



Sermon – September 13, 2020
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Verses Covered This Week

Colossians 1:10 - 11

And as you grab your seat, let's pick up our Bibles. We're going to be back in Colossians 1, chapter 1, verse 10 this morning. Colossians 1:10. This is your first time with us, welcome home. We're glad you're here. As was mentioned during the welcome time, there's a Connect Card in the seat back in front of you. We'd love to grab some information about you. Help us get to know you and help for you to get to know our church. So here we are. We're in week 2 of our 21 days of prayer emphasis. So as we talked about last Sunday, from verse 9 to 14 of Colossians 1, Paul is praying for the Colossians and for us. And as we move through this text, we've inviting you to join our church community in 21 days of prayer. And if you haven't already begun that process, it's not too late to jump in. It's very simple. Here's the idea. We just want to challenge you every day to write down a specific prayer request to the Lord. You can pray your plans, pray your problems, ask God to work in your situations. And see the way that He moves over this series of weeks together as a community. Along with that, at the end of the service, we're going to have a number of outside groups that use our facilities throughout the week that are going to come and join us at the front here in order for us to introduce them to you and also take a moment of time to pray for them. Because one of the blessings of our church facility during this COVID season is a chance for us to serve others. And to provide our space for them so that they can continue on the mission that God has called us to.

So draw your attention to Colossians 1:10. If you remember last week, Paul was walking us through what it looks like to pray for the will of God in our lives. Now he's going to turn his attention to what it looks like to pray to walk in the way of God in our lives. So notice the way he says it in verse 10.

¹⁰so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; ¹¹being strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy;

So this weekend, our middle school retreat is off at Messiah's Ranch. Just by show of hands, have any of you ever been out to Messiah's Ranch before? Alright. So quite a few of you have. If you haven't been there, it was my first time in a while to be back there. And John Hyde, one

of our deacons, runs that facility and it's a great opportunity for our middle schoolers. And I wanted him to show me around. I made sure to have him take me to the boys' dorm rooms right away before the body odor took over and was overwhelmed over the course of the weekend. But as you walked around from place to place, I was just overwhelmed by how unique a facility it is. And what John told me about is how he will take visions for buildings that the Lord gives him and he will use things that nobody else would think about using in order to create the constructions that are there. So you could look at some of the lighting and the canisters are nothing more than cans that held beans. Or if you look at some of the bunk beds that are there, they're built by tree trunks and the railing that's to keep you in the bed is the limbs of trees that are there positioned. What you find when you go around that place is that what John has done over the years is taken what's broken, what's rejected, what's overlooked, what seems to be useless, and when it's taken by a master craftsman and it's fashioned for a purpose, it can be taken from what is useless to now being useful for the kingdom. From what is unworthy to now being made worthy. And that's not just true in John's facility at Messiah's ranch. That is the image that Paul is giving us here in verses 10 to 11. That that is what God has done for us in Christ. He has taken those of us who are discarded, of no value, seemingly useless. And in Christ, He has met us in our brokenness and set us free. He has raised us to walk in newness of life so that we can be fashioned to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel. And as we see this playing out, what we're going to find is that Paul is calling us to pray for our walk with God. So that should raise the question for us. What does our walk with God mean? What does that look like? Well, from the very beginning of pages of Scripture, you see the theme of walking with God over and over again. So in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve are there and it tells us that they are walking with God in the cool of the day. When they fall into sin, they hide from God. Rather than walk with Him, they run away from Him. The nation of Israel as they are being led through the wilderness and into the promised land, they walk by faith as God leads them. The law tells us in the Old Testament law that it commands God's people to keep His statutes as they walk in Him. There's this imagery of walking that is a consistent part of what it looks like for the people of God to follow the will of God in their life.

