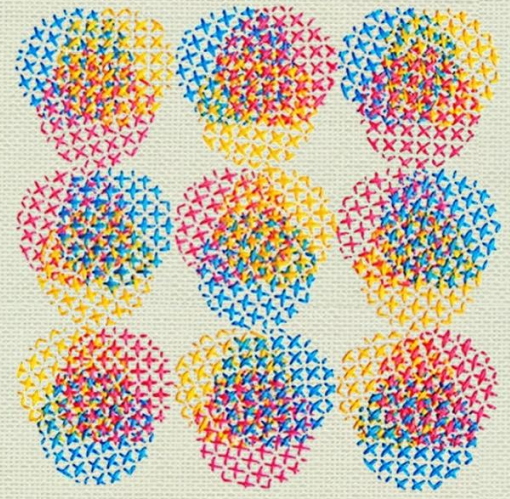


COLOSSIANS

A B O V E A L L



COLOSSIANS ABOVE ALL: EVIDENCE OF GOSPEL FRUIT

April 18, 2021

[Jeff Vanderstelt]

Colossians 1:1-8

Hi, I'm Habby, a member here at Doxa. We're going to be reading scripture together today. If you have one near, please grab your Bible. We're going to be reading from the epistle of Colossians 1:1-8. Please stand at your homes for the reading of God's Word.

"Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father. We always thank God, the father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the law that you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing--as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth, just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He's a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf and has made known to us your love in the Spirit." This is the Word of the Lord. Please be seated.

Hello, I'm Jeff Vanderstelt, one of the elders here at Doxa and it's my privilege to kick off our series on Colossians, where we see that Christ is above all. I want to start right in the first couple verses in Paul's greeting to help really set up the context of where we're going.

Paul says this, "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father."

The first thing we see here is that this letter is written by Paul, he's actually in prison while he's writing it, on behalf of he and Timothy. But if you look at the end of the letter, you'll realize that it was being delivered by a guy named Tychicus, which is one of Paul's teammates, and Onesimus, who is actually a runaway slave that belonged to the household of Philemon. And while Onesimus was running away, he actually came to faith in Jesus and became a part of Paul's temporary team, and was really useful to him. Paul speaks of him in really remarkable words saying how much of a great help he was to Paul. And so not only is he writing this letter to the church in Colossae, but there's another letter that accompanies it

that's specifically written to Philemon to address how he wants, Paul wants him to receive, Onesimus back as a brother in Christ. Now you're also going to notice if you read all the way to the end, that there's a greeting to five other people. And I want to just pause here because I think oftentimes we skip the greeting part and just move into what we think is the real kind of content, the real deep stuff.

And I don't want to miss the opportunity to identify that there were really four groups of people in the church in this day that really serve the advancement of the gospel. There were the elders, as we're familiar with here in our context that were local leaders, giving oversight to the local expression of the church. There were the deacons who serve the church and oftentimes led the daily ministries of the church. But then there were the two other groups that we often don't talk about. There, they were, what some would call an apostolic team or an extra-local ministers of the gospel. They were the people who would go and start new churches or strengthen already existing churches, or step into a situation that needed correction or completion because there was either something wrong or something lacking. And these people were a large number in Paul's day.

There were over 90 in Paul's team that went around and served the church this way. And then there was a fourth group of people. They are what we would call Gospel Patrons. They were people who realized God had endowed them with the resources to fund the extra local work that these ministers of the gospel were engaged in. Now I want to start there because as many of you know, I and Jessica Pohle are being released from staff at Doxa to serve the church at large, in a role similar to what Paul and his team were engaged in. And I won't be doing it alone. Jessica won't be doing alone. We're joining a team of people who are doing this as part of the Soma family of churches and the nonprofit Saturate to serve churches all over North America and beyond. And so I want to just stop Doxa, and say, you're part of that.

