

“Thank God for the Cross” Colossians 2:6-15

I hope that this Thanksgiving Sunday you have found much to be thankful for. In our passage this morning the Apostle Paul uses a great phrase, “Overflowing with Thankfulness” (v. 6).

If you want to fill a bucket to overflowing, make sure there are no holes in the bottom. If you want to be overflowing with thanksgiving, you need to make sure there is nothing in your life draining away the thankfulness in your heart.

I am sure you can think of many things that will drill holes in your thankfulness bucket – sickness, pain, loss, fear, doubt, poverty, addiction, failure, and the list goes on.

God’s Word gives us a sure fire way to plug any of the holes in our thankfulness bucket. The answer is always the same: keep your eyes on Jesus!

Look again at verses 6 and 7. Here the Apostle reminds the Colossian believers how they can overflow with Thankfulness.

Note what he says:

- continue to live your lives in Christ
- continue to be rooted and built up in Christ
- continue to be strengthened in your faith.

So the answer is actually quite simple: despite the troubles and pains and trials and losses, stay true to Jesus and you will find your life filling up to overflowing with thanksgiving.

Easy for Paul to say, right? He sits at his desk in his cushy house and writes these letters on his computer, waiting for the thanksgiving turkey to finish cooking...

Not quite. Paul is under arrest in Rome, chained to a guard 24/7. He is awaiting a trial for something he did not do. He is miles away from any place he might call home. And he is 2000 years too early for Skip the Dishes!

Despite his circumstances, the Apostle Paul finds much to be thankful for. Back in verse 5 he says he delights in the discipline and faith of the Colossians. This is a continuation of what we saw last week: the Apostle was thankful for the church family.

He does not stop there. Paul will take us to a very important place where we will find our lives welling up with thankfulness.

Before he takes us there, he makes sure we there is nothing to puncture a hole in our thankfulness bucket. He addresses some of the challenges the Colossian Christians face.

In verse 8 he addresses the challenge of “hollow and deceptive philosophy which depends on human traditions.”

The constant battle in the early church was to keep from slipping back into some form of Judaism or being swallowed up by the philosophies of the day. At this time a movement had just started to emerge called the Gnostics.

Gnosis means knowledge, and this movement believed that only the elite could have certain knowledge about the things of God. There were super saints who knew more than others because they were closer to God.

One form of this teaching was the claim that they had special teaching that Jesus, or Peter or Mary gave to them and no one else. Jesus had private teaching sessions and they got the information from that. So they knew better than everyone else what Jesus really wanted!

Of course this is wrong teaching. Jesus never said anything that was to separate one group of followers from another. His words divided between those who followed him and those who did not, but he would not divide his followers. These so called secret traditions were fabrications of people, not of God.

This can happen today as people claim they have special revelations from God that do not necessarily line up with what the rest of scripture says. This is usually how cults get started.

I told you about the young woman in our church in Lacombe that got a visitor at her door one day, a fellow she knew from the church. He said that God had told him that he was supposed to marry her. Now it is always hard to argue with people who say God has told them something. But she was on her toes, and she quickly responded, “God hasn’t told me yet” and she shut the door. They never did get married...

It is easy to find philosophies and teachings that start and end with man. Even science, which our world is so dependent on these days, fails us when it will not acknowledge that there is a God in heaven.

Paul also warns against being taken captive by elementary spiritual forces of this world. This phrase is not easy to decipher, but seems to point to those who determine their future by the stars. In Paul’s day even the greatest leaders would not make a move without first consulting the stars. Even men as famous as Julius Caesar, Augustus and Alexander the Great believed the stars would guide them.

Today people read their horoscopes and practice astrology and follow their zodiac signs. These have nothing to do with God, nor what he has told us in his Word. These replace God with manmade teachings.

To counter those two ideas, which will certainly put a hole in your thankfulness bucket, Paul points us to who Jesus really is. Why consult the stars when you can consult the one who made

the stars? Why consult the philosophies of mankind when you can ask the creator of all mankind? How can we connect with this great God? We do so through Christ.

