

The Real Deal

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[0 : 00] Well, we're going to turn to our reading for this morning, and Andrew is beginning a short series in the book of Colossians, so please turn to Colossians, and you'll find that page 983, if you have one of the visitor bibles, Colossians chapter 1, and we'll be reading the first 14 verses, 15 verses, 14 verses, and Andrew will be preaching on the first 8.

So, Colossians chapter 1, and beginning at verse 1. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy, our brother, to the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae, grace to you and peace from God our Father.

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven.

Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world, it is bearing fruit and growing, as it is also doing among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth, just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow servants.

He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, and has made known to us your love in the Spirit. And so, from the day we heard, 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, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work, and increasing your knowledge of God.

[2 : 07] May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

He has delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Well, amen. May God bless to us his word this morning. Well, good morning, and a very warm welcome to you all.

It's lovely to be here this morning, opening the letter of Colossians with you. We'll be spending the next few weeks looking at a few of the sections from the first chapter. And this morning, as Paul read, we'll be looking at the first eight verses, with a little bit of reference to some of the rest of the letter, too, to help us to get our bearings.

So if you do have a Bible, please do have it open with you at Colossians 1, where we'll be looking at those first eight verses in particular. Well, I wonder, do you or someone you know suffer from FOMO?

[3 : 26] That is the fear of missing out. If you've never heard of it before, it's defined as the sense of concern, that you might miss out on something very exciting that everyone else is going to see or be involved in, particularly caused by things that you might see on social media.

If you're a student, perhaps you've been particularly feeling that in this past week, in the middle of revising for exams, stuck in the library while it seems everyone else is out enjoying the sun.

And fear of missing out can lead to some people packing their calendars with as many things as possible to ensure that they're definitely there for the big event that everyone else is talking about, whether that's a concert or a sporting occasion or time with friends.

You don't want to miss out on anything fun or enjoyable. The prospect of hearing about these things secondhand, not experiencing it for yourself, well, that's just too disastrous to contemplate.

If I'm honest, I don't use social media very much, and most of the time I couldn't care less about missing out. But I know some people really want to be there. But whether we're afflicted by this

condition or not, we can likely agree most of the time, missing out on these sort of things isn't really of that much consequence.

[4 : 50] But what if, as Christians, we might be missing out? If we get the sense that we are somehow lacking something or missing out on the fullness of Christian experience, well, that is a much, much more serious and concerning thing, isn't it?

Maybe someone you know from another church tells you, well, at your church, you just opened the Bible. But in my church, we have a much richer, much fuller experience of the Holy Spirit's presence and power.

Or we hear a leader of one of the established churches speaking on TV. They're so grateful for how they used to go to an evangelical church. It taught them lots of good things. But now they've progressed on to something greater, something much better.

They've got real understanding, real maturity, and now they know what Jesus really meant in his teaching. Or perhaps you feel a bit inferior when you hear of a certain group who claim to be Christians, who follow all these added rules about what they eat and how they're much more in touch with and have a much deeper knowledge of God.

In these and other situations, we can very easily get the sense that we are somehow missing out. We just have faith in Jesus, but they have something better.

[6 : 15] It can be so disconcerting if we have a sense we're missing out on the true, the real Christian experience. Have we somehow got it wrong?

It can lead us to doubt. We can be tempted to give up, or we might even get led astray and embrace teachings that will lead us to disaster. Well, it seems like something along these lines was happening in Colossae.

They seem to be in danger of having a fear of missing out on a spiritual level. There's a concern that they might not really have the authentic Christian life.

It's hard to know exactly what the issue was in the Colossian church, but there does seem to be some kind of teaching or idea circulating there or around the church that promises spiritual fullness, promotes a deeper knowledge of some spiritual mystery that goes beyond simple faith in Jesus Christ.

Yet Paul writes this letter to reassure the Colossian believers. He's telling them that if they have come to Jesus and repentance and faith, then they're not missing out on anything.

[7 : 28] In Him, they truly have all that they could ever need in this life and in the next. So as we come to these opening verses, recognizing the backdrop will help us to make sense of what is really going on.

If you're like me, often as you approach the early verses of one of Paul's letters, there's a tendency just to rush past the opening. Let's get past these formalities, the personal greetings, the prayers to the good stuff where the meat and the action is really at.