You're part of it because I'm part of it. And I'm part of you. And Jessica and I are on behalf of the church going to serve the larger church. And I know many of you are Gospel Patrons. You have been supporting the work. And I just want to say, thank you for your financial support of this extra-local work that Doxa gets to be a part of by extension, through sending people like me and Jessica. And I say that because though I'm kicking off Colossians today, it is also my last sermon as part of the staff team. I'll still be a part of the church as an elder serving you. But I will be doing more of my work extra-locally here in this region and beyond, and I covet your prayers as we move on into that work. Now back to the text. Before we understand what's going on, we got to understand the context of this particular group of people in Colossae.

Now Colossae is a town about 80 miles from Ephesus, it's on the banks of the Lycus River. It's what we now know today as the Western part of Turkey. It was also part of the Roman Empire. This particular church that Paul is writing to in Colossae was established through the evangelistic work of Paul in Ephesus. There, Paul was proclaiming the gospel every single day for two years in the Hall of Tyrannus. As a result of his consistent proclamation of the good news of Jesus every day for two years, Luke is able to say in Acts 19, that all of Asia heard the Word of God, both Jews and Greeks. Now, Paul didn't go throughout all of Asia. The reason why is because Paul would teach the gospel in such a way that people would come to faith in Jesus, and then he would train those new converts to go back to their cities and share the good news and establish the gospel, which would lead to new churches getting started. And Epaphras and Philemon were two of those guys visiting Ephesus, who also came to faith in Jesus, through Paul's ministry, and then Paul trained and equipped them to go back to Colossae and plant the gospel there.

Philemon eventually becomes the leader of a household church that's gathering in Colossae and Epaphras is one of the key equippers who not only shares the gospel there in Colossae establishing the church, but goes on to see more churches started in Laodicea and Hierapolis. The amazing thing is, is

Paul never went to any of those cities, but Paul, by extension, through this extra-local team, established the gospel in those places. Now the occasion of this letter is Epaphras comes back to Paul and says, Hey, we've got some problems. And really they are two-fold that the church in Colossae is facing. One is the political and cultural pressure that they're receiving from Rome. Because they were part of the Roman Empire, Caesar's image was on every coin, every cup, every wall, every gate. I mean, pretty much everywhere to establish clearly to everyone that Caesar, and this was the language they would use, that Caesar is the true son of God. Caesar's the real Lord overall. Caesar's the one who will save them as the savior from any threat that would come after them. And Caesar promised them what they called *pax romana*, which is the peace of Rome, which was this kind of existential reality of a hopeful opportunity where someday everything would be absolutely amazing. And if you just submitted to Caesar, you would experience this peace transform everything in the context. So they're living under that reality every single day. Now the other threat to Christianity and the supremacy of Christ in this moment was what we call religious syncretism. That's where we take all these other ideas, philosophies, religions, and we try to mesh them with Christianity and come up with some kind of weird kind of mutt of a religion. And the idea here that we can discern from reading this text is that there were probably a group of religious leaders, very likely Jewish, who were teaching that Jesus wasn't God, and he wasn't Supreme, and that his work wasn't sufficient. It was good, but it wasn't enough. Instead, they taught that you needed to kind of mix up this cocktail of spiritual practices and observants of particular religious days, or restrictions from certain foods, and even astrological worship all mixed together with Christian beliefs to somehow attain to a higher level of spirituality. So you've got these two problems: the pressure of Rome and Caesar is God, Caesar is Lord, and you've got this religious syncretism saying, Christianity isn't enough, Jesus, isn't enough, you need to add more to it, coming after the church. And so you can see a real threat to the basic faith that they all proclaim. That Jesus is enough. Jesus is over all. Jesus is sufficient.

Paul wants to write that Jesus is greater than Caesar. He's the true creator and Lord. He is the one that's ultimately Supreme. He is the one through whom all things are held together and for whom all things exist. And the work of Jesus is enough to sufficiently qualify them to be children of God, sharing in the inheritance of heaven forever. That he is enough. That Jesus is above all else. His work surpasses anything we've done or anything we'll ever do. And that's going to be our theme throughout the entire walk through Colossians. That Jesus is above all. Man, this letter is so needed for us today.

