

How To Be Confident

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- [0 : 0 0] Awesome, great. Thanks, Kirsty. What a joy to be here in person. What a novel experience, being able to preach to you guys in person. If you're in the house tonight, there's a piece of paper there.
- We'll give you a bit of a steer through the service. It's got the reading on one side and then sermon notes, points on the other side. And hopefully at home, if you're watching at home tonight, you'll be able to follow in the usual fashion.
- My name is James, as Warren has said, and allow me to add a big warm welcome to you. And this evening, it's a good evening to be joining us at St. Silas because we're looking at a new letter this evening.
- So it's New Beginnings. And we're looking at a little letter of the Colossians. And we've called this series, Being God's New People in Jesus.
- And the title for this evening's talk is Having a Reassurance for When You're Under Pressure. But as we begin, let me pray for us.
- [1 : 0 2] So loving Heavenly Father, we thank you that we have been raised with Jesus, that our hope is a heavenly hope. We thank you that in Jesus, we can have full assurance and confidence.
- Please fill us with that assurance this evening. Amen. Well, I wonder if one of these experiences has been your experience and something that you can relate to.
- You may have recently become a Christian. And sure enough, you start hitting some hardships in the Christian life. And you start wondering, maybe it's about time that I should head back to my old life.
- It promised great promises. It promised a good house, a good car. It promises secrets of wisdom and understanding that could tell me how I could get ahead in life and live my best life now on earth.
- Or maybe experience too. You've become a new Christian. And you very quickly got fed up with going to church and with Bible study and with prayer.
- [2 : 1 4] And soon you start thinking, maybe the best way to get ahead in the Christian life is to do some stuff that's a little more real and relatable. Maybe a bit of ritual.
- Some rules. Some smoke and mirrors and stuff. And that's the way to get ahead in the Christian life. And then I'll start making some progress.
- Or maybe experience number three. You've become a Christian. And very soon, some well-meaning Christian friends come and say to you, there is a fuller and a better gospel that you should be following.
- Oh yes, Jesus did die for your sins. But let me tell you about the supercharged Jesus that super believers believe in.
- And he's a fuller and a freer and a more powerful Jesus than you could ever imagine. And all of these experiences that you may have gone through may relate to, emphasize the life in this world.

[3 : 21] They promise fullness and freedom. They introduce divisions about looking down on some who might not have the same experience as you.

And they stress our efforts over what God has done for us. And often it tempts us to build ourselves up and puff ourselves up in the words of Colossians and look down on others.

And it's two Christians like us who are facing these pressures, both within the church and outside the church and the world around them, that Paul writes this little letter, the Colossians.

He's never met the Colossians. Rather than looking very powerful and impressive, Paul is in prison as he writes this letter.

But they've heard about, but Paul has heard about the faith and love for God's people that the Colossians have through Epaphras, who's one of their own, who was with Paul and has now gone on to tell the Colossians the good news about Jesus.

[4 : 34] And so Paul writes to reassure them that despite the pressures they're facing, they are becoming God's new people in Jesus, so long as they stick with Jesus and continue in him, rooted and built up.

But before we dive into Paul's opening prayer in this letter, this great, wonderful prayer of reassurance, I wonder if we might step back and just look at Paul's opening verses and consider two paradigms or two spectacles that he gives us, that he raises right at the start of the letter, that he wants us to read this letter through and that will give us reassurance as we seek to be God's new people in Jesus.

And the first one is that despite the pressures, the Colossians are to realize that they are ruled by Christ through his apostle Paul.

So I wonder if you might just look at verse one in our letter this evening. I'll just begin here. It comes right at the start. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God.

And what Paul is doing there is he is saying, he is reassuring them that they have the right gospel despite what others say because they have the right apostle and they are ruled by Christ through his apostle Paul.

[6 : 01] And the second spectacles or paradigm that I want us to put on this evening as we look at Colossians over the next couple of weeks and that Paul goes on to unpack at length in this letter is that if the Colossians are to be God's new people in Jesus, then they must see that they have been raised in Christ to the heavenly realm.

So time and again, we read that little phrase in Christ or with Christ that we sung about at the start of our service. So the Colossians have a double citizenship. On the one hand, they're in Colossae or Glasgow or wherever and they've got their regular jobs.

They're slaves or freedmen, wives and husbands and children, lawyers, engineers and doctors, but they're also citizens of heaven in Christ.

As Paul puts it in chapter 3, you have died and now you're hidden in Christ, in God. And so Paul encourages them throughout this letter to abandon everything that has to do with this world, everything that points them to this world, all religion, every aspect, all their affections in this world, but rather to set their hearts and minds on things above in heaven.

And so, given these two glasses or these two paradigms, Paul then goes on to pray for the Colossians, this magnificent prayer of reassurance that is going to strengthen and encourage their hearts as they seek as young Christians, fledgling Christians, to become God's new people in Jesus.

[7 : 40] And so, Paul prays and he reassures them by telling them that they are true Christians, that they do have the true gospel, that Epaphras is the true messenger and they have had the true Christian experience in the Spirit.