But as I hope we'll see this morning, these verses are packed full of great gospel truths that are there to encourage and reassure us of the power of the true gospel.

They're there to enable and help us to keep going and to keep growing as Christians. So let's get into these first eight verses of Paul's letter to the Colossians.

Paul begins, as letters of that time tended to do with an introduction. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God and Timothy, our brother.

[8 : 39] So Timothy is involved writing alongside, serving, laboring alongside Paul. And Paul, right from the off, is clear. He's not self-appointed, but he's been called by God.

Perhaps some of these who are causing problems might be claiming that they are the real deal. They've come from God. But Paul is the one who has been appointed as an apostle, called by God himself.

And of course, the Colossians would have known what that calling looked like. For Paul has been transformed by a dramatic encounter with the risen Lord Jesus.

In that dramatic encounter on the Damascus Road, his life was turned upside down. He went from being a strident Jewish persecutor of Christian believers to being instrumental to the progress of the gospel among the Gentiles.

He went from murderous hatred of followers of Jesus to a remarkable love for his Christian brothers and sisters. And now, Paul finds himself in prison for Christ.

[9 : 46] Yet even there, we see that he clearly cares deeply for these Colossian believers. In spite, it seems, of never actually having met them face to face, which we see at the beginning of chapter 2.

You see, Paul is relying on second-hand testimony from others, but nevertheless is deeply invested in them. He's praying for them, and he's longing for their spiritual maturity above all else.

While some in the Colossian church seem to have been ethnically Jewish, it's likely the majority would have been Gentile pagans, likely bringing all sorts of baggage with them as they came to know Christ.

But in this letter, Paul is clear. They have known wonderful transformation from the gospel in their lives. That's why Paul calls them saints, set-apart ones, and faithful, brothers.

In chapter 2, Paul rejoices for their good order and the firmness of their faith in Christ. Seems Paul's warnings in this letter are preemptive.

[10 : 51] This church isn't in the clutches of false teachers. They aren't in a huge moral mess. They're off to a good start, and they're going well, but Paul is clear, you must keep going.

Of course, if you're concerned about whether you really have the real thing, if you're worried you're missing out on something better, well, that's going to be a big issue stopping you from going on into maturity.

So Paul writes this letter to reassure them, telling them that in Christ they truly do have all they need. Chapter 2, verses 6 and 7 could be said to sum up the whole message of this letter, where Paul writes, therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

For it is the message of Christ which is at the heart of this letter. It's all about being in Him, knowing Him and His fullness. That's all we need.

We're going to look at Paul's message of great reassurance in this passage in two parts this morning, as Paul points them to the fruit of the gospel all over the world and also in their lives, which is there to ensure them that they truly are not missing out.

[12 : 15] We're going to look at the second half of this passage first, so we'll look together at verses 5, the second half of verse 5 through to verse 8, first of all, where we see Paul is teaching, you know, the true gospel is being proclaimed by its growing global effect.

Paul begins this section by reassuring them the message they have received really is the real deal. This is the true gospel. It might have been that some were asking the question about the message and indeed the messenger.

It's not hard to imagine why there might have been some concerns. They're asking, are we missing out? Look at verse 7 where we meet Epaphras, the one from whom they've learnt the gospel.

He's the one who had established the church there, not Paul. He was from Colossae. He was one of them. He'd likely grown up. He was likely known by them.

Maybe they remembered what he was like before he became a Christian under Paul's ministry in Ephesus, which is about 100 miles down the road. Maybe people were questioning his reliability as a messenger.

[13 : 28] We know what he was like before. Can we really trust him? Or maybe they would say, well, he's not an apostle. Down the road in Ephesus, they had Paul, the real man.

They got it straight from the big man. But us here, well, we've got to make do with this guy. And maybe that's not so far removed from what we might experience at times in our Christian lives. We might, in the face of other things, question have I really received the true gospel? We think back, perhaps, to those who taught us the gospel first.

They were ordinary believers. They weren't superstars. They weren't celebrities. Perhaps not the most educated. It can rock us. It can concern us when we see people with great credentials, PhDs, and professors looking down at the simple, basic gospel of Jesus.

