

Sunday 24th September, 2023

Service for Swansea & Charlestown Presbyterian Church

Call to Worship

To whom will you compare me?

Or who is my equal?" says the Holy One.

Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens:

Who created all these? (Isaiah 40:25-26)

Song – Behold Our God

Who has held the oceans in his hands?
Who has numbered every grain of sand?
Kings and nations tremble at his voice
All creation rises to rejoice
Behold our God, seated on his throne
Come, let us adore him
Behold our king, nothing can compare
Come, let us adore him

Who has given counsel to the Lord?
Who can question any of his words?
Who can teach, the one who knows all things?
Who can fathom all his wondrous deeds?
Behold our God, seated on his throne
Come, let us adore him
Behold our king, nothing can compare
Come, let us adore him

You will reign forever (let Your glory fill-)
Behold our God, seated on his throne
Come, let us adore him
Behold our king, nothing can compare
Come, let us adore
Behold our God, seated on his throne
Come, let us adore him
Behold our king, nothing can compare
Come, let us adore him

Who has felt the nails upon his hands?
Bearing all the guilt of sinful man
God eternal, humbled to the grave
Jesus, Savior, risen now to reign
Behold our God, seated on his throne
Come, let us adore him
Behold our king, nothing can compare
Come, let us adore him

Bible Reading – Isaiah 55:8-11 (NIV)

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways,"
declares the Lord.

"As the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

As the rain and the snow
come down from heaven,
and do not return to it
without watering the earth
and making it bud and flourish,
so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,

so is my word that goes out from my mouth:

It will not return to me empty,
but will accomplish what I desire
and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

Announcements

Focus for the month – Equipping. The preaching of God’s word is to equip the saints for the work of ministry. Let’s be praying that the Holy Spirit would be leading us as a church to respond to the word. Pray each week the word would fall on good soil and we would bear much fruit for God’s glory.

Preaching over the next month. Jon will be preaching four sermons from Colossians 1 starting today. And David Wigney will preach the last Sunday before Stephen returns.

Sunday Sep 27th - Christ and the church

Sunday Oct 1st - Christ and prayer

Sunday Oct 8th - Christ and the cosmos

Sunday Oct 15th - Christ and ministry

Sunday Oct 22nd - Becoming More Like Christ (David Wigney)

Outreach in Windale. A small team from our church have begun praying and planning to do outreach in Windale. Please be praying and also considering whether you could be apart of this. For further information, please speak to Andrew Mackie, Colin Wright or Jon Brown.

School Holidays. We are now in the school holidays for three Sundays. That means our normal church activities such as kids church, Bible studies and Youth Group will be in recess until Term 4 begins. Holidays in the hall will be on for kids in pre-school to year 4. There is activity sheets for children remain in church.

Steve’s leave. Stephen is currently taking 6 weeks LSL during which the family will be travelling to USA/Canada for around a month. Please pray for a good time of rest and refreshment. If you need any pastoral help until the end of October, please see Jon or Mal or Jo.

Samaritan’s Purse Christmas Boxes. Boxes will be available from today for this campaign for \$1 per box. Fill your box and include \$12.50 for postage, have a box filled on your behalf for \$25, or buy a starter pack for \$8.50 and add a toy and article of clothing and \$12.50 for postage. Please speak to Kathryn O if you have any questions.

Meals on Wheels Charlestown (if room) - volunteers needed. If you have some time on your hands and would love to help out in the community Meals on Wheels may be the answer! They are needing help in the kitchen preparing the meals. Also delivering the meals, both drivers and support. For further information please speak to Ron Bell or Helen Flett. Or contact the Meals on Wheels office at 21 James Street, Charlestown on 49 435146 and speak to Cathy or Jenny.

