

Who Jesus Is—the Framework
Pastor Ashley Brown
Wasilla Bible Church
June 06, 2010

Going to go ahead and share a bit about my prayer for the summer. You see, Larry, our senior pastor, left to go to Africa late yesterday. And he and his wife, Marlene, will be gone about two months. Lord willing, the next time we'll see him back here with the congregation is August 8th. They are going to be doing some different things with missionaries in Africa over the next two months. And so, as he left he gave direction to me, the staff, others...basically, don't sink the ship, you know; wanted 'everything to still be functioning when we get back'. But he did give direction to go ahead and begin preparing for the fall, and to walk our congregation through sermons in worship services and all to prepare us for the fall. And he gave us an idea of where he was going to be headed in the fall, as best he can tell at this point in time as the Lord's leading, where he's going to be headed in the fall. And so Joel and I sat down and started working out just different focuses for each service over the course of the summer.

And what I'd like to do today is share with you my prayer, which in many ways is kind of something I'm praying; Joel and I have started praying, you know, and all; and I invite you to pray as well for our congregation. And in many ways this will form kind of the backdrop for the different service focuses...foci?...however you say that...of each service as we go through the summer. And it's a prayer that is based upon a prayer that Paul prays in Colossians 1, first part of 2. And so we're going to look at this. And so Paul starts off...and I'm not going to read the entire chapter, the entire section that we'll be going through. Rather, we'll kind of walk through it in a brief period of time, and stop and slow down and look at a few segments.

He begins chapter 1 by introducing himself...'Hey, it's me, Paul, and apostle of Christ.' And he introduces himself to the church and says, 'That's me writing to you. I've heard about these things; I've been encouraged. And I have been prompted to write you this letter.' And so that's how he starts off, the basic greeting. And then he gets to Colossians 1: 9, where he says "*And so, from the day we heard,*" and here 'we' is him, and Epaphras in particular, and Timothy, but those who are in prison for the faith because Paul is writing this in prison.

And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you,

Ok? He's talking about prayer, and he will unfold this in the verses to follow.

...we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ...

We're gonna stop right there for just a second. Ok? '...that you may be filled...' chapter 1, verse 9. This is the first part of his prayer. He has two primary requests in this prayer that he prays in the verses that are surrounding verse 9 of chapter 1. The first request is that the Colossians may be filled, ok? That they may be filled...what's he talking about? Well, he's not talking about... I'm a parent of young children, ok? Here's some illustrations of what he's not talking about. A general rule of thumb that I learned as a parent of young children is that when your child asks for a drink, especially if it's some sort of nice, red drink or something like that, grape juice, I don't know, something, you only pour as much in the cup as you are willing to clean up. That's a basic rule, ok? If you are not yet a parent, file that one away. It will make sense later. Ok? But that is a full glass [makes a finger and thumb measure] for my kids when I give them...and it's like ok, that's the amount I am willing to clean up at this moment. That is not what Paul is talking about here. It goes so far beyond that. It's this idea that they would be so full that they are overflowing. It would be like if my kid asked for milk and Liam, he tells me he wants milk, he holds his cup up, and I pour out the gallon jug and I just start pouring. And he's lookin' and he's like 'Yeah!'; it's goin' way past here and it's goin' all the way up to the top. And then...I can picture it right now; I haven't done this but I know this is how he would respond...he would start to get a little concerned as it started to get up to the top. And if I just kept pouring, and all of a sudden it is just spilling out all over the floor he would be at a loss; but I just kept pouring and pouring, and it was spilling out all over the place. It's like a sponge that you would dip into a bucket of water and pull up, and it's just streaming water out of it because it cannot contain any more, not a bit more. That's the sort of filling that Paul is talking about here, that the Colossians would be so full of this, what he's talking about, that it would overflow and just be spilling out into all of life around them.

So what is it that he's praying that they'll be filled with? It's with the knowledge of God's will, and spiritual wisdom and understanding. What does that mean? I think there's a passage, a parallel passage, that is very similar in the book of Ephesians...Ephesians 1:17-18 where Paul is writing...this is a letter that he wrote roughly at the same time he wrote Colossians, again from prison. And he writes that he is also praying for them, and he explains that he is praying that God will give them a spirit of wisdom and revelation—ok, similar to...similar word structure, similar grammatical structure to Colossians 1:9—in the knowledge of God, that the eyes of their hearts may be enlightened, that their spiritual eyes, the eyes of their hearts will be opened, that they will understand, the light bulb will come on, they will see God and understand and know Him in a very real way that they have not known Him before, in a deeper, more intimate, more real way than they have ever known Him before, that their eyes and understanding would be opened. That similar thing that he's praying in Colossians 1:9.

