2025-07-13 Faithful Saints in Christ

Colossians 1:1-14 (NIV)

I. Greeting 1:1-2

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 in Christ: Grace and peace to you from God our Father.

Today, we'll explore the Book of Colossians, one of the four Prison Epistles. What are the Prison Epistles? They are Ephesians, Philippians, Philemon, and Colossians.

From the opening of Colossians, we see the writer and the recipients. The writers are Paul and Timothy. Paul introduces himself as an apostle of Christ Jesus. An apostle is someone sent out, a representative of the sender. The term also carries the meaning of a "messenger." By calling himself an apostle of Christ Jesus, Paul indicates that he is sent by Jesus Christ to convey His message.

Paul highly values his apostolic identity. He describes the apostle Peter as the apostle to the circumcised (the Jews), while he is the apostle to the Gentiles, the non-Jews. Though their audiences differ, their mission is the same: to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Paul specifically notes that he is an apostle **"by the will of God."** Why does he introduce himself this way to the brothers and sisters in Colossae? Why is this introduction so significant? Pastor Kaan loves watching movies to learn Mandarin. I once tried watching American movies to learn English, but when I focused on the English, I missed the plot; when I focused on the plot, I forgot the English. In the end, I neither learned English nor understood the movie. How do Cantonese-speaking brothers and sisters learn Mandarin? Do you also watch Chinese movies? I know some mainland brothers and sisters who speak Cantonese learned it through TVB dramas.

In Chinese films, especially those set in imperial courts, we often see a scene where a eunuch holds a yellow silk scroll—a decree from the emperor. The eunuch arrives before officials, proclaiming, "The Imperial Edict has arrived…" At these words, even the highest officials kneel. The eunuch then reads, "By the mandate of heaven, the Emperor declares…" Are these the eunuch's words? No, they are the emperor's. And when officials kneel, are they kneeling to the eunuch? No, they kneel to the emperor who issued the decree. The eunuch carrying the edict represents not himself but the emperor. Similarly, Paul, as an apostle of Christ Jesus by God's will, speaks not his own words but God's message.

Do you see how significant Paul's introduction is? Everyone who hears this letter must listen carefully, for Paul's words carry God's authority. As God's decree, shouldn't every child of God listen attentively?

Who is this letter addressed to? The saints in Colossae. How does Paul describe these saints? As faithful brothers and sisters in Christ.

First, Paul calls them **"saints."** When we hear "saints," we might think of exceptionally holy, morally upright people who live ascetic, simple lives in close communion with God. But Paul calls "all" the brothers and sisters in Colossae saints. Are they all spiritual giants? If you read the entire book, you'll see that while the Colossian church is commendable, it's not perfect—it faces internal issues and challenges.

Paul calls them "saints" not because of their deeds but because of what the triune God has done for them, setting them apart as holy. In Colossians 1:12-14, Paul reminds them that they share in the inheritance of the saints because God has rescued them from the dominion of darkness, brought them into the kingdom of His beloved Son, and granted them redemption and forgiveness of sins through Christ. In verse 8, he mentions their love in the Spirit. Thus, it is the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—the triune God—who makes them saints.

Second, Paul's description of their position is striking. Where are these brothers and sisters? In Colossae, a city in modern-day Turkey, now in ruins. In the first century, Colossae was known for its textile industry. It was under Roman rule, like other Mediterranean cities. Imagine these believers living not in a Christian-dominated culture but in a diverse, pluralistic one. Greek philosophy, Roman ideology, Jewish traditions, and local customs created a complex religious landscape. Such diversity could easily blur their focus, confuse their faith, and leave them wondering: What should I believe? What is true faith?

Moreover, early Christianity was not widely accepted. Where was Paul when he wrote this letter? In prison. Why? Because of the gospel. The Colossian believers likely didn't know Paul personally; they may have heard of him but were more familiar with their founding pastor, Epaphras. Epaphras, possibly converted through Paul's ministry in Ephesus, returned to Colossae to establish the church. Where was Epaphras when Paul wrote this letter? Likely with Paul—in prison! Philemon, written around the same time as Colossians, mentions Epaphras as a fellow prisoner. If you were a new believer in Colossae, with your church's leaders imprisoned, how would you view this faith? Surrounded by diverse philosophies, religions, and Roman state religion, was it easy to hold fast to Christ?