Song – Only a Holy God

Who else commands all the hosts of heaven
Who else could make every king bow down
Who else can whisper and darkness trembles
Only a Holy God
What other beauty demands such praises
What other splendour outshines the sun

Come and behold Him
The One and the Only
Cry out, sing holy
Forever a Holy God
Come and worship the Holy God
What other glory consumes like fire
What other power can raise the dead
What other name remains undefeated
Only a Holy God

What other majesty rules with justice
Only a Holy God

Who else could rescue me from my failing
Who else would offer His only Son
Who else invites me to call Him Father
Only a Holy God
Only my Holy God!
Come and behold Him
The One and the Only
Cry out, sing holy
Forever a Holy God
Come and worship the Holy God

Prayer Points

Pray for Windale: Pray God would be opening hearts to his truth. Pray many in this suburb would come and bow the knee to the Lord Jesus. Pray for lives to be transformed. Pray for those from our church planning outreach in Windale. Pray for unity, a zeal for God's glory, and a love for the lost.

Pray for Libya. Pray for flood effected regions and many thousands grieving over loss of loved ones. Pray for a unified government that will rebuild the nation with justice and peace. Pray for the tiny Libyan Church to be united and established despite intense persecution. Pray for Jesus to reveal Himself to moderate and extremist Muslims alike.

Pray that the eyes of our state and territory leaders will be opened to see the need to protect the human rights of the unborn

Bible Reading – Colossians 1:1-8

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, **2** To God's holy people in Colossae, the faithful brothers and sisters ^[a] in Christ: Grace and peace to you from God our Father. ^[b] **3** We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, **4** because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people— **5** 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 **6** that has come to you. In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world—just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God's grace. **7** You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, ^[c] who is a faithful minister of Christ on our ^[d] behalf, **8** and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.

Sermon by Jon Brown

True Christians & The True Gospel

The apostle Paul wrote this letter from prison to a young church in the province of Asia. How this church came about is a great story. It happened during Paul's evangelistic mission in the town of Ephesus (Acts 19). Everyday Paul held dialogues in the hall of Tyrannus. For about two years. There he boldly preached Christ until everyone had heard him. It was probably during this period that a man named Epaphras was brought to faith in Christ. He most likely heard Paul preach Christ in Ephesus, and took the gospel back to his home town of Colossae. And a new Christian community was birthed.

Paul never went to Colossae. He never met these believers. And that's the main reason why he's writing to them. Epaphras reported back to Paul what happened: people are turning to Jesus! And the apostle is writing to assure them what's happened is the real deal. They are true Christians, and what they've heard from Epaphras is the true gospel. Colossians 2:6-8 is the key to the letter: "So then just as you have received Christ Jesus as Lord...so continue to live in him." When you receive Jesus, you don't then go on to bigger and better things. Because there is no one greater than Jesus Christ. He is the all-sufficient Saviour and the Supreme Lord of all.

It's a constant battle to hold on to the truths revealed to us. That's why the apostle warns them to beware of other stuff floating around. Other teaching can creep in and take us captive. We can be influenced by the spirit of the age, more than we know. We go with the flow. Unless we're swimming against the stream.

A bigger view of Jesus Christ is what's needed. And what's given in this letter. MLJ said, "Christianity is Christ, and if he is not at centre of all our thinking and experience, then we are not Christians."

We're going to look at the first 8 verses together. Paul has no doubt that these people at Colossae are true Christians. And what they heard from the lips of Epaphras was the true gospel. Those are our two headings:

1. True Christians

Check out from verse 3, "We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love you have for all the saints because of the hope reserved for you in heaven...." Don Carson said, "The unvarnished truth is that what we most frequently give thanks for betrays what we most highly value."

Paul gives thanks to God for three things about these Colossians, their: faith, hope and love. For Paul's that's short hand for authentic Christianity. He wants these believers to know that what they've experienced through Epaphras's gospel preaching is the real deal. Since faith, hope and love are the genuine marks of true Christianity, it will be helpful for us to dig a bit deeper with each.

So he thanks God the Father, for their faith in Christ Jesus. To say, "I believe in God" isn't enough. That's not Christianity. It's not faith in a denomination. It's not faith in a philosophy. It's not faith in my feelings. It's not faith in a proposition. Not even a book, ultimately. But a Person, the person of Jesus Christ. It's trusting Jesus Christ as your all sufficient Saviour and the Supreme Lord of all. And something mind blowing happens when we do this: we are united to Christ. Notice Paul started off his letter by saying, "To the saints in Christ at Colossae..." These believers lived at Colossae. A small and insignificant town. Off the map somewhere near the rich city of Laodicea. But at the same time, they are in Christ. They have

died and been raised with Christ. They are seated in the heavenly places with Christ Jesus. Their lives are hidden with Christ in God. In Christ this little community now has cosmic significance. Union with Christ means what's true of Him is true of you.

