

Sermon: Springing Up

Text: Colossians 1:1-8

Introduction:

These past seven weeks, we've been taking a deeper look at the seven letters that Jesus Himself wrote in Revelation 2-3 to seven churches spread out within an area we now think of as western Turkey. The final letter was written to the church in the city of Laodicea—and it wasn't a good letter. Jesus had some very direct words for the church in Laodicea, calling them "lukewarm," as well as "wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked." Ugh!

In my message last week, I mentioned that Laodicea received its water from the fresh, cold spring water that came from the city of Colossae, 9 miles to the east. Colossae and Laodicea were basically neighbors. However, other than it being an excellent water source, Colossae wasn't really known for much else (think "Podunk"). I read in a commentary that Colossae "was one of the least important places to which documents that were later included in the Bible were ever sent." If you like small towns—then Colossians is your kind of letter!

Jesus wrote the letter to Laodicea sometime around the year 90AD. Approximately 30 years earlier (62AD), the Apostle Paul wrote the Epistle (letter) to the Colossians. He wrote it from Rome—where he was being held as a prisoner by the Emperor Nero. Colossians was one of three letters that Paul wrote and sent at the same time—the other two were Ephesians and Philemon (more on this later).

On his third missionary journey, Paul spent nearly three years in Ephesus (approx. 54-56AD), which was 125 miles west of Colossae on the coast of the Adriatic Sea. We know from Acts 19:10, that "all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord." Talk about evangelistic impact! It was probably during this time that the church in Colossae was planted by a man named Epaphras.

A dangerous teaching was now threatening the church at Colossae, one that minimized Christ's role and undermined the new identity of believers "in Christ" (Col. 1:2;28). Paul wrote to warn against this false teaching and to encourage the believers in their growth toward Christian maturity. He emphasizes Christ's authority over all evil powers. Christians are united with the risen Christ, and therefore they share in His power and authority. Paul also encourages these believers to fight against sin, pursue holiness, and live as distinctively Christian households.

Simply put, Paul was passionate about calling them (and us!) to LOOK UP!!! He knew that we can take our eyes off of Jesus, and get caught up in the "stuff" of this world. Sure—the daily news is important. It's good to be aware of things happening around the globe and locally. But it's NOT good to get so preoccupied with the things of this world that we lose sight of Jesus and the Upper Story. The theme of this sermon series is based on Colossians 3:2, which says (The Message translation): "Don't shuffle along, eyes to the ground, absorbed with the things right in front of you. Look up, and be alert to what is going on around Christ—that's where the action is."

Examination:

- Read **Matthew 13:1-23**

- Why do you think that Jesus told stories (parables) that were so simple in nature? Here we have 23 verses dedicated to a very elementary story about a farmer sowing seeds in four types of soil. Why do you think Jesus did this?
 - The first soil type was so hard and unreceptive that the seed had no chance of taking root (v. 4; 19). What happened to this seed—and how might that apply to a human heart?
 - The second soil type (vv. 5-6; 20-21) was very rocky and shallow. What happened to this seed and why? Can you think of modern-day situations when people hear and respond immediately to the Word of God, but then quickly fall away because of a lack of root?
 - The third soil type (v. 7; 22) was filled with thorns and thistles. Jump down to verse 22 for the description of these thorns. How easy is it for the “worries of this life” and the “deceitfulness of wealth” to choke out our faith and hope?
 - The fourth soil type (v. 8; 23) is really the point of the story. In addition to hearing the Word of God, verse 23 tells us that something else has to happen to essentially “germinate” the seed. What has to happen for the seed to germinate—and what naturally happens after it does?
 - Verse 11 talks about “knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven.” What do you think these secrets are? Why do you think people’s hearts are hardened to the Gospel—what causes their hearts to become calloused (v. 15)?
 - Do you believe that the seed of the Gospel is being spread around the world—and that “good fruit” is springing up in exciting ways? Do you know of any stories or examples that support this?
- Read **Colossians 1:1-8**
 - Paul calls himself an apostle. What does that mean? How did he become one?
 - What words does Paul use to describe the people in the church in Colossae?
 - What two things about the church in Colossae stand out to Paul according to verse 5? It’s interesting how in this verse, faith, hope and love aren’t viewed together equally. Faith and love are described as “springing from” hope. Think about this, and discuss it in your group. What do you think that means?
 - Hope is described as being “stored up” in heaven. Do you ever think about this? Do you really believe that hope is stored up for you in heaven? Where do you tend to “place” your hope? What role does the Gospel play in this?
 - Paul describes how the Gospel is growing and bearing fruit on a much broader scale than just around Colossae and Ephesus. Where is the Gospel spreading? Does this give you hope?
 - Verse 6 talks about the fact that in addition to hearing the Gospel, we need to “truly understand God’s grace.” What do you think this means?
 - Epaphras told Paul of the Colossians “love in the Spirit.” Why is this important?

Application:

My challenge to you this week is to focus on being filled with faith and love that springs forth from hope that is stored up for you in heaven. This world isn’t your home. You have HOPE!