Now, I'll point out this is not just knowledge about God; this is not just knowledge about God and His will...'Ok, what does God want me to do? Ok, I'm gonna...' No. It's knowledge *of* Him, like *knowing* Him. It's like the difference... My wife...if you spend a decent amount of time around my wife and I, ever, probably sooner or later you will hear her say something to the effect of "I can read you like some people can read the newspaper." She's saying it to me. The way that she is saying it is because I haven't said anything, I haven't asked a question, I haven't made a comment, but all of a sudden she will respond and answer a question that I haven't asked, or she will respond to a comment that I have not made. And I look and I'm like "What? I didn't say anything!" And she looks and she's just like "No, but I can read you like some people read the newspaper." Why? Because she knows me. Ok? She knows exactly what's going on in my mind; nine times out of ten, maybe more, she could tell you actually what it is I'm thinking if I had opened my mouth to actually say what was in my mind, what would have come out of my mouth. And she is usually right on the money. Ok, why? Because she *knows* me. She knows me so well she doesn't have to ask a lot of times what it is that I'm thinking, how it is that I would respond to a certain situation, the way that I would act, the decisions I would make. She just knows, because she knows me. That sort of knowledge, that intimate knowledge where you just know, you don't have to ask, is what Paul is praying about here. It's like those bracelets that say 'What Would Jesus Do?' Paul is praying that you get beyond the whole 'What Would Jesus Do?' thing to the point that you just do what Jesus would do. You don't have to ask what would He do, what would He think. It doesn't matter. Why? Because you so know, you already know, you don't have to ask the question. You know Him. You understand Him. That's the sort of knowledge that Paul is praying for here for the Colossians. Ok?

Now, we're gonna go on because he also makes a second request. And this is a follow-up request that is built upon being filled with the knowledge of God's will and spiritual wisdom and understanding. And the following verse, verse 10, and then he develops it more fully through verse 12...he says "*so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord.*" What he's talking about there is the way that the Colossians lived their lives. The idea is that he is praying that they will be so filled with a knowledge and an understanding, an intimate understanding and knowledge of God so much so that it just spills out, that their hearts are encouraged, and that they are filled in such a way that it spills out into all of life and totally transforms the way that they live. That's a very key thing to understand, because if you don't have the first part then the second part just becomes legalistic, moralistic, behavioristic, humanistic, secular self-help...how can I live a better life? What can I do to save myself and to be worthy of God? That's basically what it comes down to if you miss the first part, which is why that first part is so important.

But it's interesting...he says...he develops four ideas beneath the "so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord"; he develops four ideas and hits on them briefly in this prayer of what that will look like, what a person...what will characterize the life of a person who is walking worthy of the Lord. He develops four things and he kind of hits on them here. One—they're going to be continually bearing good fruit. Doesn't mean that you're perfect, doesn't mean that you never get anything wrong. But there is an ongoing process whereby your life continues to bear more and more and more good fruit, because you are becoming more and more and more filled with God, looking at the world and other people and your own life in line with the way that He does. And so you continually bear more and more and more good fruit. You're also, second, continually growing in the knowledge of God. As you understand Him more, as you see Him more, you begin to know and understand even more. Your knowledge grows, and you have this continually growing knowledge of God. The third thing—that they would be continually demonstrating long-suffering. This is probably the most sobering one to me in this list because it's prayed and written by someone who's in a prison cell. And Paul's prayer for the Colossians is that they will suffer well, that they will be able to walk through life...the pains, the griefs, the tragedies, the trials, the tribulations...and as they do so they will be able to be patient and confident and suffer well, that they would have long-suffering and confidence in the midst of that. That is a very sobering prayer that totally does not mesh with the typical way that we, in America, like to approach spirituality, where it's going to fix everything and we want a nice, easy paved path. But the thing that even drives it further home to me is that fourth thing, that they will be continually spilling forth gratitude to God. It's this idea that

even in the midst of that long-suffering the Colossians will be continually praising God and thanking Him for what they are experiencing of His grace in their lives, and they just can't help it. They're so overwhelmed by their understanding and knowledge and experience of God that even in the midst of suffering well and suffering long they will spill out...they can't help it...they continue to overflow with praise and gratitude and thanks to the God and creator of the universe who has allowed them to be in relationship with Him. If you just grasp that right there, that is something that can totally, radically change your life if you are a typical American, because that goes so counter to our culture, to our impulses. That is completely the antithesis of the American dream. Just food for thought.

