

Sermon Title: "It's Going To Be OK!"

Sermon Series: "It's Going to Be OK"

Colossians 1:1-14

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Today we begin a series of sermons drawn from the letter to the Colossians. The Epistle lesson for today and for the next three Sundays are taken from this, deeply theological book. Your pastors will use these texts to try to shed some light and provide some encouragement for our daily journey in faith. The series is entitled "**It's Going To Be OK.**" I would strongly encourage you to make this letter part of your home devotions during these weeks. It's also the focus of our Adult Bible Study this month. Read it. Mull on it. Read it again. As they say, it's a good read.

A number of years ago I was privileged to participate in a tour of Greece called the **Footsteps of Paul**. We visited Athens, Ephesus, Philippi. We walked on the very stone path on which Paul walked which led from the sea to the city of Corinth, and many other famous sites. It was a wonderful experience. One place we did not go was to the city of Colossae. The reason is that it does not exist today and nobody really knows exactly where it was. It was near the ruins of Laodicia, which doesn't exist either, but there are not even any ruins to mark Colossae. It was never a thriving metropolis. The area is known for earthquakes which may well explain why it never survived.

There was, however, at the time of Paul, a cluster of Christians there. This little congregation was not started by Paul. He never saw one of them face to face. The founding pastor was evidently a disciple named Epaphras who brought word to Paul that there were many good things to say about the Christians there. Their faith in Jesus was strong and their love for one another was noteworthy. They loved Jesus and they took care of each other. One might think "*what else do you need?*" But there were problems. Serious problems. One commentator said that if the theological heresies there had been allowed to develop, it might have even destroyed the Church in that part of the world.

I find it interesting, and instructive, that Paul approaches these problems in a very gentle, encouraging manner. He doesn't talk down to them. He doesn't admonish them in an over-bearing way. He is saying "*Yes, it is a hard, scary world in which we live; and we Christians face threats of false teaching and self-made religion, the power of Satan, the struggle to fulfill God's calling, enduring the consequences of our human sin, the daily battle against our self-centeredness. The list goes on. It is not easy being a Christian. But because of the saving work of Jesus, because of his cross and the victory of the open tomb, we have the assurance that it's going to be OK.*" It's going to be OK.

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It's not easy being a Christian. Can you identify with that? The truth is that loyalty to Christ may involve loss and pain, suffering and unpopularity. We are challenged to live the way of love and service and sacrifice. But to so many this seems the way of the fool. Why forgive

people who hurt and betray us? Why should I go out of my way to help people who don't appear to be expending much effort to help themselves? And who often don't really express any gratitude? Why not just barge ahead and get while the getting is good. Darwin had it right. We're all just animals and only the fittest and greediest survive.

Deep down, I think we know that this self-centered approach to life is deceptive and unfulfilling but we also know that it is very tempting. We know that we get pulled into this way of thinking at every turn. We try to keep our better selves in control, but it is such a struggle. As Paul says in his letter to the Romans, "*I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. The good that I would, I do not, and the evil that I would not that I do...who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God.. deliverance is through Jesus Christ our Lord.*" (Rom. 7)

Or as he says it in our lesson.." ***Giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. " Faith and love spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven"***.

Heaven is our home! That's a pay-off, for sure. Surely better than any temporary prosperity. Let's face it, all prosperity is temporary. Deliverance from this body of death... that's eternal.

Indeed, **we know that the struggle doesn't go on forever. In our funeral services we mourn, but we also celebrate.** We live in the kingdom of the Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. We have the assurance that it's going to be OK. We have trials and losses..but it's going to be OK. We have burdens and disappointments.. but it's going to be OK. *Faith and hope spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven.*

You've been qualified for this! Qualified to share in the inheritance of the saints. Notice the tense of the verb. He doesn't suggest that you are qualified, that you somehow measure up to expectations. No, it's been done for you, it is offered to you. The Father has qualified you, given you your credentials, by grace alone, through the merits of Jesus Christ. This is why we have the hope of heaven.. the confidence of heaven.