Last week, Pastor Julia reminded us that life and faith in Canada can be too comfortable—we should step out and see the world. Canada faces cultural diversity, false religions, and even heretical teachings infiltrating churches. Some politicians propose remove religious groups' charitable status. Yet, Canada remains relatively friendly to Christianity. For example, on the citizenship test, one question asks, "What is Canada's largest religion?" You must choose Christianity, or you lose a point. Canada's faith challenges don't typically threaten our lives, jobs, or families. But in Chinese house churches, holding to Christ can mean significant loss. In Hong Kong, believers increasingly feel the difficulty of standing firm.

We can't return to first-century Colossae to experience their challenges, but you can join the mission trip with Pastor Julia to see how Christians in other parts of the world face faith struggles. At a recent prayer meeting, Catherine shared about a pastor at a retreat who said missionaries to India need the stamina to run 10 kilometers and must sign three death waivers. If you are not ready for a mission trips, that's okay. In our church, God has brought together brothers and sisters from Hong Kong, mainland China, Malaysia, Taiwan. This gives us a chance to learn about faith challenges in different contexts. Mainland believers can understand Hong Kong's situation without visiting, and Hong Kong believers can learn about mainland faith challenge through those here. English-speaking believers can also learn from these brothers and sisters about the faith challenges faced in their respective areas.

Why should we care about others' faith struggles? Because we are in Christ. Paul reminds the Colossians that they are not only in Colossae but, more importantly, in Christ. In Christ, we are called Christians; in Christ, we are the church; in Christ, we are members of one body; in Christ, we cannot only care for ourselves but must bear one another's burdens. Our brothers and sisters are not just in mainland China or Hong Kong—they are in Christ. This vision helps us uphold the body of Christ, sharing in both honor and hardship, avoiding the hypocrisy Pastor Chu mentioned last week—being outwardly polite but inwardly judgmental.

How did the Colossian church fare in such a diverse and often hostile environment? Paul calls them faithful brothers and sisters. Let's explore what "faithful" means later. Let's look at what did Paul do for these faithful believers he had never met?

II. Thanksgiving Prayer: Faith, Love, Hope (1:3-8)

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, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf,

8 and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.

Paul prays for these believers, beginning with thanksgiving. For what? Their faith in Christ Jesus and the love they show to all God's people. What is the foundation of this faith and love? Hope. Where does this hope come from? The gospel, delivered by faithful ministers. These short verses contain key faith concepts.

Let's start with **faith in Christ Jesus.** Paul doesn't just say faith in Jesus as an object but faith in Christ Jesus—the sphere of their faith. This faith arises from a relationship with Jesus Christ and fellow believers, creating the context for their faith.

This relationship begins with God. God created humanity in love, became human to bring us back to Him. This faith is visible through love for all God's people—all believers, the saints. Loving some believers is easy, but loving ALL? That's hard. Loving those who are like us or agreeable is simple, but loving those who are different or difficult? That's a challenge. Yet faith in Christ Jesus produces love for ALL saints—both the lovable and the unlovable. The Colossians demonstrated this love, and Paul thanks God for it.

Faith and love flow naturally from hope. What is your hope? Is it the hope Paul describes, "stored up for you in heaven"? This hope is secure, guaranteed by God, not by us. The Colossians lived in Christ, their earthly lives driven by this heavenly hope—the gospel.

"Gospel" wasn't a Christian-exclusive term. In the Roman Empire, victories in war or an emperor's ascension were called "good news." For Paul, the gospel centers on Jesus Christ—His victory on the cross and His reign as King. Colossians 1:13-14 outlines this gospel: God rescued us from the dominion of darkness, brought us into the kingdom of His Son, and through Him, we have redemption and forgiveness of sins. Because of Jesus' blood, our sins are forgiven. Colossians 1:22 adds, "But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation." Through Jesus, we are made holy, saints without fault, able to stand before God as His children. This is the gospel.