Well, they have graduated on to a higher plane of spirituality. Some people today seek to drive a wedge between Paul and Jesus. The true gospel of Jesus, they say, is one of love and compassion.

[14 : 38] What if it's been corrupted as Paul and others start to introduce all these unhelpful, narrow-minded concepts to do with sexuality and hell and things like that?

When we hear these things, it can shake our faith. And it seems the same was potentially going to be true for them. So Paul is reassuring them and us.

The gospel of Jesus, which you have received from Paul and Epaphras, is the real deal. The gospel message which was brought to them, which established the church there, is true.

This is not a fabrication. It's not a myth, but it is the word of the truth in the second half of verse 5. The gospel, it's truly good news.

It's not even a recent invention, not come up with by Epaphras or Paul or the Tron church. This message, Paul says, is the glorious fulfillment of all God's covenant promises.

[15:41] And he says it's proving wonderfully fruitful, not just in one small part of the world or amongst a single group of like-minded people, but rather, notice, in the whole world, verse 6, it is bearing fruit and increasing.

These are words which point back to the Genesis creation account where God says, be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. What Paul's saying here is that this message is built on God's original covenant promises from Abraham promising that God's creation purposes would overflow and increase, bearing fruit all over the earth as his descendants brought great blessing to all nations. And Paul is saying the gospel that they have heard and received is doing just that now. This is not some flash in the pan. It's not a new fad.

No, this is the one true God, the one true gospel of Jesus Christ, which has borne fruit in them and has also borne fruit all around the world.

Every corner of the known world at that time, the gospel has gone out as promised from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

[17:05] We'll think a bit more of the remarkable effect that the gospel had on those Colossian believers in a moment. But here, Paul is pointing out that what you have seen in your church, remarkable though it is, what you've witnessed in your lives isn't actually unique.

And Paul says that's a really good thing, because the same gospel which turned your lives around is doing exactly the same to countless others all over the world.

For what they, what we are engaged in is not some sect or cult missing out on the true thing. No, this is the only son of the father, the one who is at work building his church through his word.

Paul says what has happened and is happening in you, right from the very first moment that you heard and understood it, is happening many other places.

And of course they would have heard stories, they would no doubt have heard news of what was going on elsewhere. But for us today, how much greater is our awareness of what is happening in the world through increased travel and communication ease with the internet and other things?

[18:18] We truly can be comforted, can't we, to realize we're not alone. At times, it can feel like that here in Glasgow, the place that once, this nation that once had so much privilege, had so much faithful preaching, where Christianity had so much societal influence for so many decades, well it feels like so little is happening.

But we can be encouraged by Paul's words here that this same gospel is bearing fruit and increasing rapidly indeed in other parts of the world. There are more Christians living in Africa today than in any other part of the world.

What a change from not so long ago. There's significant gospel growth in Asia, and South America too. There are more Christians alive today than at any other time in world history.

You see, the gospel message is bearing fruit. It is increasing amongst people from every tribe and tongue and nation. It is bearing fruit and increasing all over the world, the true gospel message.

And it's wonderfully encouraging, isn't it, to get a glimpse into that both here as we see people from all over the world, but also at our fortnightly prayer meeting. We're reminded of what God is doing in places like India, Nigeria, Pakistan, Zambia, and countless other places all over the globe.

[19:48] And Paul says that ought to encourage us. Paul also goes on having acknowledged the truth of the message to recognize that Epaphras is also the real deal.

verse 7. Paul is clear. His gospel is my gospel, which is the authentic gospel of Jesus Christ. He's clear. Just because Paul's not been physically present, they haven't missed out.

Notice Paul is clear. He is our beloved fellow servant. He's working alongside them. That word is literally slave. He's serving. He's laboring alongside Paul and bringing this gospel that saved and transformed him to his own people back in Colossae.

He's a slave because he's bound by this message. He's not free to change it. He can't alter it. He can't make it more palatable. He hasn't watered it down.

No, Paul says he is a faithful minister of Christ on their behalf. And that is reason for Paul to give thanks. Even though Epaphras isn't an apostle, Paul is saying he is faithfully teaching the apostolic message.