Imagine you need to board a plane...You're at the airport....there's you...there's the plane...My question is...What the relationship you need with the plane? Would it help to be under the plane? What about being inspired by the plane? What about following the plane? None of those will cut it will they....You need to be in the plane..Why? Because by being in the plane...it means what happens to the plane happens to you...This is what it means to be in Christ...When you put your faith in him...you're united to him...what's true of him is true of you.

But you must put your faith in Him. John Calvin said,

"As long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value to us."

And the next thing Paul thanks God for their, Love for all the saints. Love among believers is a sure sign of genuine Christianity. Love for all the saints. It's sounds nice doesn't it? But do you know that word Love is the word 'agape'. It's not just a fuzzy feeling. It's very practical. If you we want to know how to love one another, go to 1 Cor. 13. Love is patient. Love is kind. Love does not envy. It's not boastful, is not arrogant. Is not rude, is not self seeking. Is not irritable. And does not keep a record of wrongs. Paul highlights some of these again in chapter 3, "Put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience, bering with one another. Forgiving one another. Just as the Lord has forgiven you. Above all, put on love which is the perfect bond of unity."

Gospel love is the greatest mark. Now it's saints where to love, that should be easy right? Wrong! The poem, "To dwell in love with saints above, while that will be the glory. To dwell below with saints I know, why that's a different story." Saints are really hard to love. Just ask my wife. Why? Because as Luther put it, we are Simul Justus et Peccator - both saint and both sinner. And notice it says ALL the saints. Not just the ones we like. Not just the ones who dress the same as us. Or smell the same. Or talk the same. Or are the same age. ALL the saints. It's supernatural love that flows from Christ to us by His Spirit (v. 8).

Now the last true mark of Christianity is hope. The hope that is laid up for you in heaven. A Christian is someone who's ultimate hope/dreams, isn't on earth, but in heaven. Hope has to do with the ultimate future. And for believers it's a confident assurance that the greatest thing still awaits you.

It's not in this life. Heaven holds the greatest things won for us. It's not about living comfortably and having your best life now. It's not about self-fulfilment. It's about heaven and being with Christ forever. Where are the Colossians believers now? They're no longer at Colossae. There's nothing there but ruins. They are in heaven with Christ - they are more alive than ever! We live here, work here, serve here, but our true home is in heaven.

It's a hope that is kept safe in heaven, no one can break in and steal it. Nothing is really safe in my house at the moment. You wanna keep something safe, you have to put it 10ft off the ground. But thieves could still break and and steal my guitars. But you can never lose what's laid up in heaven? It's a hope that doesn't disappoint. It's sure and certain because it's grounded in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And now this takes us to our second point. Paul has been assuring these believers that they are true Christians. And thanking God for them. And now he wants to assure them about the message they heard through Epaphras:

2. The True Gospel

Notice in verse 5, “you have already heard about this hope in the word of truth, the gospel, that has come to you.” The gospel creates the church.

The only reason these Christians in Colossae exist is because some dude called Epaphras got converted through Paul’s preaching. And went and spread the news back home. they heard and received the gospel. Now there’s a few things we can point about the true gospel here:

First the gospel is a word. It’s something that can be articulated; put into words. It’s a message that makes sense. It’s straightforward really; In a nutshell it’s what Paul said was handed to him in 1 Cor. 15 from verse 3, “For I passed on to you as most important what I also received: that Christ Jesus died for our sins according to the Scriptures that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.” Jesus Christ is the gospel, his person and his work. We’ll dig more into in verses 15-23. Paul didn’t make this news up. He heard about something that actually happened. Christ died on the cross for our sins. He was buried, but rose again. And it was prophesied about. And there were eye witnesses. It’s a historical event. And the news of this historical fact that spread like wild fire and has changed the world.