In our present cultural moment, we have observed syncretism all over the place. Where we are trying to fit our beliefs in a culture that doesn't conform to Christianity. And instead, we're trying to conform to the culture instead of to Jesus. We've synchronized or synchrotized our faith and our politics so that some people actually believe that being a Christian is equal to being a Democrat or being a Republican. We've exalted leaders as though they are our personal Jesus's, our personal savior. We've been told that certain religious, political or social behaviors, if we engage in them appropriately, as the culture says, will actually be more acceptable, more spiritual. And sadly, many of us have formed a dualistic separation between our faith and our everyday life. We have a religious kind of behavior and then we have our everyday life and we don't think the two should come together. We separate faith and our work. And many of us believe then that there are just some things that are spiritual. Some things that are actual worship. Some things that are actually glorifying to God and almost everything else is not spiritual, doesn't matter. And unfortunately, what we've done is we've fallen into the same thinking that Rome wanted people to believe and that is, this part of your life belongs to the culture, belongs to the politics, belongs to the social strata you join or are a part of, but this part of your life, that's only Jesus's. But the truth is Jesus is over all and he wants to be through all for you and me. When you believe this, when you see that Jesus truly is above all, that he wants to be working through all in your life, you will be able to agree with what Paul says later in the letter, Colossians 3:17,

"Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

That's the kind of life that Paul wants the Colossians church to live. That's the kind of life he wants you and I to live. And that's how Paul begins his greeting, giving thanks in everything, but in very specific terms, for the people of the church in Colossae. He says this in verse 3.

"We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you."

Paul's going to share that he's thankful for three things that are evidence of the gospel, get bearing fruit in their life. And that is faith, love, and hope. See this group was completely without God, without hope in the world, and then they found Jesus and their lives were radically changed. And they experienced the fruit of the gospel bearing for them a faith that was transformative, a love that was spilling over in their lives, and a hope that was eternal. And as I walk through each one of those three fruits of the gospel bearing fruit in our life, I want you to ask yourself, where am I experiencing a growth in my faith? An extension of my love? A confidence in the hope that I have in heaven? I want you to examine where you already have received it, but also where you might be lacking the fruit of the gospel. And wherever you're lacking it, I want you to ask this question: how or where have I believed that Jesus is not actually above all? Or that his work is not actually sufficient for me? Let's stop and pray that the Spirit will reveal that to us as we keep working through this text.

Father, I believe, we believe that your word is powerful. It's living, it's active, it's transformative. It can change us. And we ask that you would work in and through us now as we continue to ask the question, where are we lacking any of the fruit of the gospel and where might we need to put more hope and faith in Jesus that we might overflow in love toward one another? Help us as we continue in Jesus's name. Amen.

Paul starts with their faith. Verse 4, "Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus." The fundamental doctrine of Christianity is that we are saved by grace, through faith in Jesus Christ, not by our own works. That what we do doesn't make us more acceptable and what we've done wrong, doesn't make us more rejectable. But rather we are ones who believe by faith, that we have been saved by grace, by a gift given to us by God. And I want to stop and acknowledge that to have faith, fundamentally, means you know you need something. That's what it means to have faith. It means you realize you're lacking or that you are unable to do something or have something. And so you must put your faith in someone or something else to be for you or do for you what you aren't or can't do yourself. If we look back at Paul's initial greeting, we hear Paul say this to the church, "To the saints," remember that word, "and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father." Now notice what he calls them. He calls them saints, faithful brothers. They were previously sinners. And now they're saints. Holy ones, set apart for God. Seen as acceptable. Purified without sin. Saints and faithful.

They were previously not faithful. They were not following the ways of Jesus. Now he's calling them faithful. And not only is he calling them faithful, but he calls them faithful brothers. They were once enemies of God. And now Paul is reminding them that through faith, they are now children of God. Part of the eternal family with Jesus. Now, how is this true of them?