[21 : 05] Maybe he's not got the same kudos. He's not as well known, probably not as well educated or well read. But the important thing Paul says is he is the genuine article.

He's brought the true gospel to you. That message which has borne fruit in his life and in their lives and all over the world. And of course for us today we haven't had the apostle Paul in our midst. We haven't heard God's word directly from Jesus. But we can be encouraged that this message is the message of Christ.

If we've received God's word this is the same message they had. Maybe we look back and think to those who taught us the gospel whether it was our parents, Sunday school teachers, our friends, or colleagues and they seem so ordinary.

Yet if they shared the gospel that we have before us in the pages of scripture then we can be reassured that we have received the real thing. You don't have to have a celebrity pastor or the most educated Bible study leader to grow and mature.

[22 : 17] You don't need to be a Billy Graham to share the gospel with your non- Christian friends. You don't need to have a PhD in theology to bring up your children in the fear and admonition of the Lord.

You just need to pass on the true gospel message Christ and him crucified. Of course we want to do that well.

Epaphras has clearly taken God's word seriously. He's had input and investment from Paul. But the reason Paul is commending him to them is not his qualifications.

He doesn't say he was top of his class at Cornhill Ephesus. But rather he points to his faithfulness. Paul is clear that fullness is not found in the messenger but it's found in the message.

Our confidence is not to be found in our speakers but in our Savior alone. And notice this message is of God's grace.

[23 : 17] In the second half of verse 6, the grace of God and truth is what you have heard and received. This is not a message about performance. It's not about our merit.

Not requiring great deeds of self-denial to attain some kind of deeper spiritual experience as some have been suggesting. The gospel message is all about God's grace.

We can't produce this sort of fruit by trying really hard. It doesn't come about through mystical experience. It's all about Jesus and what he has done for us.

Knowing, understanding that and being united to him in faith. If you know and love this Jesus, Paul says you're not missing out on anything at all.

It is only through the shedding of his blood at the cross that we can know the hope of redemption and forgiveness. goodness. Paul says, you know the true gospel is being proclaimed by its growing and its global effect.

[24 : 23] And of course, the other side of that is that what Paul is teaching us helps us to recognize a fraud. How often do we see those who are watering down the gospel or seeking to add things to it in an effort to make it more palatable be part of churches that simply aren't bearing fruit.

They're not growing but are withering and dying. Or think of various cults and sects that have a Christian veneer but add in other elements, often in ways that look so enticing and appealing. Yet they only appeal to people from a certain background, maybe a certain education, or people from a specific region of the world. Paul says that's because they are not the real deal.

They're not bearing fruit and increasing all over the world. Now, of course, those who come promoting these ideas, who offer a truer, a deeper spiritual experience, they never come to us with a sign around their neck saying, I am a heretic.

They claim, don't they, to be genuine believers. They say, oh, I'm a real Christian. I'm part of this true gospel that is bearing fruit and increasing all over the world. But Paul is clear later in this letter.

[25 : 37] Although it has an appearance of wisdom, it simply can't deliver. It doesn't follow through on what it promises. The problem is these things have no power to stop the indulgence of the flesh.

And Paul helps us to distinguish between a real believer, between real gospel fruit, and a fake by reassuring the Colossians of the fruit of the gospel in the lives of real Christians.

And that's what we see in the first part, verse 3 to the first half of verse 5, where Paul says, you know, true gospel people by their lives of hope-driven, loving service.

Notice in verse 3, Paul is giving thanks for this fruit in the lives of these Colossians when he prays for them. He's not congratulating them.

He's not giving them a pat on the back. He's not saying, take your foot off the gas. You've made it. If you're like me, it is so easy to get proud and complacent and carried away. But Paul is recognizing and reminding them and reminding us of these positive signs, encouraging things in our church, in our lives, and in our world.

[26 : 53] They're a gracious gift from the Lord. And we ought to give thanks to him for that in our lives and in the lives of others. The reason, again, Paul is doing this before them in this letter is so that they will be reassured that they are true gospel people, true Christian believers who have had lives that have been transformed.

And notice what it is that Paul points to in thanksgiving here. As he prays for them, he's thankful in verse 4 and 5 for their faith, for their love, and for their hope.