But that's Paul's prayer, ok? And basically that ends up forming the structure of most of Colossians. The first part of the book he ends up unpacking and explaining and helping them see a bit more of that knowledge of God's will, spiritual wisdom, understanding...he unpacks and helps them see who Christ is, who Jesus is. And he does that, and then in chapter 2 verse 6 he turns a page, so to speak, and he starts moving into that "so you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord." He says in chapter 2 verse 6, he says therefore, because of all this stuff we've just been talking about, about Jesus, about who He is, what I'm praying for, all of this...because of all of this walk worthy of being called by the name of Christ. Walk worthy of being a Christian. And he goes into that.

Now here's the thing, ok? What's going to happen this fall is Larry is actually going to be jumping more so into that second half, "so walk in a manner worthy of the Lord". He's going to be looking at, as we go into this next year, how do we live out the lordship, the 'rulership' of Jesus in our lives. If we are following Jesus and He is the ultimate authority in our lives, how does that impact the the way that we live and walk and talk and speak, think, everything...how does that impact our lives right here, right now? He's going to be looking at that this fall, and in many ways what I'm going to do is we'll hit on some of that over the course of this summer. But that isn't going to be the primary focus. The primary focus I'm going to follow the pattern that Paul follows here, ok, the pattern that he sets. You see, he wants to make sure that they have a firm grasp and understanding of who Jesus is today; not who He was, not what He did, but who He is today and what He is doing today. Now, that is based upon, yes, the cross and resurrection is the climax of history and it is the basis for all of our life if you are a follower of Christ. But the simple fact of the matter is that is not some historical event that ended back then and does not have continuing effects today. It is something that, yes, it was a historical fact. The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ is a historical fact, but it is a historical fact that has ongoing, continuing significance today, that impacts our lives today. And so that's what we're going to look at.

Paul, as he follows this path here through Colossians 1 he ends up, in verses 13 through 23 attempting to expand and enlarge and enrich the understanding the Colossians have of who Christ is. He starts bursting into praise. It's like he's saying 'Christ is this', and 'Jesus is that', 'He's done this and He is currently doing that right here.' This is the basis of it all, and for those ten or eleven verses he bursts into praise, proclaiming who Jesus is. And so over the course of the summer each of the services what we'll do is we'll look at a different aspect of this, how it plays out and where we see it in different pieces, portions, passages of Scripture, these different aspects of who Christ is that Paul breaks into praise right here in Colossians 1.

But then in verses 24 through 29 of chapter 1 he explains that because of all of this, because of his prayer, because of who Jesus is, because of the reality of the life-impacting force that it has, the transformation that has come about in his life...that is the whole purpose of his ministry. That's why he's doing what he's doing. And he wraps up this section, this first half of Colossians, as he heads into what is chapter 2, is he heads into this by going back to his original prayer. In chapter 2 verse 1 he says 'Because of all of this I want you to know how great a struggle I have.' What struggle is he talking about? I'm absolutely convinced that it's prayer. He is struggling in spiritual warfare on his knees on behalf of the Colossians. The reason I believe this is because in Colossians chapter 4, just two chapters later in the same letter, he...in verse twelve he ends up talking about how

Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in the will of God.

Epaphras is there with Paul in prison; and in the midst of prison as he is writing this letter he and Epaphras are partners in spiritual warfare, praying the exact same thing for the Colossians. And so that's why I'm convinced that that's what Paul is doing here. And that's important, we'll see in just a moment.

So what's he praying for? Well, he's praying once again as he kind of comes back to this topic, he's kind of approaching it from a little bit different angle, explaining it in a little different way. He's praying that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together; that their hearts may be encouraged. What the idea here is that kinda like that filling, that they will be filled so much that it overflows...it's the same sort of idea that their hearts will be so

full of faith and hope and love—very real, confident faith, hope and love that they can actually go through all of life, all of the struggles that they face, all the opposition, the trials, the persecution, deaths, suffering, whatever may come, that they will be able to face that head-on with complete confidence and courage, that it will not waver because they are so filled up that they cannot help but stand. That's his prayer for them.