And he gives little marks for each of those that they can assess themselves to. So, we're going to consider the marks of the true Christian just looking at verses 3 to 4 there.

So, look at what Paul says in verses 3 and 4. We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people that comes from the hope stored in heaven.

And so, the marks of the true Christian that Paul outlines here and that he gives thanks to God for them is that they have a faith in Jesus. They believe in Jesus, in the Jesus that he specifically has preached.

That they love God's people and that faith and that love comes from that hope of a future glory that's stored up for them in heaven.

[8 : 58] And so, if your faith is placed in Jesus that Paul preaches in Colossians, that should be a great source of comfort.

A little later in Colossians, Paul describes Jesus as the one in whom all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form. There is no greater Jesus to follow than the one that Paul teaches us.

And so, if your faith is placed in Jesus, is placed in another Jesus who's not God, who's maybe a good example, then you should be discouraged because that is not the Jesus that Paul preaches and that's not the Jesus that Paul encourages us to follow.

The second mark of the true Christian that Paul reassures them with here is that they have a love for God's people. The Colossians love God's people.

You see, the Colossians are not only clear on who Jesus is, on who the biblical Jesus is, but they display that they understand that in their love for those others around them, people who love the Lord Jesus.

[10 : 14] And in the context of Colossians, love is an active, it's an inclusive, it's a united love. So here, listen to Paul in chapter 3, verse 11, here there is no Gentile, no Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all and is in all.

It's a love that is inclusive in the context of Colossians. And it's my suspicion that when a lot of us talk about love, particularly at church, what we mean is that we simply define love as being an absence of hatred.

You see, rather than a positive action or inclusive action towards someone, towards the unlovely, we are simply happy to say that we love others but we'll never reach out to them and we simply mean that we don't really hate them.

But the love that Paul is talking about here is a love that steps out towards the unlovely, those who no one else could love but a mother.

So I wonder if you've ever seen a new parent and you know what new parents are like, they've got their baby and their baby's the most beautiful thing in the world. But let's be honest, newborn babies aren't particularly attractive or lovely.

[11 : 39] But don't tell the parents that. They love those babies, warts and all, and they'll do anything for them. And that's the kind of love that the Colossians display here.

And that we're encouraged to have in Jesus. And having this kind of love is incredibly reassuring. Because it means that if my first instinct is always to love, it means that I'll love others without the fear of rejection.

Because I'm always thinking of them. It means that even, it means that also I'll understand that many times in my life I will be very unlovely.

and that I can still know that my heavenly father will love me warts and all because I understand that love isn't dependent on my performance.

And the third assurance that Paul gives the Colossians here that they are true Christians is that they have a hope that's stored in heaven. It's a heavenly, a future hope that we'll look, that we'll consider now under our second point there, the marks of the true gospel looking at verses five and six there.

[12 : 51] And Paul describes this gospel that he's, that Epaphras has told the Colossians as a word of truth or a true message. And it's, it causes, it's the faith from verse five, 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. And so the first mark of the gospel that reassures them that they are following the right gospel is that they believe in this life to come, this heavenly hope.

They've put their hope not in the here and now but in a future glory, in a hope in heaven. They haven't been pressurized to put their hope here.

And it's a hope that's stored in heaven or as Paul puts it later. It's the gospel, is Christ in you the hope of glory?

And maybe living in Colossae or Glasgow, as they live there, they have been spiritually raised into heaven and they await that physical resurrection into heaven where they'll know that hope fully.

[14 : 11] And it's a hope that gives confidence and assurance that they can face and will face the end of all things, the judgment to come, knowing that their life and their future glory is secure in Jesus.

It's a hope that's stored up for them in heaven. And nothing in this life can take away that future hope and that future glory from them.

And it's this hope that is really the best news in the world. It's something to get you out of bed in the morning. It's something to share with your friends that no matter what happens in life, you're safe in Jesus in glory.

And that you'll breeze through that future judgment because Christ has taken the price for you. And the pressure that the Colossians were facing that we face is to abandon that future heavenly hope, to give up following Paul's Jesus, and rather instead to look for our glory and hope here on earth in the here and now.

And the second mark of the true gospel is that it's a message that's for everyone. It's a universal message. So just look down at verse 6.

[15 : 31] In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world. And today, lots of us are tempted to abandon the apostolic gospel because we think that it's not inclusive.

We think that it's not for everyone. But here Paul describes the gospel as being for everyone. That it's bearing fruit all over the world and that it's good news for all people everywhere in Jesus.

It's the most inclusive thing, idea, in the world. It's the most inclusive hope that we can be offered. But in contrast, the pressures that the Colossians were facing were divisive.

They were getting told to do things and keep certain rituals and aspects, religious festivals, new moon celebrations, Sabbath days, worship of angels that excluded some people from that hope.

And the third mark of the gospel that we see here, that Paul describes here in verse 6, is, well, it's bearing fruit and growing. It's a dynamic and growing gospel.

[16 : 50] It's alive. And here, Paul, he lists the mark of the true gospel, that it's alive and active, and that it has the power to shape and change people's lives.