Of course, this is a familiar trio in Paul's letters. On one level, it seems so basic. It seems so simple. It seems so unimpressive. Isn't there something more, Paul?

But rather, Paul is clear. These are the hallmarks of a genuine Christian believer. If you exhibit these things, then God really has been at work in you.

Paul is emphasizing that they are the real deal. These qualities are not actually natural in human beings. This is not something which comes easily.

[28 : 05] No, this is the fruit of God's Spirit at work in a person. We see Paul spell that out explicitly at the end of verse 7. He speaks of their love in the Spirit, which Epaphras has communicated back to him.

This is only possible by the work of God's Spirit in our lives. So let's look briefly at each of these qualities. Firstly, Paul is thankful for their faith in Christ Jesus.

And the object of their faith is key here. Paul is clear. It's only faith in Jesus Christ, the one true God, the only Son of the Father.

This is not some vague belief in God, but rather trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ himself and nothing and no one else. It's because they're doing that that they are saints.

They are faithful brothers in Christ. For Paul is clear. It's Jesus alone who can save. And it's Jesus alone who can sanctify his people.

[29 : 11] Nothing and no one can or should be added to it. You can't say I'm trusting in Christ and also looking to these other miraculous visions or my church's reputation for this or any other thing.

Paul says it's faith in Christ alone. If we add anything to that, then we stand to lose everything. Christ is right at the center of this letter.

It's packed with references to him and how glorious and wonderful he is for who he is and all that he has done. And the emphasis is that he really, truly is worth trusting.

And Paul is clear. We've touched on the grace already, but faith is only possible as a miraculous gift of God's grace. It's him alone who gives sight to blind eyes.

It's him alone who takes us from darkness to light. It's only his grace that makes this saving faith possible. Paul is reassuring them that their faith is in the right place.

[30 : 19] This is a faith that is under attack. There are people seeking to take them captive in chapter two, we're told, by other teachings which claim to add to Christ, but in reality only detract from him.

Secondly, we're told about the love that they have for all the saints. Also in verse four, Paul has heard of their great love. Love, of course, is something that's so familiar to us from pop songs.

All you need is love and all these other things. We hear so much about it. But Paul is clear. This is not hollow. This is not sentimental. This is sacrificial and Christ-like love for other believers.

Paul says the way we see the power and the presence of Christ on earth today is not, as some would have you suggest, through incredible experiences of mystical things. It's not in these remarkable acts of self-denial some are promoting.

It doesn't come through religious rituals. No, it's through Christ-like sacrificial love amongst God's people. Paul is clear that true Christian love in this way is possible only in lives that have been transformed by God's grace.

[31 : 36] For this love is not self-serving, nor is it superficial. It marks the church out as being truly unique. If you're like me and you've been around church for a while, it can be easy to take this for granted.

But Paul is clear we should never do that. And of course, experience tells us that such behavior is not normal outwith church that has truly been transformed by the gospel.

I truly am thankful to have witnessed and experienced that through our church family and elsewhere throughout my life. It's a wonderful thing when we witness members of a growth group stepping up and providing real, costly, practical love, care, and support for those who have no earthly family in times of great hardship, isn't it?

Or seeing people extending hospitality to others, even when they have a thousand and one other things going on in life, inviting people who are so different from them into their homes, and lovingly preparing a meal.

I'm thankful for people bearing with me and all my quirks for forgiving me when I sin against them. And as we look around the room, each gathering is met in this morning, we'll be struck, won't we, when we think about it.

[32 : 59] There's unity with people from all different ages and stages, people from different parts of the world, with various different interests. There would be no other reason for us all to be together this Sunday morning other than through Christ.

And we see afterwards, there's real, there's tangible Christ-like love. These things are not normal. We shouldn't take them for granted.

It's only through the work of Christ in us. And Paul says that should encourage us, that we are the true thing. We really are people who've been transformed by the one true gospel.

Well, Jesus himself said, didn't he, by this all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another. Perhaps if you're new to church, it's something that seems so striking, so strange, so new.

All these different people loving each other with no obvious thing connecting them together. Well, Paul goes on as he looks at hope to explain why it is that people behave in this way in a true gospel church.