Now how does that happen? It's interesting. He says "*having been knit together*", and following here just kind of the structure of this, he says "*that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love*", that they are coming together, that they are joined. It's like taking two pieces of steel iron and you weld them together where now they are one piece. That they will become knit together in love, and into...in the direction of...towards...heading into "*all the riches*", all the richness, the wealth, the fullness, that comes from having "*a full assurance*", a confidence "*of understanding*". He develops that a little bit further, into "*a full knowledge of God's mystery, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*" What he's talking about here is this. There is a certain extent to which...and I'm sure if you've lived very long you've probably gone into a situation where you aren't quite sure what's going on. Anybody been in a situation like that? You're like, 'I don't know what's goin' on.' Ok? Wow. Not too many people. I guess I'm the only person who's ever felt out of place. So here's the thing. Maybe it's because I'm more of an introvert who's learned to be extroverted when I have to be. But seriously, I go into a place that I don't know all the dynamics, I don't know what's going on, I don't know people so well and honestly, confidence? Yeah, I'm not too confident in this situation. All kinds of things can go...I'm like 'I don't know how to interact with these people.' I'm conversationally stupid. So there is like this...this lack of confidence. It happens in a variety of circumstances. Probably any situation where you look at it and you say, 'You know what? I don't have a full understanding of what's going on here; I don't see the answer, I don't see all the issues, I don't see all the problems, and so I don't fully know where everything stands,' you probably have a little bit more lack of confidence than you may in other areas of your life. See, oftentimes confidence comes with understanding, with knowledge. When you are confident that you understand a situation, when you are confident that you understand what is going on, you have a fullness and a richness in life that you can't unless if you have that confident understanding. There's a certain richness and fullness and wealth of life that comes from having a confident assurance of understanding. And that's what Paul is praying for here, that they will be knit together in love and realize that they will go into, that they will go towards, all the richness of life that comes from having a full assurance, a confidence, of understanding. And not just understanding things in general, but in particular to having a full knowledge of God's mystery, Christ; a full knowledge of Christ that they will know Him so intimately that they don't have any questions about life, that they will be able to go into a circumstance, a situation, and even if they don't fully know what's going on there they have full confidence and a richness of life that comes from fully knowing the creator God of the universe and saying, 'I don't know what's going on here, but I know Him and so guess what? I have full confidence as I head into this situation.' That they would be able to have that sort of richness and fullness of life—that is what Paul is praying for here.

Now, there's a couple of common errors that Christians slip into, at least here in modern America. One—we look at it and we make the goal 'having been knit together in love, it's unity'. We come together and we just do life together. That's what we do, and that's our end point. The sad thing is if we do that, yeah, we may have unity. We maybe be having lives that are intertwined and interconnected, and we have this network of support. But really, what's happening is we are grounding our confidence on that network of people that we have enmeshed our lives with. And the simple fact of the matter, the reality, is that a human, no matter how many of them you have, cannot carry the weight of your soul. Ultimately that is not enough. That's why Paul says that we're knit together in love, but not just that. The whole purpose of that is that we would be going towards...that we would be going into, realizing for the purpose of, realizing all these riches that come from the full assurance of understanding Christ. Ok?

The flip side of it is basically you have Christians, and this is a big movement especially among younger...like my generation, I know, or even...it's a different flavor among my generation than in previous generations. But it comes out in a variety of generations where it's this idea that 'you know what? I'm going to know and understand God. That's my goal. I want to know and understand God. I want to know and understand Christ. But I don't need a church, I don't need a body of believers. It's an individual journey that I am on.' I'll tell you right now, I honestly believe...it is my personal belief that that is sadly one of the biggest lies right from the pits of hell that impact our community, our lives, our culture here today. Christianity is very personal, but it is not individual. That is completely...the idea that it is, that it's an individual spiritual journey, is completely unbiblical; it is nowhere in Scripture, and quite the opposite—Scripture is very clear that Christianity is personal, but it is also communal. No one else can make the decision for you to trust Christ for your salvation, no one else can do that. It's very personal. You and you alone have to do business with God and confess the fact that you are a sinner; you deserve nothing good from Him. But you also are confident that He is merciful and full of grace. And He made a relationship with Him possible through the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, on the cross as He died and was resurrected so that you,