In verse 11 and 12 the Apostle points out that religious practices can get in the way of true thankfulness. He mentions circumcision, the sign of being a true Jew. But in Jesus we do not offer a little flesh, but our whole selves. This is symbolized in our baptism where we are buried with Christ as we go under the water and are raised again to a new life as a child of God when we come out of the water.

Religion can be a real drag when it does not connect you with the living God. Going to church week after week, doing certain rituals and practices can soon become very boring if we are not truly connecting with the living God, connecting with Jesus. This is what Paul is saying. Empty religion will put a hole in your thankfulness bucket like nothing else.

There are many people today who will not be overflowing with thankfulness because they have had bad experiences with religion. Maybe they had a pastor or priest fail them. Maybe they have had a member of the church treat them bad. Maybe they expected more when they prayed. Maybe they lost a loved one and no one could explain to them how a loving God could let that happen. Now they are mad at God. It is hard to be thankful when you are angry.

So, finally, in verse 13, we reach the place where Paul is going to tell us how we can be overflowing with thankfulness. And he takes us immediately to Christ Jesus: "God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sin."

Brothers and sisters, we will have a bucket full of thanksgiving when we realise how wonderful is the salvation we find in Christ Jesus. He forgave us all our sin, cancelling the record of debt that was against us...

We read in Romans 3:23 that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, but that was not us, was it?

In verse 14 Paul gives us a picture of a parchment being unrolled with our sins written on it. As it unrolls we see items like this:

Lying?	Well it was just a small lie...	guilty!
Stealing?	It was only a chocolate bar...	guilty!
Jealousy?	You should have seen the look she gave him...	guilty!
Envy?	Well if you drove the car I drove you would want something else too ...	guilty
Hatred?	I will never forgive her...	guilty!
Murder?	Safe there, except Jesus did say if we hate in our heart we commit murder...	
	Guilty!	

Adultery I haven't been with someone else's wife... but Jesus says if we look with lust we commit adultery in our heart.... Guilty!

Gossip But I was just sharing a prayer request.... Guilty!

Shall I go on? Drunkenness. Laziness. Pride. Selfishness.

Our "rap sheet" does not look good. But we are told in verse 14 Jesus has "cancelled the charges." The KJV translates this verse saying, Jesus has "blotted out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us."

In Paul's day the ink did not have acid in it to embed the ink into the paper, or animal skin. So a piece of paper, or papyrus, could be reused if you simply wiped off the old ink, blotted it out. It was gone. All record of what you wrote has disappeared.

This is what happens to all the charges against us when we come to Christ for forgiveness. He blots them out, or wipes them off. "As far as the east is from the west so far has he removed our transgressions from us," we are told in Psalm 103:12.

But what if some hacker can find those deleted files? What if there is a way to actually add something to the paper and the old ink marks return? What if someone who knew me before starts to rewrite all those charges on the sheet? No doubt, that is what Satan will want to do...

Jesus was not finished yet. He wiped away all the charges against us, taking them away, and then he took that rap sheet and nailed it to the cross. There no one can access it. That is what verse 15 means. He has disarmed the powers and authorities showing them who's boss! Satan does not have access to the account of your life. That belongs to Jesus.

So all that we did wrong, all our sins, are forgiven as we put our faith in Christ, and he takes that sheet and nails it to the cross. No one is adding anything else to it. The grace that saved us yesterday will save us today and tomorrow.

Can you see how wonderful that cross is? Not only is it the place where Jesus made forgiveness possible as he took the penalty of our sin on himself, but he also nailed the list of our sins to the cross. It is finished!

This morning we can overflow with thanksgiving as we look to the cross once again and remember what Christ did for us there. He bore our sin, he paid our debt, he declared us "Not guilty" and now he nails the rap sheet to his cross so no one else can add to it.

Thank you for the cross, Lord. Thank you for all it means to us. Thank you that the cross will always point us to Jesus. And in him we find our hearts overflowing with thanksgiving.

It does not mean everything is going perfectly in our lives. It does not mean we do not have trials or sorrows or pain. But we have something greater – we have Jesus. The cross will always remind us of that fact.

. And we give thanks.