Well, they knew they were needy. They knew that they needed help. They realized they were sinners. They realized they weren't faithful. They realized they didn't belong to the family of God. And so they had to put their faith in Christ who could forgive them, who could make them faithful, and who could bring them into the family. That's at the very heart of faith is your acknowledgement that you are needy for someone else to do what you can't do for yourself. And because of that, Paul says they are now in Christ by faith. Now, this is a huge statement. In fact, if you look at most of Paul's letters, he will use the phrase in Christ over and over and over again. And what he means is that all those who put their faith in Jesus now partake of all that Jesus is and will be for them. All that Jesus has done and will do for them.

Another way to think about it is this. If your faith is in Jesus Christ, your life is in Jesus Christ. And if your life is in Jesus Christ, then all that is true of Jesus Christ is now true because you are in him spiritually, true of you as well. Which is why Paul can say, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father." What he's saying is because your faith is in Christ, your life is in Christ, you can now by grace receive all that is true of Jesus and all that he's done for you by grace as a gift that God gives you.

I want you to think about that. If your faith is in Christ and all he is, and all he's done, then all that he is, and all that he's done is now true of you. Which means as God the Father loves God, Jesus Christ the Son, God the Father loves you. As God the Father accepts Jesus Christ the Son by faith in Christ, God accepts you. As God the Father is pleased with all the work of Jesus's righteous life lived on this earth, if your faith is in Christ, that is also true of you. God is pleased with your righteous life that you didn't earn, but Jesus gave to you because of his own work on your behalf. This is all given to you. It's all grace. You don't earn this. You don't attain this. You don't strive for it. You receive it as a gift. And Paul wants the Colossian church to never forget that because all of these other religious people are coming in and saying, no, it wasn't enough. You've got to earn it. You've got to do more. You've got to observe particular practices and rituals in order for God to truly accept you. And Paul's going "No! If you are in Christ then all that is true of Christ is now true of you by faith." And here's how it works. When you believe this, you receive it. It's by grace. It's what we believe through faith, it's what we receive.

And as we receive God's grace, it not only changes our relationship with God, but with one another, which is why Paul continues with the word love. "Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus," verse four, "and of the love that you have for all the saints." And then later in verse eight, Paul says how Epaphras had shared and "made known to us your love in the Spirit." For Paul, faith in Jesus Christ and the free gift that we've received by grace will prove itself to be a genuine faith when it's expressing itself through love. He says that later in Galatians 5:6. In other words, you know that you have faith in Jesus because it produces a love for one another. Jesus, in fact says it this way in John 13:34 and 35, after he just got done serving his disciples, he said, "You're going to be able to tell who the true disciples are by their love for one another." In other words, true faith will produce affection for one another, love for one another. And sadly, we have so many people who claim the name of Christian or Jesus, and yet have so little love for anyone. Ken Hughes says it this way. "We've all met people who claim to be good Christians, who were upstanding, honest, and orthodox--but unloving. They had a loveless goodness, an orthodoxy without charity, a questionable faith." He calls it.

They were the kind of people Mark Twain had in mind when he said, "He is a good man in the worst sort of way." Religious but unloving. Knowledgeable but uncaring. Righteous, quote unquote, but with no compassion. And later when Paul speaks to the church in Corinth, he says, "The people who do these good works, but have not love are just like a clanging gong or a resounding cymbal. They're just making a ton of noise that nobody wants to be a part of."

John says this about all those who truly know the love of God. In 1 John 4:7-8, he says, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love." John continues in that letter describing how Jesus was the demonstration of the Father's love as he gave his own life to pay in full for our sins. And here's the big idea that John wants to get across. He's saying, "If you have come to believe and know the love of God personally, if you knew you were a sinner and an enemy of God, and yet God still chose to give you his own son and Jesus willingly laid down his life on the cross to forgive you of your sins so that you might have the love of God poured out into your heart. If you know that, if you believe that, if you've experienced that, you will be filled with love for people." You want to know if you believe the gospel, you want to know if you have the fruit of faith trusting in Jesus in your life, consider how you love people. Because love is the outcome of faith in Jesus who loved you first.

