

Coming in First Place ~ the preeminence of Jesus Christ

"... so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything"(Colossians 1:18).

Coming in First Place – The Book of Colossians The Primacy of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (1:1-23) The Prayer for the Gospel - Colossians 1:9-14

9 For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; 11 strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light. 13 For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

What do the following dates all have in common? July 4, 1776? December 7, 1941? September 11, 2001? They are all dates in American history that have had a profound effect upon the very lives of American citizens. From the declaration of independence from Brittan, to being violently brought into the second world war, to seeing the horrific images of jets crashing into the World Trade Centers, these dates symbolize changes in thinking as well as changes in actions. These dates left their marks on the American psyche.

Looking at this idea from another perspective, I remember when I was about 9 years old taking a skateboard to the top of the hill. I looked down the steep sidewalk, seeing my friends all out in front of me and so I gave a kick and started down. Faster and faster I went, that is until my wheels met with a crack in the sidewalk that took the board from out under my feet, hurling me forward. And just what was it that broke my fall? I did not land on my knees, nor did I land on my hands. No, my fall was broken when my forehead banged full force into the concrete. Almost instantly I had a goose-egg on my head. Very dazed and confused, but thankfully not knocked out, I yelled out...okay...cried out in pain and fear. I was brought to my friend's house and checked for signs of concussion and such. For the next two to three weeks I had this goose-egg wherever I went along with headaches and for much of that time two black eyes. That made a lasting impact on my life. Note just because I remember the event, but also because that event that took place over 30 years ago also left a physical mark on me. For sometimes, when I get hot or even if I simply scrunch my forehead together just right, you can see right where that goose-egg was. That event literally left a lasting mark.

And so, whether we are talking about significant dates that changed the course of history, or we are talking about injuries that have left their marks emotionally and physically, there are times and events that forever affect us and continue to reveal their impressions in our lives.

And there is nothing for which this ought to be truer and more evident than in the lives of those whose hearts and minds have come to understand and be changed by the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. The gospel, this good news that God has sent His Son Jesus Christ to this earth to save men and women, boys and girls, from their helpless and hopeless condition of sinful rebellion against God, by which they only deserve God's eternal wrath and the horrors of hell, but rather to make them by His own power fit for the eternal bliss of heaven as they believe and are transformed by this belief that Jesus came for them to be both their Savior from sin and therefore their Lord of righteousness. Has this gospel, this good news had a profound and life-changing effect in your life? Better yet, does the gospel, this good news continue to be the most profound and life-changing event in your life?

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“... so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything”(Colossians 1:18).

As we finish up Colossians 1:9-14 this morning, let me remind you that we have been noticing Paul’s prayer for the gospel; that it would continue to have its life-changing effects revealed in the lives of these believers. In verse 9 we saw the main request upon which the rest of our verses are build, that request being that believers be filled with the knowledge of God’s will – that believers would continue to know God and His ways as God fills them with such knowledge. Next, in verse 10a we saw the reason for this request, so that believers, who are being continually transformed by the gospel, may then continue to “walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respect.” And then last week, we notice the first three of four RESULTS of those who are walking in such a manner worthy of the Lord, of those who are filled with the knowledge of God. They are those who are bearing fruit in every good work; who are increasing in the knowledge of God; and who are being strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might [not our impotent might] resulting or manifesting itself in steadfastness in circumstances and patience toward others.

This morning I want to bring to your attention the last of these results, the last of these evidences that reveal the gospel is having a continual and lasting impact on our lives, that that gospel has left its mark on us and that mark is apparent. The final and in some ways the most influential of the results listed here is found in verse 12 (actually picking up “joyfully” from verse 11), **“joyfully giving thanks to the Father...”** This is the result of a life that is being lived in a manner worthy of the Lord, a life that is filled with the knowledge of God’s will. We find that Paul prays for these believers that one of the results of the gospel to be manifested in their lives is joyful thanksgiving to the Father. A most literally reading of this phrase would be, *“giving thanks with joy to the Father...”* Notice that all of these “results” have been qualified or defined for us. In verse 10 it is not simply the request that believers would be “bearing fruit” but “bearing fruit in every good work...”; not simply that they would be “increasing” but “increasing in the knowledge of God”; not merely strengthened, but “strengthened with all power...[God’s glorious power]; and now we see that believers are not only to be giving thanks, but are to be *“giving thanks with joy to the Father...”*

