

Scriptures: Deut. 30:9-14; Col. 1:1-14

A World Starving for Hope

Turn on the news, scroll through your feed, or glance at the headlines, and one word reverberates beneath it all – uncertainty. Political turmoil and upheaval flares up all around the globe. Economic fears loom, with inflation and job insecurity shaking families. Wildfires rage across countries. Devastating floods displace thousands of people. Artificial intelligence threatens to upend well-established industries. And the war in Ukraine – now well into its third year – continues to remind us that peace is a fragile thing when humans call the shots.

In the face of such uncertainty, a question rises from the deepest corners of the human heart. “Is there any hope?” The Apostle Paul would answer with a resounding, “Yes!” But it’s not the kind of hope that the world trades in.

In our epistolary lesson this morning, Paul introduces a hope that doesn’t depend on governments, bank accounts, climate trends, or technological breakthroughs. It’s a hope rooted in Jesus Christ, laid up in Heaven, and heard through the Gospel. It’s a hope that is real, living, and life-changing. So today, let’s look at Colossians 1:1-14 together, and discover what it means to live as people who have truly heard of this hope. **Read Colossians 1:1-14.**

The Gospel – Our Source of Hope

Paul opens the letter to the church at Colossae with an introduction, letting them know who’s written to them. “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To God’s holy people in Colossae, the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ: Grace and peace to you from God our Father,” (Col. 1:1-2). Apparently Timothy was with him when he wrote the letter, and may have even helped write it. The letter opens with a blessing.

What Paul writes next is very interesting. 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 God’s people – the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel that has come to you, (verses 3-6a).

Paul has never met the people from the church at Colossae. He doesn’t personally know them. The church there was apparently planted by Epaphras, who keeps Paul informed about how the church is doing, (verses 7-8). So he’s “heard of” their faith in Jesus, and about their love for God’s people. In other words, he’s heard of their hope. Paul connects faith and love to hope. The hope the Colossians have in Christ is the engine driving their faith and love.

Their hope isn't wishful thinking. It's not saying, "I hope things get better next year." Or, "I hope my candidate wins the election," or "I hope the economy stabilizes." It isn't vague optimism. What the Colossians had is concrete, Heaven-stored, Gospel-proclaimed hope. And Paul says it comes from "the true message of the Gospel that has come to you... and is bearing fruit and growing," (verses 5-6).

We live in a world full of misinformation, filtered images, manipulated narratives, and deepfakes. That's a word that we don't hear much, and some of us may not know what it is. It's where they put an actor in front of a green screen and then use a computer-generated filter over them so that they look and sound like someone else. Back in 2020, there was a pretty funny Christmas address given by Queen Elizabeth II, which turned out to be a deepfake. We can laugh about it, but the reality is that much of what we see on our feeds and televisions is very polished. So, it's refreshing to be reminded that the Gospel is truth. Amid all the chaos, the Gospel continues to bear fruit all over the world – even today.

Just last month, various Christian ministries reported record baptism numbers in parts of Africa and Asia. Despite war, famine, and poverty, the Gospel continues to produce fruit. Ukrainian pastors hold underground worship services. Churches in South Sudan are growing even in refugee camps. People are still hearing of this hope – and their lives are being transformed!

Discipleship and Knowledge – Growing Hope

Paul highlights for the Colossians long ago, and us today, the visible fruit of hope – faith in Christ, and love for all God's people (verse 4). This isn't some far off, aspiration to try to reach. It's the real, day-by-day interactions going on between God's people in Colossae. They weren't just showing up on Sunday morning to attend a service. They're living their faith. They're loving their community. Why? Because of the hope they've heard of.

Let's be brutally honest for a minute. In today's "us versus them" culture, love is hard. We see deep divisions – racial, political, generational. Even within churches, debates rage about how to respond to everything from immigration to ethics. Our society is on a slippery slope, spiraling ever downward, away from God. And yet, what if we – like the Colossians – were known not for our outrage at all the troubles and problems we see, but rather for our faith and love?

In June, I read a story about a church in Phoenix, Arizona, that converted its entire parking lot into a cooling station for the homeless people of the city during a heatwave. They didn't wait for the city government to act – they simply said, "We've heard of this hope, and we're going to live like it's real." Or more recently, the Coast Guard swimmer. I don't recall his

name, but during the flooding in Texas last week, he rescued 165 people on his own – and it was the first time he'd ever been involved in that sort of thing. That guy's a hero. That's what the Gospel does. It moves us toward faith that acts and love that gives – even when it hurts, and when it seems counter-productive to what's best for our self.

Subtitle

After Paul's short statement about Epaphras, who tells him about the love of the people for each other, look what he says next. "We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please Him in every way," (verses 9-10a). He's praying that the Colossians grow deeper in their love for each other, and their love for God. Hope isn't something we hear about once and move on from it – it's something we have to live into.

Paul's prayer for the Colossians is really practical. He wants them to be filled with wisdom, walk in a way worthy of Jesus, and then he says, "bear fruit in every good work, [and] grow in the knowledge of God," (verse 10b). Basically Paul's combining what we know in our heads about what God has done for us through Jesus Christ crucified and resurrected, with what we do – how we walk – through our daily lives. Our world is drowning in information – but it's parched for wisdom.