There is no way to overstate the value of that. As Paul assures the Corinthian Christians..."*If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.* (15:16)

That is surely true. But I'm here to tell you today that there is more. There is more than a heavenly reward. It is not **only** for this life that we have hope in Christ...**but it is also for this life.** Living in the framework of the Gospel, living with the guidance and inspiration of Gospel, living with the comfort of the Gospel. living in the light of God's love and direction, **living God's way, being part of his mission, is the best way!** **I call it Gospel living.** **There is a real pay-off. Here and now.** Surely no promise of material prosperity and I don't wish to diminish the sacrificial aspects of the Christian journey. It will cost you to be a Christian. But there is so much about living in Christ and for Christ that is beneficial now..today!

Start with **the Ten Commandments.** This is God's way. This is not even the Gospel but it is still the best way. These are **really the guidelines for the good life.** Which do you think is better..living in a family full of strife and jealousy and rebellion? Or in a family where children honor and obey parents, and parents love and sacrifice for their children? Where do you want to live.. in a community full of hostility and violence, theft and hateful gossip?

Greedy, covetous self-interest? Or among people who care for each other and look after the best interests of one another and speak well of one another. Really, it's a no-brainer. Understand that the Commandments don't just tell you what NOT to do, but by inference what TO DO! Do these things and life is good! Of course, we can't. Thus the need for God's love and forgiveness... our need for Christ.

Then consider **that Gospel living is purposeful living!** God's love gives us a sense of direction, a reason for being. **We are here to share this way and this Gospel, this Christ, with all the world.** The Gospel, you see, is universal, for everybody. There are very few things in this world that are really open and available to everyone. A man's mental ability decides in large measure what he can study and become. Your wealth determines the amenities you enjoy in life. Your talents determine what you can do. But the joy and peace of the Gospel is truly available to all. And we have the privilege to share it. It's not a drudgery, a "got-to" but a "get-to". We have the privilege to share the best news that ever hit this planet!

I can testify that when one gets older, when you know that the vast majority of your life has already been lived, you begin to look back and assess. You reflect on what had real meaning and purpose. It's not a matter of accomplishment but striving. Did I use my time trying to do something of worth, something that adds value. Did I live with purpose or just drift through life aimlessly? Did I contribute something or just take?

Gospel living is **purposeful because it is productive.** We can give ourselves to it because it bears fruit. It is a plain fact of history that the Gospel has the power change people and the society in which people live. The Gospel changes hearts. You can't really absorb into your being the love of Christ and remain hard and self-centered and judgmental, callous to the hurts and needs of your neighbors. The Gospel motivates people to go places where no one wants to go, care for people no one wants to be around, it makes cowardly people courageous and weak people strong. The Gospel makes a difference. It's worth doing. It's worth living. It's productive! It offers the joy and fulfillment of a purpose driven life.

In the course of my ministry I have been privileged to work with hundreds of deeply committed Christians, people like so many of you, who worship regularly, give generously, care deeply for the less fortunate, pray and serve with steadfastness and patience. I can't imagine any of them saying, "*You know, if I had it to do over again, I would spend my time and energy trying to make more money and get more stuff. I would do a lot more partying and living on the edge*" I would spend my life looking after # 1. No, what they would say is "*I wish I could have done more.*" Purposeful living is a thing of great value. It is priceless.

Yes, it's a hard and scary world in which we live. Christians face threats and challenges at every side. To walk with Jesus, to trust in Him in every circumstance, to make the sacrifices that are required of servant people, disciples of Jesus...it's not an easy journey. But because of the saving work of Jesus, we have the assurance that it's going to be OK... more than OK.. We are "*strengthened with all power, given endurance and patience* for living the purposeful, productive life...*joyfully giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.*

Indeed, it's going to be OK... more than OK! Amen.