The idea of giving thanks – from the Greek word “eucharisteo” a verb that means to be grateful, to express gratitude. The noun form speaks of active, grateful language expressed to God as an act of worship. From this verb we get the word “Eucharist” which is a fancy word for celebrating the Lord’s Table, the partaking of communion in which we are to express our deepest thanks and gratitude for the work of salvation by Jesus Christ. Whenever you participate with the saints around the Lord’s Table, you are giving thanks to the Father for sending His Son Jesus Christ to be your substitute for sin. Whenever you are absent then you are failing to give thanks as Jesus Himself lovingly commands you.

So here we see that one of the results of the gospel’s effects on the lives of believers and something for which we ought to be praying for one another, is that our lives would be marked or characterized by the giving of thanks. And not just some giving of thanks, for this action is stated in the present tense. Those who are filled with the knowledge of God’s will as prayed for in verse 9 are those who will then demonstrate they are so filled by constantly and continually giving thanks to the Father. This reminds me of something our brother Tyler says so often, that the danger for us is never praising or thanking God too much; rather the danger always lies in praising or thanking Him too little.

If you were to take stock; to take inventory of all the thanks you have offered up to God this past week, how full would that account be? Do you seek to fill that account every day? How do you evaluate if you have praised and thanked the Father enough for His working in you? Might I

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suggest that you come regularly to Colossians 1:9-14 and use the elements of this prayer to gauge the depth of your thanksgiving to God.

But, as we already noted, we are not simply called and to pray that we would give thanks to the Father. This giving of thanks is qualified - it is to be “joyfully” or “with joy”. That almost seems redundant. It would seem that giving thanks should be in itself a joyful experience, would it not? So why then does Paul pray for “giving thanks with joy...” I believe what we have here is a reminder to constantly evaluate our giving of thanks. It is easy to get so used to certain phrases and to singing certain songs, words that might in themselves state praise and thanksgiving to God, but we may not be truly experiencing and communicating praise to God. Sometimes our expressions of thanks to God, in word or in song, may suffer from the Eeyore syndrome. You remember the character of Eeyore from Winnie the Pooh. He is always down, always kind of depressed and even when he is “thankful” or “grateful” it sounds and looks more like discouragement. “O bother, I’ve got to worship the Lord again...not that I’m complaining! For You have been good to me, Lord” [said with an Eeyore lilt]. Tell me if our worship might not be best described this way? Our worship, our prayers and our lives are not to be characterized as suffering from the Eeyore syndrome, but are rather to be characterized as joyful; literally full of great or exceeding gladness. I love how Spurgeon encouraged his readers saying, “*When Jesus comes into the heart, he issues a general license to be glad in the Lord. No chains are worn in the court of King Jesus.*” Our giving thanks to the Father for what He has done in sending His Son Jesus Christ is to constantly overflow with language of gratitude and attitudes of expressive praise.

We need not be boisterous or obnoxious, but I suspect that we often express more thanksgiving and praise for a sports game than we do to the Lord. You have the license to be glad – use that license constantly. Beloved, remember that Paul is praying here for believers to be continually affected by the gospel and part of the reason is so that the world may see the blessed effects of the gospel in a changed life. The continual giving of thanks to the Father for salvation is not only a sure sign of the walking in a manner worthy of the Lord and of being filled with the knowledge of God’s will, but it also one of the most powerful tools you have to share Christ with others. If your life is characterized more by the Eeyore syndrome...no one will care to know Jesus because of you. But if your life is characterized by a continual giving of thanks to the Father because of His working in your life; now you have a powerful tool for sharing Christ.