I was in Charleston a few months back doing some of that extra-local work that I'm being released to do, and Charleston is going to be one of the key cities we're going to begin to work in. And I had the privilege of meeting with a black pastor. His wife served in the Emanuel AME Church, many of you know about in 2015, June 17, a 21 year old white supremacist walked into that church and just shot callously with so much hatred in his heart. Nine people killed then. And this black Pastor's wife was shot in that Bible study. As we sat with him and he recounted what he went through when he found out the news. And then when he was aware that there was going to be a court date and this young man who killed these people was going to be there. He remembered, he recounted to us. He said, "I didn't want to show up. I didn't want to go there. I didn't want to look at him." He said, "but I was compelled." He said it was like, "Jesus got me up out of my chair and walked me to the courtroom." And he said, "As I got into the courtroom, I kept saying, I'm not going to do this. I'm not going to do this." But he said, "Jesus's love and his grace compelled me to forgive this guy." And if you know much of the story, he expressed forgiveness publicly to this 21 year old. Now the 21 year old didn't receive it. He's had just as much hatred after he heard the words of forgiveness as before. But this Pastor recounted to me that he couldn't help but give grace because he had received grace from Jesus himself.

That's the fruit of the gospel. When you are so aware that what you receive from Jesus was so undeserving, that what you deserve was not forgiveness, but condemnation. When you received the love of God, when you knew that you were an enemy of God, and when you understand what real grace and forgiveness looks like, you can't help but love others. And that's what was happening in the Colossians church. People from so many different backgrounds, ethnicities, you had all kinds of races coming together. You actually had slaves and slave owners in the same church. It was a different form of slavery back then, but still oppressive and really broken. And yet these people were coming to faith, men and women, young and old, rich, and poor, educated and non-educated. And they were all linking arms together as one family worshiping God together. Sadly, this last year, I feel like we've seen so little of that. So much division instead of unity. So much hatred instead of love. So much rejection instead of loving acceptance of one another over race, politics, how people handled COVID, you name it. And unfortunately, many of these people claim to be followers of Jesus. How is this so? Paul would say, "I question that, because the fruit of your faith in Jesus is a life of love toward one another."

Years ago, when we first started Soma Church in Tacoma, and I don't know if you've ever heard this story, one of my favorite stories, we got to go to this restaurant over and over again with some guys I was discipling and we regularly were intent on making sure we tipped really, really well. And so of course the servers all wanted our table and this one woman got to know us because we'd go there every week together. And she would try to get our table regularly. And at the end of our time together, I would always ask her, "How are you doing?" As she would kind of bring the check and get ready for us to leave. And you know, most often she would just answer, "I'm fine." You know, nothing very significant, but one day I asked her that, and she started to tear up. And as the tears streamed down her face, she told us that she had moved to Tacoma because she could afford to buy a home, whereas she couldn't in Seattle, and she had bought a fixer upper and she said every night she went home to a house that she had demolished. There was broken tile everywhere, drywall was missing because she had to demolish the home to rebuild it. But she said she had no idea what she was doing. And she would come home from working two jobs, crawl into bed, crying in the middle of a mess, wondering if she was ever going to get help. And this went on for months. And as she shared that with us in that moment, I had to chuckle because a couple of the guys that were with me actually worked in construction and in tile, they could do everything I knew they could. And I didn't know what would happen in that moment. But in that moment, they chimed in and said, what if we helped? What if we were to fix it? We, and she said, can you guys do that? And they said, this is what we do for a living. And she was overwhelmed. She said, I can't ask you to do that. And they said, you didn't ask us. We offered. And over the next few months,

those guys along with a bunch of others, remodeled her entire home. And I'll never forget the first time she came to one of our gatherings on a Sunday, she had never been a part of a church, she walked up and joined me in communion, and she started to take communion. I said, "Why are you taking this?" She said, "I am so overwhelmed with the love of Jesus. The way you loved me is evidence that he must love me." And she responded in faith and gave her life to Jesus, in that moment, putting her faith in the one who showed his love, not only through the cross, but through his people who showed up in her life. When you have faith in Jesus, it will show up in your love for people. And where you have no love, you might want to ask, is it possible that I don't know Jesus? Is it possible that maybe I don't know his love that well yet? Is it possible that I'm lacking real deep faith in the God who loved me through Christ? So I just want you to stop and ask which relationships in your life are you presently lacking the truth and the power of the gospel that would show up in love? Where have you given yourself permission to not forgive, to not be kind, to not be loving?

