

“Grounded, Growing, and Grateful” - Colossians 2:1-23

I recently did something I rarely do. Jana and I went out for a quiet birthday dinner together. It was a pretty busy place that night and when our food came it was bad. The salmon was dry, the broccoli was tasteless and the potatoes were cold. So I did what I usually do, I complained to my wife! With her usual clarity she said, “Send it back.” I don’t send stuff back. It will embarrass the waiter, the manager will come out and apologize, they’ll feel obligated to give us a free dessert...wait a minute...free dessert? I sent it back! They corrected the problem and the second version of my dinner was outstanding. So was the dessert.

I have a feeling there are a lot of people who approach the Christian life like I usually approach a bad meal; they just settle for a cold, tasteless, unsatisfying version of Christianity. They hear about some people who seem to have gotten “the full meal deal” but their faith has started to feel like warmed-up leftovers. Apparently that was the experience of many in the town of Colossae. They had been introduced to Christ and had even established a church in this cosmopolitan city. But Christianity was a new religion very much in the minority. The many philosophies and world views in this city created a lot of noise spiritually. As you might expect, under pressure those who were followers of Christ began to combine their new-found faith with other philosophies and the result was a cold, dry, tasteless experience. So Paul writes a letter to encourage them. Today we come to the heart of this letter.

I. The Purpose: 2:2-4. Paul’s goal was clearly stated in 1:28, to present every person complete in Christ. His goal was that the new-found faith of each Colossian believer would continue to the point of completion. He expressed the same idea to the Philippians in **Philippians 1:6**, “For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will *perfect* (complete) it until the day of Christ Jesus.” That should be our goal as well. When we say, “our mission is to lead people in a growing relationship with Jesus Christ,” we’re saying we want to contribute to what God is doing to complete what He has begun in you. While that work will look a little different in every person’s life, it will always involve three irreducible minimums found in vv. 6-7. He uses a mixed metaphor combining an agricultural metaphor with an architectural term to provide a beautiful description of the Christian life.

1. Grounded – “firmly rooted.” There is no growth until our roots are anchored in good soil. Jesus told a famous parable about seed that fell on four kinds of soil. The only seed that bore fruit was the one that fell on good soil. The life God intended begins when the seed of His word lands on the good soil of an eager heart.

2. Growing – “established and built up.” We are going to see that growth for the believer is not a matter of addition but nutrition. The more sound words we digest the less likely we will be to fall for false doctrine.

3. Grateful – “overflowing with gratitude.” This is the expulsive affection Gabe has been referring to. When our hearts are full of gratitude for what Christ has done there is no room for competing philosophies that leave us confused and unsatisfied. Grounded, growing, and grateful followers of Christ possess “a FULL assurance of understanding” (v. 2) of what Christ has done.

The Christian life is a full life. Jesus promised that His coming would enable us to live life to the fullest extent possible. In fact He promised that we could experience life “abundantly.” God has given us the key to a treasure chest that contains, “all the wealth that comes from the full

assurance of understanding, *resulting* in a true knowledge of God's mystery, *that is*, Christ *Himself*,³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” (vv. 2-3). Notice how often Paul uses this word (pleroma): 1:19, 25; 2:2, 9, 10. Every person who is a follower of Christ can experience a fullness not possible apart from Christ.

II. The Problem: vv. 4, 8. The Colossians were being told they needed something more than Christ. They needed to believe in some “new truths” that were plentiful in their city.

Gnosticism, a very real threat in Paul’s day, is not a problem in our culture but how about Mormonism or Jehovah’s Witness? Some people who would claim Christ as their savior also consult their horoscope or a palm reader, or a psychic. Not a problem for you? Then how about man-made rules that are popular in churches like how many Bible verses you should read or how you should cut your hair or what food and beverage is approved vs. those that are “not for Christians.” I’ll never forget the man who gave me a lecture about the evils of alcohol while he was chewing on the nastiest looking cigar I have ever seen! This kind of thing confuses people. There was a lot of confusion in Colossae with so many different religious expressions. When you are around nice people who believe differently you inevitably wonder if maybe there are multiple right answers. Chelsea Clinton married a Jewish man and the newspapers reported how common it is becoming for people of different faiths to marry. One article quoted a man in an interfaith marriage as saying it works as long as you don’t think your religion is the only one that’s true. Welcome to Colossae where we have designer clothes as well as designer religions. Any old religion will do just pick the one that suits you best. We’ve lost the “full assurance of understanding that leads to a true knowledge of God’s mystery – that is Christ Himself.”