The rest of verse 12 and on through verse 14 then expresses to us the “for what” of Paul’s thinking. No doubt there are countless things for which we ought to give thanks to God. We thank Him for our physical lives, for creation, for our families, our homes and our jobs. But Paul does not mention these things here in our text. It is not that we are not or cannot give thanks for such things, but all such things take a back seat to the great working of salvation by God in our lives. As I said before, Paul is about to rehearse the gospel for us in verses 12b-14. In these verses he reminds his readers of what it is God the Father has accomplished for us through God the Son. Then, beginning in verse 15, Paul will rehearse the person and work of God the Son. But we start with the very foundation for our spiritual lives in Christ expressed with three actions by the Father in our text. When you want or need to be reminded for what to being your thanksgiving to God, let your mind come back to this text and remember these three words; God has qualified you; rescued you; and transferred you. This is the basis of all your thanksgiving, of all your praise and of all your worship. When you join with the body of Christ to meet with the Lord, this is where our worship is to begin; this is the root of our joy that is to blossom into the full flower of heartfelt and properly expressive praise to God. This is the foundation of your very ability to speak of salvation to others; namely that God the Father, in love, in wisdom and in

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keeping with His full justice has qualified the unqualified; has rescued the lost and has transferred you into the blessings of His Son Jesus Christ. Let us look each of these briefly.

The first reason for which we are to constantly be giving joyous thanks to the Father is because He Himself has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light. The word “qualified” is so rich, so beautiful. It means “to make sufficient” that which is not in itself sufficient. It means to “empower” that which in itself has no power. It can also mean “to authorize or grant permission” to that which previously had no such authorization. Beloved, God the Father has qualified the unqualified. That is what this means; that we who had no merit, we had the qualifications of being in God’s presence or of enjoying God’s benefits, we have, because of Jesus’ work on the cross and the Father’s good grace, been made sufficient in Christ; empowered by Christ’s power and authorized by Christ’s righteousness to “share” with God and with all the saints, this “inheritance.” One of the ladies posted the following statement on her Facebook page this week the follow statement that reminds us of what it means to be qualified: *“It is not my ability, but my response to God’s ability that counts.”* It is when I recognize God’s work of love and receive by God’s grace the righteousness of Christ life as my own that am made a sharer, a recipient of this inheritance of the saint, which I take to be a reference to the very person and presence of God. The phrase, “in Light” speaks of where this inheritance dwells. God and God’s kingdom dwells in light, as opposed the dominion of darkness we will look at in a moment.

Let us pray and give thanks to the Lord for making us fit for heaven by making us more and more like His Son Jesus Christ. Do you see this working in you? Have you been qualified by the Father? Do you know that if you were to die today, that you would indeed meet the qualifications for entrance into heaven rather than into hell? What are you looking to in order to gain entrance into heaven? What qualifications do you possess in yourself, you who is described in Romans 5 as a helpless, ungodly, sinner and enemy of God? Are you looking only to the qualifications of Jesus? And how do you know if you are looking to such qualifications? Are you constantly thanking God the Father who so qualified you?

The second action of God expressed in this prayer for the continued effectiveness of the gospel in our lives is that **“He rescued us from the domain of darkness.”** Do you want or need a reason for giving thanks to the Father. He has “rescued” a word that means to draw near to oneself. God has brought you to His side; He has made the move to be close to you. While from the earthly perspective it might appear as though we sought after God and we brought ourselves near to Him, the Scriptures remind us that we never do that until He first acts, until He first moves to draw us near to Himself. Jesus reminds us as recorded in John 6:44 saying, **“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him...”** and again in John 6:65 Jesus says, **“No one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father.”** We might feel that is not fair...that the Father must first draw, that He must first grant, that He must first rescue before the sinner will come; but that is just the point of this verse; that is the truth which is to cause us such joy and move us to give great and exceeding thanks to the Father, for no sinner would ever come to Jesus unless the Father first rescues Him.

And just what have we been rescued from according to this verse? We have been rescued from domain of darkness. In contrast to the “light” of verse 12, which pictures God’s kingdom of truth, purity and bliss; darkness here pictures a realm of falsehood, of impurity and of damnation. The one who has been filled with the knowledge of God’s will (v. 9) and who is therefore walking in a manner worthy of the Lord (v. 10); is the one who constantly gives thanks to the Father for rescuing Him from the blindness, the pain and the curse of having been a citizen of the kingdom of darkness; having once been deluded by his own flesh into thinking he was okay

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with God on his own; having been deceived by Satan, the prince of the power of the air; to be a son of disobedience rather than a son of obedience to God. Let us pray for the church; and for ourselves; that we would thank God that He rescued us who should have drowned; who should have perished.