Lastly, Paul celebrates their hope. He says it this way, "because of the hope laid up for you in heaven." Now typically the apostolic order of these three virtues is faith, hope, and love. But Paul intentionally to this group of believers in Colossae changes the order. He says, "It's your faith and your love that springs forth from your hope." In other words, you were without God and without hope in this world, but because of Epaphrus and Philemon bringing the incredibly good news of Jesus Christ and the joy of this salvation you've received, you now have this kind of eternal hope that has changed everything for you, both now and forever. You have the hope of heaven, both on earth and one day in the new heaven and the new earth. And as a result of that hope that you have, you have faith and you have love. In other words, Paul is speaking to a context in Rome where Rome kept promising these people a hopeful future, but the problem was, it was only available to the elite, the educated, to the exalted, and it was only temporary at best. And Paul in the face of Rome's hope, wants to offer a far better hope. The reminder that they are inheritors of good news of the gospel that gives them the privilege and the standing to be able to actually have everything that belongs to Jesus now belong to them.

It's a far greater hope. In fact, I would just pause and ask you this question. What have you been putting your hope in? Because whatever you put your hope in will be what you ultimately put your faith in. Let me say it this way. The idea of hope is that I'm anticipating something. I'm longing for something. I'm looking for something to do for me what I hope it will do. Accomplish for me what I hope it will accomplish. Give to me what I think I absolutely need. And whatever I set my hope in will be the thing I put my faith on. Now, your faith and the depth of it, and the certainty of it, will always be connected to how certain this hope is. And the problem is for many of us, we are setting our hope in something that's not certain, whether it's the stock market, a doge coin, whether it's your kid's future, whether it's your own success in a company that might not be here in a year or two. If you're putting your hope in any of those things, your faith will be meager at best.

And as a result, your love will likely be waning all the time, because it will always be on the rocky waves or your present circumstances and how well today is going for you. But for those of us who know Christ, our hope is certain. Not only because we know he overcame sin and death through his resurrection, which should give us absolute confidence to never have to fear the reality of our impending death, but it also gives us great hope, knowing he is present with us by his spirit to walk with us through anything we go through, which means we have not only a great hope, but that hope gives us great faith and that great faith produces an amazing love for God and people. Now I was in Virginia a few weeks ago, trying to raise some more support for the work we're doing. And I had the privilege of meeting with this man who flew in a little early to be with us before this fundraising dinner.

I won't share his name, but he's a very wealthy guy. And I was just amazed at how generous of spirit he was. I mean, this guy was, is so in love with Jesus. And every story he told was about him loving people. And the guy who was with him was kind of like his body guard, but also his financial advisor, the guy

who I think who gives the yes, okay, well, let's give money to this organization. He told me later, he goes, just so you know, you're not getting a check tomorrow. We have to do a full due diligence thing and here's the deal. And he said, my friend here would give everything away to you in this moment because he so loves Jesus, and he loves the work of Jesus that he just gives it all away all the time.

And while I was with this guy, hearing all the stories, I was overwhelmed with so much joy, as he talked about the joy he has in giving everything he's got to Jesus. He shares Jesus everywhere. In fact, at the fundraising dinner, he was with one of the waiters, praying over them at one point in the night, I'm like, what's this guy doing? He is just oozing with the affection of Christ. And here's what he said. He said, Jeff, I've only known Jesus for 10 years, before that I was, in some drug addiction, some other stuff, was ruining my life. Had tons of money, so he just was spending it like crazy. He said, I've been with Jesus for 10 years. And he said, here's the deal. If there was no life after death, these 10 years would have been enough.