Nothing and no one else can bring us before a holy God and make us acceptable. In Colossae, some said strict adherence to laws, fasting, or asceticism could earn God's approval. Paul says, "No, only Jesus!" Others claimed worshiping angels or passing through spiritual realms was necessary. Paul says, "No, only Jesus!" Still others suggested secret knowledge or special rituals could make you spiritually elite. Paul says, "No, only Jesus!" We don't need mystical powers, special laws, or rituals to approach God. Paul declares, "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and in Christ you have been brought to fullness" (Colossians 2:9-10). In Christ, there is fullness and freedom.

Despite living in a diverse "religious supermarket," the Colossians showed faith, hope, and love in Christ. This life naturally led to growth and the spread of the gospel. We often see evangelism as an action or formula, but Paul shows it's a life transformed by God's grace. This life was evident in Epaphras, the faithful servant from whom the Colossians learned the gospel.

Recently, a sister shared that a Sikh's exemplary life inspired her to learn about their faith. Christians transformed by the gospel can have the same impact. Evangelizing family is hard because they know us too well—we often show our best side to outsiders and our flaws at home. How can our families see the gospel in us? Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 2:15, "For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing." Salvation or perishing is God's sovereignty and a person's choice, but we must ensure we carry Christ's aroma. Paul says we ARE this aroma because Christ is our life (Colossians 3:3-4). We don't just share the gospel or show our goodness; we show that Christ is our life, transforming us into people who carry His fragrance. Our goal isn't to bring people to church but to Christ, into Christ.

When Paul calls the Colossians "faithful," and describes Epaphras, Tychicus, and Onesimus as faithful, he highlights their steadfast witness to Christ in a pluralistic world, proclaiming Him through their lives. Paul says, "We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me" (Colossians 1:28-29). Faithfulness isn't just proclaiming but guiding people to full maturity in Christ, relying on God's strength.

To seekers among us, you may be here because a Christian friend invited you, you heard church people are kind, or you're curious about church. Years ago, a brother shared he went to church to find a girlfriend, believing Christian girls were great. Whatever brought you here, I pray you don't just find friends but find Christ. These brothers and sisters inviting you aren't just introducing Christ but striving to help you know Him and be in Him. The treasure of Christians and the church is Jesus Christ. We hope you not only meet Christ but become complete in Him. This is Paul's next prayer.

III. Intercessory Prayer: Living Worthy of the Lord (1:9-14)

9 For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives,

10 so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God,

11 being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience,

12 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.

13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of his Son he loves,

14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Paul, hearing of the Colossians' transformed lives, gives thanks and prays for them. They heard the gospel, witnessed its power, and spread it. With such a strong start, Paul encourages them to stand firm in the truth.

Paul prays they live a life **"worthy of the Lord."** Christians often say, "I'm so unworthy!" This isn't humility or politeness but a heartfelt response to God's grace. I once struggled with stuttering, barely able to complete a sentence. Now, I not only speak fluently but preach God's word—what amazing grace! I'm unworthy, yet God chooses the foolish to shame the wise, the weak to shame the strong, the lowly to nullify the proud, so no one can boast before Him (1 Corinthians 1:27-29). A pastor once said God picks the rotten apples from the crate. I'm that

rotten apple chosen by God.

If we're so unworthy, why does Paul urge us to live "worthy of the Lord"? Because in Christ, we are saints, rescued from darkness into God's kingdom. Our actions should match our new identity. Colossians 3-4 details how to live worthy: how wives treat husbands, husbands treat wives, parents raise children, children honor parents, Christians approach work, employers and employees interact, and how and why we pray.

Paul says to **"please him in every way."** In everything—health or sickness, employment or unemployment—we ask, "How do I please the Lord?" Christianity isn't abstract philosophy but the foundation of daily life, 24/7.

How do we live worthy? Paul prays they be filled with the knowledge of God's will through spiritual wisdom and understanding—not worldly wisdom, which may help us navigate this world, but only spiritual wisdom helps us know God and His will. Knowing God's will enables us to please Him, bear fruit in good works, and grow in knowledge. We also need God's power to gain strength, endurance, and patience, living in two worlds: the visible world and the invisible world in Christ.

To live worthy, start with prayer. Let's hear Paul's prayer for the Colossians again, letting the Spirit speak through these words written over 2,000 years ago.

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