affirmation. Paul's affirming the gospel they heard. The fruit it's born. And he says Thank God.

And then in verse 9. He goes on. Here's what God's done in you. Thank God for that. Here's what we hope and pray he will do in the future. Looking forward now he says.

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you.

And you get a bit of an insight here into what Paul sees as being valuable for Christians. If Paul could choose a Christmas present for Christians. This is what he'd choose. There's a logic here we're going to follow.

Paul says there. First thing verse 9. We've been asking God to

..fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

We want you to be able to spiritually discern God's will. We've asked God to fill you with that knowledge.

What's he talking about there? If he's praying that for you what does he mean? Is he asking God to fill your diary in for the week. So you know what you should be doing?

Is he asking God to tell you what uni course to enrol in. what job to take. What car to buy?

There's a hint in what he says next. In veres 10 he spells it out

And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way:

So the kind of knowledge Paul's praying for. The thing he wants God to FILL YOU WITH. Is to be able to live a life. That's pleasing to God.

It's the kind of knowledge that tends to come when you've known someone a long time.

When you know them deeply. There was a gameshow a while back where they took husbands and wives and they separated them and asked different questions to see how well they knew

each other. Which veggies did they like? What would they do in this situation. How much do they like the mother in law?

And to be filled with the knowledge of God's will. Paul's prayer....I think is about having that deep knowledge of God and his character and his purposes. That you can please him. Number one that you can know the kind of things he wants his people to be doing. And number two that you're able to do them. So you can please him in every way. Bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God.

That's Paul's prayer for them. Let me ask you this. What's your prayer for you? What would you like to be filled with?

Every day my mailbox is filled with all kinds of things. The TV's got all sorts of things to fill me with entertainment, sport, then there's the internet and the bookshelf.

With every distraction available to me. I can easily spend a week, a month. Longer than that...being filled with everything other than the knowledge of God's will.

Having the spirit. Is not the shortcut to knowing God's will. If it was. We wouldn't really need the bible.

There's a popular Christian theory out there that I need to debunk. It's quite a common theory. And that is that you can get the bible's benefits by osmosis. By merely having it on the shelf or the bedside table or by having more than one bible in the house. You can absorb it's goodness. You can't. You have to read it. More than that you have to meditate on it.

That's where God reveals his character. That's where he tells you what he's like. So you can please him and bear good fruit.

And he goes on. Being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience., or literally long suffering

Is that what you pray for?

And joyfully giving thanks to the Father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.

Here's the things we pray for you Paul says. If you're going to go from strength to strength. If you're going to endure and have patience. And keep swimming upstream.

And Paul finishes with another reminder of the word of truth, the gospel. God's grace in all its truth. In case you're looking for some motivation. From verse 13.

For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.