We have 24/7 newscasts, YouTube tutorials, online churches and sermons, the list is endless. It seems as if the whole world is only a few clicks or taps away. But real wisdom comes from knowing God's will, and then walking with God. That's discipleship. That's what helps our hope stay strong when the world makes us feel like everything around us is crashing and burning.

Right now, some of you are facing uncertainties. It may feel like the world's caving in on you. You may be anticipating a job loss. Maybe you've gotten a medical diagnosis you weren't expecting. Perhaps you're trying to deal with a fractured relationship. Or maybe you're feeling anxiety about the way the world is, and the kind of world your kids or grandkids are inheriting. Friends, if any of that resonates with you today, I want you to know, that Paul's prayer is for you, too. That you would be filled with knowledge, strengthened for endurance, and rooted in hope.

Strength and Patience – The Endurance Hope Gives Us

Look what he says next. "Being strengthened with all power according to His glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of His holy people in the kingdom of light," (verses 11-12). The hope of the Gospel gives us strength for the long haul. Paul doesn't

pray that the Colossians would be spared hardship. He prays they'd be strengthened for endurance and patience.

It's like the poem Annie Flint wrote over a hundred years ago, which was later set to music and became a hymn of the Church:

God hath not promised skies always blue,
Flower strewn pathways all our lives through;
God hath not promised sun without rain,
Joy without sorrow, peace without pain.

But God hath promised strength for the day,
Rest for the labor, light for the way.
Grace for the trials, help from above,
Unfailing sympathy, undying love.¹

Isn't that what we need today? Not an escape route, but an anchor that holds us steady in all of life's uncertainties. Not shallow comfort, but deep resilience. I don't know how many of you get *The Voice of the Martyrs* magazine each month. There's always little blurbs in there about Christians being persecuted all over the globe. Last month, 21 year old Aidin Rakhimov, a Christian in the former Soviet republic of Tajikistan, was sentenced to five years in prison for extremist activity. The activity he was convicted for was attending a home Bible study. His family wrote, "We are grieved – but we're not without hope. The Gospel is still true. Christ is still King." This is the kind of strength Paul's talking about. A power not of this world. A power, "according to His glorious might." (verse 11).

Giving Thanks – the Joy of Hope

Verse 12, "Giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of His holy people in the kingdom of light," is the high point of this passage, I think. Because of the hope of the Gospel – because of Jesus and what He's done for us – we have been qualified, or made worthy, to share in the inheritance of His holy people. Who are His holy people? Friends, we call them the saints. We're qualified because of what God has done.

It's not something we earn. I'm working on a Theological Heritage III class right now for Course of Study. You know, Martin Luther launched the Protestant Reformation because he opposed the sale of indulgences by the Church. Basically, if you paid enough money, the Pope would write a certificate and say your sins were forgiven. That's what an indulgence

was. You can't buy salvation. You can't work your way into Heaven. Jesus paid the price for us in full, with His blood!

See, Paul goes on and says, "For He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves," (verse 13). We live in a time marked by people who are desperate to find their identity. To find belonging and purpose. From hashtags to movements, people are asking, "Where do I fit in?" "What tribe do I belong to?" "Who am I, really?"

Paul gives an answer here to these sorts of questions. We've been "brought into the kingdom of the Son He loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins," (verse 13b-14). We are a redeemed people, and part of God's family and kingdom now. We know from another book written by Paul, that:

In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8:37-39).

So what should that produce in us? We ought to be grateful. We should express constant gratitude to God for what He's done for us. It's hard to be grateful in a world of complaints. But Christians, of all people, should be marked by thanksgiving. Even in sorrow and uncertainty. Even in loss. Because we've heard of this hope.

So... Have You Heard of this Hope?

Paul wrote the epistolary letters nearly 2,000 years ago. But they speak right into the headlines of today. In a world where hope is often a marketing ploy or a campaign slogan, Colossians reminds us that true hope is heavenly – laid up for us in Christ. Hope is living – bearing fruit and growing. It's formative – producing faith, love, wisdom, and endurance. And it's secure – rooted in what God has already done, not in what we can do.

So friends, let me ask you. Have you heard of this hope? Not just heard like you hear a song in passing, but heard it like it's sunk into your bones. Heard it like it's changed your steps, your thoughts, and your future. Have you heard of this hope? If you've heard of this hope then walk worthy of it! Let it drive your faith, your love, and your gratitude. Share it with a world starving for something real.

And if you haven't yet heard it in that way – if the Gospel seems distant or abstract – come closer. Christ has qualified YOU. He has redeemed YOU. He has called YOU out of the darkness and into His marvelous light. This isn't just a message for the church at Colossae.

It's a message for 2025. It's a message for America, Ukraine, Sudan, and right here in Shelby County. It's a message for the anxious student, the overworked parent, the unemployed worker, the lonely retiree. It's a message for you – and for me!

Prayer: Gracious God, Thank You for the hope laid up for us in Heaven, a hope that never fades, never fails, and never disappoints. Help us to walk in that hope today – to live with faith in Christ, love for one another, and strength for whatever lies ahead. Fill us with the knowledge of Your will, and grant us endurance, patience, and joy. May our lives bear fruit that points others to Jesus, and may we always give thanks for the inheritance You've given us in Him. In the name of Christ, our living hope, we pray. Amen.