And then, simultaneously with this rescue, God also transfers us from this realm of darkness and lostness into where? Into the kingdom, into the realm, into the blissful presence of His beloved Son. To be transferred speaks of an exchange. We have been exchanged from the domain of darkness along with all its practices, into the kingdom of Jesus. Just like someone using mass transit of the big city might transfer from one bus to another, because the first bus does not take him to the right destination; God has taken us off the bus of destruction and placed us on the bus of blessing. Do you give thanks to the Father that you are no longer heading in the wrong direction; no longer destined to suffer the horrors of a Christless eternity; but rather have been granted the inheritance of Christ's eternal presence? That you are no longer one whose eternal ears will be filled with the disharmonic and deafening screechings of hell, but rather with the jubilant praise of the Lamb that was slain for you?

Notice how this rescue and transfer are further described to us in verse 14. What does all this mean to those whose lives are marked by the gospel; in whose lives the gospel has made and is making that profound and lasting impression; for such as these are experiencing redemption – literally, being purchased off the slave block; having been freed by the price Jesus paid on the cross so that you might no longer live as a slave to sin, but rather now as a slave to righteousness. The one who has been filled with the knowledge of God's will, who is walking in a manner worthy of the Lord is the one who is constantly giving thanks for his redemption, who sings out, "Thank You, Lord, for saving my soul!" In the New King James, verse 14 reads, "in whom we have redemption through His blood..." Let us never forget the cost of our redemption. As the songwriter has penned,

*May I never lose the wonder
The wonder of the cross
May I see it like the first time
Standing as a sinner lost
Undone by mercy and left speechless
Watching wide-eyed at the cost
May I never lose the wonder
The wonder of the cross*

Beloved, to watch wide-eyed at the cost is to behold the wonder of the cross. This is to move us in both private and public worship to constant express thanks to God the Father for qualifying us, for rescuing us, for transferring us; and for redeeming us to Himself.

And if redemption was not enough, the last description of this rescuing and transferring is declared to be, "**the forgiveness of sins.**" Do you want to know for what you ought to give thanks to the Father? Give Him thanks for the forgiveness of sins. The idea here is having been granted a pardon from a deserved penalty. I remember going to court once with a friend who had a traffic violation. He was quite nervous, this being his first experience in court and the potential fine was hefty. He approached the judge who asked his plea. My friend announced his guilt before the judge. The judge looked at my friend's record, "or lack of a record" and asked my friend if he had learned his lesson and if he intended to obey the laws of the road. My friend said he had. And then the judge pardoned, forgave the fine and told my friend he did not want to see

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him again in his courtroom. The judge had granted remission or pardon for a deserved penalty. And for those who have trusted in the work of Christ on the cross as their only means of qualification before the Father, who have acknowledged the rescuing and transferring work of the Father on their behalf, these are said to be granted remission of the penalty of their sins. Only, rather than being told that the judge never wants to see them again in His courtroom, this Judge says that such ones are not only forgiven but they can also call Him, “Abba, Father” – dearest Daddy. And then, like children known and loved by a gracious father, it is our desire to be as obedient children, no longer conforming ourselves to the former lusts and acts of disobedience that we did in our ignorance of God, but rather to live to be holy, pure, children of light; to imitate Christ. Charles Spurgeon captured this redemption, the forgiveness of sins as a basis of thanksgiving to God the Father well when he wrote,

His mercy is so great that it forgives great sins to great sinners, after great lengths of time, and then gives great favors and great privileges, and raises us up to great enjoyments in the great heaven of the great God.

Beloved, this is how we give thanks to the Father, when we live our lives in light of all that He has accomplished for us through His Son Jesus Christ. And part of that living in the light of such work is realized as our lives become more and more of an expression of giving thanks to God the Father for our salvation. Are you a thankful person? What are some ways in which you can cultivate a more grateful, demonstrably thankful attitude toward God? Where do you begin? Beloved, one place to begin is simple to rehearse and repeat the gospel to yourself. Do you know that you have been saved, redeemed by Jesus Christ? Think of all the benefits of that, if you are so saved and thank God for it. Take time today to identify five good things that have happened to you today and then thank God personally for them as well as openly.

For such as those who so openly and actively give thanks to the Father, these are those who are filled with the knowledge of God and who can know that they are walking in a manner worthy of the Lord, to the glory of God.

Soli Deo Gloria

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