

Place: Lurgan Baptist 28:10:2012

Reading: Colossians 1:1-8

COMPLETE IN HIM

2. BACK TO BASICS

Fifty years ago France was occupied by the Nazi forces of Adolf Hitler. During that occupation there were many brave men and women of the French Resistance who were out to frustrate and eventually help defeat their enemy. In the first days of the Nazi invasion many of these resistance volunteers removed all the road signs in France so that the advancing German army did not know which way to turn or what direction to take. It led to a lot of confusion and frustration. My do you sometimes feel that the frustration and confusion of our times is because the “*sign posts*,” have been taken down. In France it was done to frustrate the enemy, but now it would seem it is the enemy who has removed the signposts. I mean, there are many in our land, who just do not know which way to turn or what direction to take. In such a time of crisis we need to turn back to the Holy Scriptures. In God’s Word alone we find the only reliable signpost for living. We need to get back to the Bible. We need to get back to basics.

Now in the pagan world of the first century there was much confusion invading the Church. In his letter Paul was giving “*sign posts*,” to the church at Colosse to

point them in the right direction and seeking to focus them on Christ. Like the Christians in other churches, those at Colosse were in imminent danger from strange doctrines. The population of the city was a mixture of Jews and Gentiles and the heresy that threatened the assembly was a combination of *Greek Philosophy* and *Jewish Ceremony*. Later it came to be identified as Gnosticism which means “*to know*.” An agnostic is one who does not know. You see, on the one hand there was *Greek Philosophy* which said, *Christ plus knowledge equals salvation*, on the other hand there was *Jewish Ceremony* which said, *Christ plus works equals salvation*. Those who were teaching these errors boasted that they had a superior philosophy (2:4, 8,) They were the people “*in the know*,” when it came to the deep things of God. They were the “*spiritual aristocracy*,” in the church. Of course all of this teaching was but man made philosophy based on traditions and not divine truth. (Col 2:8) So Paul writes this letter to refute such teaching and to set forth the preeminence of Jesus Christ.

I mean, is it not so easy to become jaded and faded in our appreciation of our Saviour ? My what we need is a fresh appreciation of who Jesus Christ really is, what place He occupies and how relevant He is to our times. Now it’s important to notice that Paul did not begin by attacking the heretics. Rather he began by encouraging the saints, assuring them of his love and prayers for them, and then he proceeded to exalt the Saviour. Notice here first of all,

(1) THE GRATITUDE THAT PAUL EXPRESSED

The famous Scottish preacher, Alexander Whyte was known as an appreciator. He loved to write postcards to people thanking them for some kindness or blessing they had brought to his life. These messages often brought a touch of encouragement to a heart just when it was needed most. *You see, appreciation is a great medicine for the soul.* Now Paul was a great encourager and this letter is a good example of the grace of thanksgiving. Here Paul gives thanks for what Christ has done in the lives of the Colossian believers. He also mentions thanksgiving in five other places in this letter (1:12, 2:7 3:15, 17 & 4:2) My when you recall that Paul wrote this letter in prison his attitude of thanksgiving is even more wonderful. I mean, can you picture Paul listening to Epaphras relate to him about the church in Colosse. Having heard it all, he turns to Timothy and Epaphras and says, “ *Let’s first of all give thanks.* ”

My is thanksgiving a lost art among us as the people of God ? We take so much for granted and our carnal attitude toward things can make us to be grumblers. We need to serve our apprenticeship at thanksgiving for thanksgiving is an essential part of a balanced prayer life. *Is thanksgiving part of your prayer life ?* How many times do you hear someone stand up in the prayer meeting and just express gratitude to God ? Doubtless Paul heard of their problems but he also heard of their faith, love and hope. He was able to trace the grace of God in their lives. Do you know what

thanksgiving does ? It gives us a positive attitude toward others. It looks for good in others, it looks for grace in others. In this grace we see the marks of a full orbed Christian life, faith, hope and love. Thirteen times in Paul’s writings do we come across this little triplet of “ *faith, hope and love.* ” Do you remember what Paul says to the Corinthian church ? “ *And now abideth faith, hope and love, but the greatest of these is love.* ” (1 Cor 13:13) Three words which are the basic ingredients of the Christian life. For these words summarize what the Christian life is all about. *You see, all of us live our lives in three dimensions. We have a past, present and a future. Faith that looks to the past, love that looks to the present, and hope that looks to the future.*

You see, faith is pre-eminently Paul’s theme. Hope is pre-eminently Peter’s theme and love is pre-eminently John’s theme. Faith possesses the past, hope claims the future and love rules the present. Faith sees Christ having come, hope sees Christ yet to come, and love sees Christ ever abiding. Faith realises, hope visualises and love vitalises. Now these are the traits that stimulates Paul’s prayer of thanksgiving ?