He said to be with Jesus, to know Jesus, to do what Jesus has done in my life toward others in the way that he loved me, now, I get to love others. He goes, it would have been enough. I have experienced heaven on earth. And as I listened to him talk, I thought, this is a man who has great hope that he's not wasting his life, which has given him great faith in Jesus, the one who gave his life for him, which is leading him to be the most amazing loving man I have ever met, honestly, one of the most astounding examples of a man who has a lot of wealth, but he's not putting his hope at all in his wealth, but rather in Jesus. And therefore he's using his wealth to love others ridiculously. See, Jesus is going to appear one day. This isn't about just what we see temporarily around us. John says it this way, "Beloved, we are God's children now," that's true for us now, "but what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he, Jesus, appears, we will be like him, because we will finally see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself now as he is pure." See Jesus changed everything and he will change everything. You and I have a certain hope that not only do we get to experience heaven on earth, through Jesus's spirit in our life today, but one day he will bring it completely and we will experience our lives being completely transformed. And this world will be finally what we ultimately hoped it would become. I sometimes wonder if the reason why we love so little is because our desire for the kingdom of God is so little. So small. CS Lewis speaks to that in *The Weight of Glory*. And he says this, "It would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are halfhearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased." Now I've heard some people say these people are too heavenly minded they're of no earthly good. But I wonder if the apostle Paul might say to many of us, you're too earthly minded. You're too set on the temporal. You put too much of your hope in what is so small. And that's why your love is so small. That's why your faith is so small. And Paul, I would believe to us, as he's saying to the church in Colossae, don't forget what you already have. Set your hope on what is eternal, not what is temporary. So I want to ask you, what have you put your hope in today, you'll know because it'll shape your faith, and it will be the thing that most forms how and who you love.

When you and I realize with eternal eyes that we have an eternal inheritance, we will be willing to lose whatever is temporary, because we already know we have what is eternal. When we realize, and remember that we have an eternal home, we'll be willing to open our homes to others. When we believe in and trust that we have eternal riches in Christ, we'll be willing to give away our present and temporary riches for the good of others. When we realize that we are eternal children of God forever, we will want everyone who doesn't yet know the love of God to come into the family. And we will share generously not only our lives, but the good news of Jesus so that they could join us in this forever family

in the future. But if your hope is only on what is temporary, you will have a temporary faith and a love that looks nothing like Jesus.

Thankfully, that's not what happened to the church in Colossae. I pray it's not what happens to us, Doxa, which is why Paul could say of this church, "Of this you've heard before in the word of truth, this gospel, which has come to you, and indeed in the whole world is bearing fruit and increasing as it does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth." See, Paul knows that when people really get the gospel, really believe that God loved them in Christ, really have their hopes set on what is eternal, that they will have a love that bears fruit, that they will have people all around them who experienced the kingdom of God breaking into their world. That there will be an eternal inheritance that they already know they have, that they willingly share with everybody they come in contact with. And this kind of faith and that kind of hope and this kind of love will bear fruit more and more and more. Doxa, it's my prayer through this series of Colossians, that we will be a church that is growing in our faith because of the great hope we have in heaven. And as a result, we will become incredibly loving people and God will bear much fruit through our lives as a result, let's pray that he does that.

Father, thank you for the good news that you love us regardless of what we've done or will do. Thank you that our hope is not in what is temporary, but what is eternal. That our hope is not in something that ends in death, but in the one who overcame death through his resurrection. And as a result, we have a great confidence we can have a strong faith because our hope is certain and therefore our faith is deep and strong. And Lord where it's not, would you open our eyes to whatever we have hoped in, or however we've seen Jesus as not enough, as not over all, and in all, and through all in our lives. And it is our desire that this faith springing from hope would produce a kind of love that looks a lot more like Jesus, every day. Help us we pray, in your name, Jesus. Amen.