Some were being “deluded by persuasive arguments” that were not only deceptive but deadly to a growing faith. Heresy is to the believer what Kryptonite was to Superman. Remember Clark Kent, “mild-mannered reporter of a great metropolitan newspaper” who was transformed into Superman who was “faster than a speeding bullet, more powerful than a locomotive and able to leap tall buildings with a single bound?” He was Superman but Superman had a weakness for two things: Kryptonite and empty revolvers. Heresy is like Kryptonite, it robs us of our vitality and threatens our mission. How can I spot a heresy?

The simplest test is to ask the question, “Who is Jesus Christ?” The fundamental test of any religion or philosophy is where does it put Christ – His person and His work? Does it deny His deity or His humanity? If so, then it robs Him of His fullness. Does it teach that you need some new experience to supplement your relationship with Christ? Then Jesus isn’t all-sufficient.

Deceptive heresies complicate the truth and diminish our confidence. The best heresies are the ones that sound plausible. They are religious “knock-offs.” Egs. 2:16-19, 23.

The truth of the Gospel is simple. 1:15-20; 2:2. I didn’t say it is simplistic, even Paul refers to it as “God’s mystery,” but it is attainable. And there is a pay-off – fullness of life.

III. The Prize: 2:9-15. Jesus, the God-man, embodies all the fullness of God. And here is the amazing thing; every believer shares in that fullness. You are complete in Him. Verse 10 could be translated, “And you are in Him, having been completely filled full with the present result that you are in a state of fullness.” (Wuest). Paul elaborates on a four-fold identification with

Jesus through circumcision (11), baptism (12), resurrection (13), and crucifixion (14).

When you were born into the family of God, your second birth, you were born complete with nothing lacking. One of the reasons I am unashamedly pro-life is that a baby in the womb has all the genetic material it will ever have from the moment of conception. No chromosomes will ever be added. Life is just a matter of growth over time. The same is true of the Christian life. From the moment of conception you have all the spiritual material you will ever need. You have Christ and are “filled with the fullness of God.”

Have you begun the greatest adventure anyone could ever experience? Have you received Christ? Because of what Jesus has done for you and in you, you can have the full assurance that:

You are completely saved (12-13a)

You are fully forgiven (13b-14)

You are totally free (15). Jesus’ victory on the cross has set us free from fear, deception, and the power of sin so that we can live life to the fullest.

When Paul used the word “triumph” his first century readers heard something different than what we hear. A triumph was an official celebration of a great military victory where the conquered army and their ruler was put on display. The ancient historian Plutarch gives a vivid description of the three day triumph honoring the Roman General Aemellius Paullus after his defeat of the Macedonians in the Third Macedonian War in 168 B.C.

He reports that great scaffolds were erected in the streets of Rome so that all the citizens of Rome who turned out in festive white garments could get a good view of the proceedings. They littered the streets with flowers and burned incense all along the parade route. As the chariots and horses trampled the flowers the smell of victory covered the city.

On day one, 259 chariots paraded statues, pictures and colossal images plundered from the enemy. On day two wagons rolled through the streets displaying the armor confiscated from the Macedonians. “All newly polished and glittering; the pieces of which were piled up and arranged purposely with the greatest art, so as to seem to be tumbled in heaps carelessly and by chance: helmets were thrown upon shields...quivers of arrows lay huddled among horses’ bits, and through these there appeared the points of naked swords. All these arms were fastened together with just so much looseness that they struck against one another as they were drawn along, and made a harsh and alarming noise so that, even as spoils of a conquered enemy, they would not be held without dread.” (Hughes, p. 79) Following the wagons came 3,000 men carrying the enemies’ silver.

On day three the captives were paraded through the streets following 120 sacrificial oxen with their horns gilded and their heads covered with flowers and garlands. Next came Macedonian gold followed by the captured king’s chariot, crown and armor. Then came the king’s servants with hands outstretched weeping and pleading for mercy. After the servants came the king’s family members and then King Perseus himself, clad entirely in black followed by his vanquished army.

For the grand finale, the climax of the triumph, the victorious general, Aemellius Paullus, appeared. Listen to Plutarch again, “seated on the chariot magnificently adorned, dressed in a robe of purple, interwoven with gold, and holding a laurel branch in his right hand. All the army, in like manner, with laurel boughs in their hands, divided into their bands and

companies, followed the chariot of their commander, some singing verses, according to the usual custom, songs of triumph and the praise of Aemellius' deeds."

Our ancient foe has been defeated. Jesus is the victorious King. "When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him." I can't think of a better way to respond to what He has done than to sing a song of triumph as we close...