So a couple of years ago, I went to an orphanage, and I met there a chap called Don. And Don, he was a South African guy, and he had been a terrorist.

He used to bomb people that were different to him, because he disagreed with them. And then he went on to become someone who fostered life, who cared for people, because the difference was that he had been changed by the gospel.

He had been regenerated, he had been made alive by the gospel. And the final mark of the gospel that we see here, right at the end, is that of the true gospel, is that it's the gospel of grace.

So just look down at the end of verse six. Just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it, and truly understood God's grace.

[18 : 00] You see, there is nothing that we can do to impress God. There's no work that we can do. There's no ritual that we can keep. There's no earthly temple or thing that we can offer that will win God over to our side.

But the grace, the glory of the gospel is that God's kindness has been shown to us. His mercy has been given us out of his sure generosity and grace.

When we were hopeless and helpless and stuck in our sin, God sent his son to die for us and to take our sins on our behalf, that we might have that glorious heavenly hope that no one else can take away so long as we continue in Jesus.

And because the gospel is based on grace, there's no room for snobbery and looking down on others. There's a level ground at the cross. We shouldn't go into church and look down on someone because of their past lives and their past sins.

And all these marks of the gospel that we see in this passage are the opposite of what the pressures were that the Colossians were facing.

[19 : 16] You see, those who were putting pressure on the Colossians were emphasizing earthly religion rules and practices rather than seeing themselves in Jesus in heaven.

They were boasting in their own efforts. They practiced a false humility, chapter 2, 23. They were puffed up on their own efforts, 2, 18.

They were concerned with life in this world. They had no regard for that future glory, that future hope stored in heaven. They were all about living their best life now.

Sometimes when they were coming from within, they were promoting a division within God's people by teaching a different gospel that affected our outreach to the world around us by dividing God's people.

Their gospel lacked any real power to transform lives. But Paul writes to the Colossian church to encourage them and to reassure them that this was not the case for them, that they had the true apostle and they had the true Jesus and that they were going to become God's new people so long as they continued in Jesus.

[20 : 35] And it's this true message of the gospel that Paul reassures the Colossians that Epaphras, their friend, even though Paul is locked away in prison, Epaphras has brought to them as Paul's faithful minister and that their Christian experience is authentic.

So just our final point there, the true messenger and the true experience, verses 7 and 8. And so Epaphras is a reliable minister on Paul's behalf.

I wonder if we might just look down at verse 7 there, at where he writes, you learned it, that's the gospel, the word of truth from Epaphras. And look at how he describes Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf.

And so Paul reassures earlier on in the passage in verses 5 and 3 that they've heard the true message and they've come to a true understanding of the gospel of grace.

But here he says they've been evangelized by his dear fellow servant, Epaphras, who is a faithful minister of Christ and who has acted on Paul's behalf.

[21 : 55] And you see, notice that Epaphras' credentials as a faithful minister, as a true messenger, comes from his relationship to Paul.

Epaphras doesn't speak on his own behalf. He speaks the words that he has been instructed to speak by Paul, on behalf of Paul. And so his confidence, their confidence in Epaphras as a true messenger of the gospel comes from Epaphras' relationship to Paul.

So Epaphras is Paul's messenger in verse 7, just as Paul is Jesus' messenger in verse 1, the apostle in verse 1 then.

And so, and the good news for us is that we can still have the same assurance and same confidence today. We might not have an Epaphras or a Paul, but Paul's authority and his gospel still lives on in his letters and in the Bible that we have.

And everything that you need to have, know, for a full and rich Christian life to become God's new people in Jesus is in the Bible.

[23 : 12] And the final thought there that I just want to cast our mind to, that the final assurance that Paul gives the Colossians is that their experience of the Christian life is authentic.

So looking at verse 8 there, Epaphras has told Paul of their love in the Spirit. And so they've received God's Spirit and what's God's Spirit do?

God's Spirit has motivated them to love others. And perhaps the Colossians had great temptations to want greater or more exciting expressions of God's Spirit.

But here, Paul, in verse 8, the only mention of the Spirit in the letter of the Colossians, Paul ascribes the chief and most important work of the Spirit in motivating us to love others.

It's the hardest thing that we could ever do. Love others sincerely. And so in this letter we get these two paradigms, these two spectacles that we should be ruled by Christ, that we should see that we have been raised in Christ into the heavenly realms.

[24 : 25] And then we have these great assurances of what the true Christian looks like. Someone who has a faith in Christ. Someone who loves fellow Christians. As someone who puts their hope in that future glorious hope.

And then we have those marks of the true gospel. And then finally we have Paul's assurance that Epaphras is his true messenger. And that Paul speaks on Jesus' behalf.

Let me close in a word of prayer for us. So Father, we thank you for this letter of the Colossians. We pray that we might become God's new people in Jesus.

We pray that we might be reassured that we'd grow in love, in faith, in our understanding of that future heavenly hope.

And we pray that we'd trust the Lord Jesus more and more each day. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[25 : 26] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.