(a) FAITH: THAT LOOKS BACKWARD:

Look if you will at (1:4) You see, the Colossians are not like those who distort the gospel (Gal 1:7) or do not obey the gospel (1 Pet 4:17) no Paul is thankful to the Lord for their faith in Christ Jesus. Now the word

“*faith*,” means to be persuaded that something is true and to trust in it. It’s far more than intellectual assent, it’s far more than emotional concern, rather its total commitment to Jesus Christ. Now we are not saved by faith in faith. There is a cult of “*believism*,” today that promotes faith but has little to do with Jesus Christ. The modern attitude is, “*If you believe you are safe.*” But the obvious question is, “*Believe in what?*” Their answer, “*Just believe.*” Nor are we saved by faith in a set of doctrines. On one occasion George Whitefield the famous evangelist was witnessing to a man. “*What do you believe?*” Whitefield asked. The man replied, “*I believe what my church believes.*” “*And what does your church believe?*” asked the evangelist. “*What I believe,*” replied the man. Undaunted Whitefield tried again, “*And what do you both believe?*” “*Why we both believe the same thing,*” was the man’s evasive reply. My saving faith involves the mind, the emotions and the will. With the mind we understand the truth of the gospel, and with the heart we feel conviction and the need to be saved. But it’s only when we exercise the will and commit ourselves to Christ that the process is complete.

Two men in a boat were caught in a severe rapid, they were being swept towards a waterfall. Some men on shore tried to save them by throwing a rope. One man caught hold of it and was pulled to safety on the shore. The other, in the panic of the moment grabbed hold of a seemingly more substantial log that was floating by. That man was carried downstream, over the rapids never to be seen again. Now faith, just like the rope that

linked to the shore connects us to Jesus Christ and safety. But good works just like the log only leads to ruin. My this is where the Christian life begins. Faith in Christ Jesus. Now have you taken that step of faith? Are you totally reliant on Christ for salvation? (a)

(b) LOVE: THAT LOOKS OUTWARD:

“*And of the love which ye have to all the saints,*” (1:4) You see, we are saved by faith but we are saved to love. True saving faith is more than a conviction of the mind. It transforms the heart to love. Now what is love? “*God is love.*” (1 Jn 4:8) *Love is that selfless quality that seeks the good of its object even at personal cost. Agape love is the power that moves us to respond to someone’s needs with no expectation of reward.* My one of the most visible marks that you are truly saved is your love for your fellow believer. John talks a lot about it. He says “*We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren.*” He says, “*If a man say, I love God and hateth his brother he is a liar, for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen.*” (1 Jn 3:14, 4:20)

Did you notice that the Colossians love all the saints? “*And of the love which ye have to all the saints.*” Now is that not tough? The fact of the matter is there are some saints that are more lovable than others, have you ever noticed that? I mean it’s not hard to love the sweet saints but what about those old sour saints?

**To dwell above with saints we love,
That will indeed be glory;
To live below with saints we know,
Well that's another story.**

But the Lord enables us to love. I mean do you see what Paul says in (1:8) My that's the key. It's the Holy Spirit who gives us love. Paul says, “ *the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.* ” (Rom 5:5) We're saved to love. And that simply means the act of self - sacrificing service toward one another. Do you know when I most loving to you ? Not when I put my arm around and tell you some sentimental nonsense. But when I study as hard as I can to teach you things that will change your life. Do you know when you are most loving to me ? When you do all that God wants you to be and minister to me in any way you are able. (a) (b)

(c) HOPE: THAT LOOKS FORWARD:

“ *For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven,* ” (1:5) Now in the Bible “ *hope*, ” does not mean “ *hope so.* ” Rather hope is confident assurance of future glory and blessing. My because Christ is in us we have the “ *hope of glory.* ” (1:27) You see, these false teachers tried to unsettle these believers and move them away from the hope of the gospel. (1:23) But Paul made it clear that this hope is “ *laid up,* ” for believers in heaven. The phrase “ *laid up,* ” means “ *to be reserved, or to be set aside for someone.* ” The tense of the verb indicates that this hope has once and for all

been reserved so that nothing can take it from us. Hallelujah. Not only has this hope, our glorious inheritance in heaven been reserved for us, but we are being kept by God's power so that we can be sure of enjoying heaven one day. (1 Pet 1:5) My we are being guarded for glory. Do you know what an inheritance is ? Its something you get. It is something that is yours out there in the future. I heard about a couple of wasters who were out in the park one day just folli9ng around. Then one of them started crying, and the other one said, “ *What's the matter with you ?* ” He said, “ *Oh, I heard that Rockefeller died today ?* ” The other one said, “ *Well, what are you crying about ? You are not one of his heirs.* ” He said, “ *That's what I am crying about.* ” My does the hope of heaven and seeing Christ not encourage you in your times of trial and suffering ? Do you recall Paul's words ? “ *I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.* ” (Rom 8:18) My “ *It will be worth it all when we see Jesus,* ” (1)

(2) THE GROWTH THAT PAUL EXPECTED

Look if you will at (1:6) I wonder have you ever asked yourself. “ ***Why am I here ?*** ” Why has the Father chosen me ? Why has the Lord Jesus redeemed me ? Why does the Holy Spirit indwell me ? What is the one thing that you and I have been saved for ? The word we are looking for is in (1:6) Fruit. For when the gospel enters a heart that's been prepared by the Lord, it results in fruit. (Matt 13:3-8) Actually Bible scholars

tell us that (1:6) can read “ *And bringeth forth fruit and grows.* ” Now there’s a two fold fruit here. There is,

(a) SPIRITUAL GROWTH INDIVIDUALLY:

Look if you will at (1:6) “ *In you.* ” My the Word of God is alive and powerful, it is productive. Divine energy produces fruit. The gospel is like an inward energy that spreads like the mustard seed becoming a tree. Now let me ask, are you growing spiritually ? Paul talks here about love and that’s the fruit of the Spirit. Indeed he says to the Galatians “ *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering , gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance,* ” I suppose we could call it Christian character. Perhaps Christlikeness would be better. Murray McCheyne said, “ *Its not great talents God blesses but great likeness to Jesus Christ.* ” A Sunday School teacher had been telling her class about the wonderful qualities of the Lord when He lived on earth. Then she asked, “ *Where does Jesus live now ?* ” She fully expected one of the children to say, “ *in heaven.* ” But she was surprised when a little girl from a poor section of the town responded, “ *Oh He lives down our street.* ” Upon further questioning the teacher concluded that someone lived in that child’s block whose radiated the Lord Jesus. What about you ? Are you bearing this type of fruit ? My how like Christ are you ? (a)

(b) EXTERNAL GROWTH CORPORATELY:

For the gospel produces fruit not only personally but also externally. My are the two concepts not closely related ? The first idea of bearing fruit has an inward concept, the second is a spreading thing. The gospel gets into somebody and grows and he begins to mature and then it spreads and the church begins to grow. So, you have internal spiritual transformation and you have external growth in the church. ***Is that not what we find in the book of Acts ?*** You see, they grew internally, they grew inwardly, they grew spiritually in their hearts, and out of that came the growth of the church. For example, here’s what we read “ *Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria and were edified, and walking in the fear of the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost were multiplied.* ” (Acts 9:31) Spiritual growth individually, then external growth corporately.

Do you we not see the same thing in (Acts Ch 12) ? “ *But the word of God grew,* ” that is the Word of God was producing growth in the lives of the believers. And then it says, “ *And multiplied.* ” And then it was spreading so that others were being saved. Was this not the pattern time and again in the book of Acts ? Spiritual growth individually and flowing from that external growth corporately. I wonder does this highlight one of the reasons why we are not reproducing ? You see, character has to do with production, but converts have to do with reproduction. Of Dawson Trotman the great soul winner it was said “ *That he was born to reproduce.* ”

My what about us ? For surely the fruit of the believer is spiritual children, baby believers if you please. Is this not what Paul was thinking about as he sought to go to Rome ? He says, “ *I purposed to come unto you, that I might have some fruit among you also.* ” (Rom 1:13) Growth, but the only way we’re growing these days is by playing musical chairs. So a believer falls out over there and comes here and a believer falls out here and goes over there. Is that the growth Paul was talking about ? No. He’s talking about spiritual growth in terms of character, he’s talking about external growth in terms of converts. Maybe when we get ourselves sorted spiritually we’ll see God’s blessing on us evangelistically. Now look (1) (2)