[34 : 14] He's clear that what drives and what motivates faith in Jesus and love for one another is hope. Verse 5. He says it is because of this hope that is laid up for you in heaven.

Now, this hope is not a vain hope, not hope as we often speak about it in terms of wishful thinking that's founded in unreality, like me hoping that Man United might finally put together a decent run of form.

No. This is something far more concrete and certain. The hope that is laid up for you in heaven.

This is forward-looking with great confidence and it changes things now.

It may have been that the false teaching that was in danger of shaking the Colossians was promising in the here and now much more rather than looking ahead.

They certainly appear to have been promising great insight into the spiritual realm, power over evil. They're saying, why wait? You can have it all now.

[35 : 18] But Paul is clear. Whatever it was that was going on, it can't and it won't produce genuine faith in Christ and it won't lead to true love for brothers and sisters.

What it actually leads to, we see in chapter 2, is disunity and division. People looking down at others for failing to do the things they demand beyond faith in Christ.

People become puffed up in their self-righteousness because what they have is not about grace, but about what they do or what they add or what they claim.

The reality is that these things which look good, which promise fullness, which seem wise and offer supposedly a deeper understanding, well, they actually prove to be empty.

They have no power to help us to resist our sinful, selfish desires to put me above my brothers and sisters. Yet while Paul speaks, yes, of a future hope, he's not saying the gospel offers no hope to life here and now.

[36 : 23] Of course, we have so much to give thanks to God for as he repeatedly emphasizes throughout this letter. The wonder, as we've mentioned, of fellowship with one another, forgiveness, redemption, great assurance.

But Paul says the things we know now, they're merely a taster of something far greater that lies ahead. Paul says the best is yet to come.

This world is not all there is. So don't be taken away by those who promise it all now. Colossians chapter 3, verse 3, tells us you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

What Paul is speaking about here is union with Christ being joined to Jesus. He says, you really belong with Jesus. He is in heaven, but we don't see it.

It's hidden now. And of course, we don't feel like that. We wish we could see it. We wish that reality was more obvious now. But Paul is clear in the very next verse.

[37 : 30] He says, one day that will be revealed when Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Paul is clear that this glorious future in heaven with the Lord himself awaits all who know and love Jesus Christ.

And it is this hope that shapes and indeed transforms how we live today, fueling our faith and promoting remarkable, sacrificial, Christ-like love for brothers and sisters.

But for now, of course, we aren't physically in heaven. We're in Colossae or Glasgow. And Paul says, the reality of that truth is seen in your love for one another. That is a signpost to your true home.

Because you have this hope, it transforms the way you live now. This is the only way possible that you have been and can keep living in this way as faithful fellow pilgrims on the journey to what is our true and our eternal home.

Paul says, it is that view alone that leads to this loving unity that is possible through Christ. Paul is clear you can be reassured as you keep looking forward to the hope that is yours in heaven because you've been united to Christ through faith.

[38 : 56] He truly is all that you need. You have the real thing. You know the true gospel has been proclaimed amongst you. You've seen its growing, its global effect.

And Paul says, you know you are true gospel people if you're displaying in your church and in your life hope-driven, loving service. So if you've come to know Jesus Christ and embraced Him in repentance and faith, if we do see His grace at work in our lives and amongst our church, why on earth would we be tempted to look anywhere else for something more?

We aren't missing out on a single thing in the Christian life. Let's pray. Our Lord and our Heavenly Father, we do give you thanks for the gospel of the Lord Jesus.

We give you thanks that it is bearing fruit and increasing all around the world. We rejoice and give thanks for news we hear from elsewhere, from gospel and ministry partners who are faithfully laboring and who are producing fruit for your kingdom, fruit that will last forever.

And we do give you thanks for fruit that we see here in lives and hearts that are being changed and transformed by your gospel, looking ahead to the future, sure and certain hope of heaven with you for eternity.

[40 : 30] We long, Lord, that we would see that more and more in our lives and as a church. and we do pray, Lord, that you help us to keep our eyes fixed on that hope which drives and fuels and equips us to love one another in a Christ-like manner.

Help us to have great confidence that we aren't missing out, that we don't need to look elsewhere. Enable us to keep going, keep persevering in proclaiming and living out this gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen. Amen.