too could have and taste life, true life. And that was made possible...no one else can make that decision for you. That's something that you must work out with God. But the simple fact that it's personal doesn't mean it's individual. The Bible is very clear that when you enter into that life you enter into that life with others who are a part of the body of believers. You enter into that life. And that's why Paul says that you...if you miss this whole thing of having knit together in love you will never come...if you are not knit together with a body of believers you will never come to a full knowledge and understanding of God that you would otherwise have. It will not happen. And that is why I believe that is one of the biggest lies straight from the pits of hell, because it is a way that Christians are made to think that 'as I'm heading out bravely into the world on my own to find my own path, some courageous, independent, modern, western, American, humanistic way of thinking...as I'm doing this yes, I'm growing deeper in my spiritual walk', but in actuality you are being deceived to remain a spiritual infant, and to not grow into the full knowledge and understanding that God intends for you to grow and develop into. So those are two errors. But really, ultimately, what it comes back to is Paul is praying this, that their hearts would be encouraged, that they would have a faith, a hope, a love that so fills them that it spills out and they can walk through life with total confidence and courage, and they experience the richness that is available because of that.

There's a young man that I talked to about a week-and-a-half ago, two weeks ago, had a conversation with him. He's a young man who came...he's at college now, but he's been here and a part of our congregation for some while. He's got some medical stuff goin' on, and a decent amount of pain, a whole lot of pain. He's doing better the last week-and-a-half or so than he was. Doctors aren't quite sure exactly what's going on, to the point where he wasn't able to get a full night's sleep; the last time until about a half a week, a week ago, the first time he could actually sleep through the night to like 6 in the morning without waking up in pain was since Christmas or so. He's been in a lot of pain; just has some things goin' on. But talked to him, and I asked him...I was like, 'How are you doin'? Don't sugar coat it. How are you doin'?' And his response totally humbled me; it convicted me; it encouraged me, it challenged me where I said, 'Man, that is exactly what Paul is praying that we will experience here in our lives.' This young man, his response was basically this. He said, 'Well, I've made it through today so far. So far God has given me the strength to make it through each moment today. And He's given me the strength to make it through each day that came before. And so I have full confidence that He will continue to give me the strength each moment to make it through today. And I'll worry about tomorrow when I get there. And even though there's this spiritual warfare going on I have confidence that when I get to tomorrow, God'll have enough strength for me to get through tomorrow when I get there.' That sort of courage...and the crazy thing is when he and his friends, when he and his friends were going in, they were taking him in a while back to the emergency room...as he's sitting here in pain in the car, his friends...he taught his friends, 'cause he knows we're singing the prayer of witness, right? And so he wanted to learn it, and he's been prayin' that. He and his friends are singing the prayer of witness as they're headed into the hospital, that in every circumstance including this one he will have the confidence and strength to give witness to Jesus Christ, who alone has the power to save. That is a young man who knows and understands the God of the universe. Doesn't mean that he understands every aspect of His nature. It means that he is in this relationship, that he has full confidence, and there is a richness to life there that is amazing, that is not found in any other way.

So what do we do with this? Well, gonna do what Paul does. Gonna pray. I'm going to be praying that God will allow us, as we go through the course of this summer, to gain a fuller, deeper, better understanding of exactly who Christ is, that we will see it and we will allow it to impact our lives and work its way into our hearts in such a way that we have lives that are characterized by faith, hope, and love, that our hearts are encouraged to such an extent that God's grace spills forth out of us, overflows to life all around us. If you wanna join with me, the prayer's right there on the front of the bulletin. Basically, this is just what I'm gonna be prayin' over the course of this summer, just that...*pray that God will encourage our hearts as He knits them together in love, into the richness that comes with the full confidence of understanding, into a full knowledge of Christ, in whom all the treasure of wisdom and knowledge are hidden. And we pray this so that we may live for Your glory with a courageous and confident faith in the midst of every circumstance and situation we face now and in the days to come.* My hope and prayer is that we, as a congregation, will gain a fuller, better, deeper knowledge and understanding of Christ, and if that happens this sort of life is the natural result that comes out of it.

I ask that you would join me and stand. We're going to close with the song of...the prayer of witness. And I ask that you would join with me in this.

[Congregation sings the prayer of witness song]

Thank you. Go in grace.