And the gospel is the truth. The whole truth, and nothing but the truth. “The word of truth.” It’s not Paul’s truth. It’s not Epaphras’ truth. It’s not my truth or your truth. It’s the TRUTH. Oprah thanks people for sharing “their truth.” That’s nonsense. It’s not true if it didn’t happen. But you’ve probably noticed, we live in a time when feelings trump truth. Feelings are important. But the truth is more important! Our feelings should be guided by the truth. Not the other way around.

My kids feel like ice-cream for dinner every night. But the truth is it wouldn’t be good for them to eat it every night. It would hurt them. The truth might hurt your feelings but it can save your life. The gospel is the saving truth. Not one truth among many but THE truth. It’s not a matter of opinion. It carries a great authority with it. And therefore we can speak it with authority.

And the gospel is powerful. Notice in verse 6, “It is bearing fruit and growing all over the world just as it has among you since the day you heard it and came to truly appreciate the grace of God.” It’s like a seed that has life in itself. Remember Jesus parable of the Sower? The gospel brings forth fruit, by its own inherent power.

The prophet Isaiah in chapter 55 says, “For just as rain and snow fall from heaven and do not return there without saturating the earth and making it germinate and sprout, and providing seed to sow and food to eat, so my word that comes from my mouth will not return empty but will accomplish what I please and will prosper in what I send it to do.” And Jeremiah 23: “Is not my word like fire? This is the Lord’s declaration - and like a hammer that pulverises a rock?” In the New Testament, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God to salvation to all who believe.” Again in 1 Corinthians 1:22-24, “For the Jews ask for signs and the Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ and him crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles. Yet to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.”

The gospel has its own inherent power. It produces an effect. It changes lives and communities. And nations. Look at the apostle Paul, it changed a murderer into a missionary. It changes sinners into saints! In Colossae, it changed Pagans into Christians. It changed me, that’s why I’m standing up here. And Paul says it’s bearing fruit all throughout the world. Luther said, of the Reformation, Melancthon and I sat and pub and drank beer, while the word did the work. They estimate around 100

million people become Christians every year. That's 27,000 converts a day! It's still bearing fruit throughout the world. It can change you. It's God's power producing salvation for all who believe.

The Colossians believed it and were radically changed. And that's something to thank God about. And they had a faithful minister of Christ who reported these things back to the Apostle.

He doesn't report back on how great their programs were. Or their music. Or their graphics. But their faith in Christ Jesus, their love for all the saints, and their hope laid up for them in heaven. Wherever the true gospel is preached, you'll get true Christians springing up. Because that's how God the Father works through our Lord Jesus Christ. We need to regain our confidence in the power of the gospel. And why don't we spend some time this week thanking God where we can see him at work here. Spend some time examining our selves. And see how our faith, hope and love are doing.

Pray. Lord we thank you for faith - although it's weak. We thank you for love among us, however imperfect. We thank you for the hope laid up for us in heaven. We thank you for the gospel of Jesus Christ that is bearing fruit among us. And faithful ministers that preach it.
In Christ Alone.

Song – Facing A Task Unfinished

1 Facing a task unfinished
that drives us to our knees,
a need that, undiminished,
rebukes our slothful ease,
we who rejoice to know you
renew before your throne
the solemn pledge we owe you
to go and make you known.

2 Where other lords beside you
hold their unhindered sway,
where forces that defied you
defy you still today,
with none to heed their crying
for life and love and light,
unnumbered souls are dying
and pass into the night.

3 We bear the torch that flaming
fell from the hands of those
who gave their lives proclaiming
that Jesus died and rose;
ours is the same commission,
the same glad message ours;
fired by the same ambition,
to you we yield our pow'rs.

4 O Father, who sustained them,
O Spirit, who inspired,
Savior, whose love constrained them
to toil with zeal untired,
from cowardice defend us,
from lethargy awake!
Forth on your errands send us
to labor for your sake.

Benediction: 18 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. **19** Go [c]therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20** teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age.” [d]Amen. (Matthew 28:18-20).