(3) THE GOSPEL THAT PAUL EXTOLLED

He talks about it in (1:5) The Bible describes the gospel with several phrases. It calls it, “ *the gospel of the grace of God.* ” (Acts 20:24) “ *The gospel of His Son.* ” (Rom 1:9) “ *The gospel of Christ,* ” (1 Cor 9:12) “ *The gospel of God.* ” (Rom 15:16) “ *The glorious gospel of Christ,* ” (2 Cor 4:4) “ *The gospel of peace,* ” (Eph 6:15) And “ *the everlasting gospel.* ” (Rev 14:6) Here Paul describes it as “ *the word of the truth of the gospel.* ” Have you ever heard people say this ? That’s the gospel truth. People use that phrase when they want to stress their sincerity, so that what they say will be believed. Although folk may use that phrase flippantly there is a real gospel truth. Notice for example here,

(a) *THE GOSPEL IS REVEALED:*

“ *The word of the truth of the gospel,* ” (1:5) Paul tells us that this gospel is,

1. Centered in a Person:

Why the word “ *gospel,* ” means “ *good news.* ” My the gospel is the good news that the Lord Jesus has solved the problem of sin through His death, burial and resurrection. The false teachers who had invaded the fellowship in Colosse were trying to remove Christ from His place of preeminence but this was to destroy the gospel. It is Christ who died for us and rose again. I mean this gospel message does not centre in a philosophy, a doctrine or a religious system. It centers in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Do you see that phrase in (1:5) “ *Whereof ye heard before,* ” that is at the first. The old gospel as contrasted with any new fangled gospel such as threatened the Colossian church. My if you wanted to rouse Paul’s anger you only had to start preaching a rival gospel. Do you recall what he says, “ *If any man preach any other gospel unto you, than that ye have received let him be accursed.* ” (Gal 1:9)

C. H. Spurgeon once said, “ *People have often asked me, ' What is the secret of your success ? ' I always reply that I have no other secret but this, that I have preached the gospel, not about the gospel, but the gospel, the full, free, glorious gospel of the Living*

***Christ, who is the Incarnation of the Good News.
Preach Christ, brethren, always and everywhere.”***

2. Rooted in Grace:

It's the message of God's grace. (1:6) My is this not where the gospel contrasts sharply with the all the other religions of the world, which assume that man can save himself by his good works ? But the Bible says, “ *For by grace are ye saved through faith and that not of yourselves it is the gift of God, not of works lest any man should boast.* ” (Eph 2:8-9) Is this not the gospel that has been revealed ? Centered in a person and rooted in grace. (a)

(b) THIS GOSPEL IS RELATED:

For (1:7) says, “ *As ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellowservant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ.* ” Do you see what happened ? Epaphras evidently had gone over to where Paul was in Ephesus and had heard the gospel and been saved and when he returned back to Colosse he preached the same message that Paul had preached to his people there and they were saved. You see, one day they heard a faithful man, they heard a man preach the word of the truth of the gospel. My is that not what happened to you ? You walked into a church building like this and a man stood up in a pulpit like this and he was holding a book in his hand, it's the word of the truth of the gospel. And you heard the message from a faithful man and you were saved. Do you see how Paul describes

Epaphras ? “ *A faithful minister of Christ.* ” Thank God for faithful pastors and preachers of the Word. But tell me are we as faithful as we ought in getting the gospel out ? Like Epaphras are we seeking to reach out to our Colosse with the gospel ? (a) (b)

(c) THIS GOSPEL IS RECEIVED:

This gospel had been both heard and received and heeded because the Colossian Christians had not only listened to it (1:5) but they had received it and made it part of their personal experience. Look at what it says in (1:6) “ *Since the day ye heard it and knew the grace of God in truth.* ” What he's talking about is that wonderful day, when they heard the gospel and received it and they were saved. Do you know what ? ***Today could be your day.*** I mean this could be the day you have heard the truth of the gospel. This could be your day. In fact, my the Bible urges you to let it be this day. The Bible says, “ *Behold now is the accepted time, behold now is the day of salvation.* ” (2 Cor 6:2) Come to Christ today. Give your life to the Saviour today. Walk out of here saying, “ *Today was my day, it was my salvation day.* ”