And that's definitely the case here when Paul is laying things out for us in Colossians 1. He's calling us to walk in the way of God. And that picture of walking is one of connection. It's one of relationship. It's one of depth. It's one of relentless pursuit that we are following after God's design for our life and walking in His ways. And as we continue this 21 days of prayer emphasis, as we turn our attention to Colossians 1:10 and 11, Paul is going to offer us this morning three ways that we need to pray for our walk with the Lord. So you'll notice the first one back there in verse 10 where Paul tells us to pray for a walk that pleases the heart of God. That pleases the heart of God. Notice how he says it. So as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him. So this idea of walking in a manner worthy of God, occurs six times in the New Testament. And in each occasion, it's sending a signal that our life should match the life that God has designed for us; that it should be suitable, fitting, appropriate for use. And that should seem startling to us if we read our Bibles. Because what we know is that from the very beginning, when Adam and Eve fall into sin, the Bible is reminding us that all of us are unworthy before God. We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. We are all deserving of judgement whether that's from Adam and Eve eating forbidden fruit. Or the nation or Israel worshipping idols. Or perhaps even for Paul himself who was at first a persecutor of the church. On our own we are unworthy before God. But now that we've been bought with the price, we are made worthy. We have standing before the Father, because He no longer sees us in our sin,

but instead, clothed in Christ's righteousness. And Paul is calling us to walk in a manner that reflects that reality. To walk in a manner worthy of the Lord. And notice what happens when we walk in a manner worthy of the Lord. Do you see what he says there? When we walk worthy, it is fully pleasing to God. He tells us there in verse 10 that it is fully pleasing; not occasionally, not sometimes, but fully, always, it is every situation. This is designed to be true. So what does Paul mean when he says, pleasing God? What does it look like to be pleasing to Him? Well, if you were to look at the original language, this imagery is used about a dozen times in the New Testament about living a life that's pleasing to God. And at the root of it, is this picture of someone who is devoted, who is committed in their behavior, who is pursuing excellent service for the sake of someone else. When Paul speaks here of being pleasing to God, that's the image. He is calling us to pray for that to be true. If you're not sure exactly what it means, just think about college football kicking off in earnest last night. And what we found was, as those offenses drove down the field and scored a touchdown, when they'd make it to the sidelines, you'd see that head coach slapping helmets and high-fiving. He was well pleased by their good conduct on the field. Or as the first six weeks of school comes to an end and you parents go into your schools for parent-teacher conferences and you hear a good report about your child's behavior and learning in the classroom. And it overflows in joy and praise and you come home and tell them how pleasing they are to you. That's the type of picture that Paul is driving at here. That we are called to live a life that is pleasing to God. And that that should be at the center of our prayer. Now the danger for each one of us is that we're wired to be people pleasers. In a fallen world, we're constantly looking around and what do other people think of us. How do they see me? What's their perception of who I am and how can I live in a way that earns their favor? That makes them happy? And often we find our value by the way we are perceived as others. Well what if the problem with that is not the desire to please people, but the fact that we are seeking to please the wrong people. That instead of seeking to please others, Paul is reminding us that we are called to please one man, the Lord Jesus Christ. To live in a life that is pleasing to Him. Which means, as we think through this 21 days of prayer together, that one of the most practical things you can do in your prayer life is when you're not sure how to pray, you can pray verse 10 of Colossians 1. God, in this moment, would You help me walk in a manner worthy of the Lord? Would You enable me to be fully pleasing to You? As you move into those plans, into those moments of uncertainty, God will meet you in that moment and fulfill that prayer request to walk in a way that pleases the heart of God.

But notice the way that verse 10 continues. Because we see a second thing that Paul is calling us to pray for. When he tells us that we should pray for a walk that produces the fruit of God. So notice halfway through verse 10, he says, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. So in other words, how can we please God by walking in a manner worthy of the gospel? Well, the rest of verse 10, all the way through verse 12, is going to help us see some various ways that we can do that. And one of those is by living a life that produces the fruit of God. He speaks there of bearing fruit. Now if you look back at verse 6 at a verse we covered a couple weeks ago, it's the exact same term that Paul used right there. Remember, if you look back in verse 6, he spoke about how the word of truth, the gospel, is bearing fruit and increasing in all the world. That God is working in an extensive way around the globe through His word. But now when he speaks about it, he's talking about how God is working in an intensive way in and through our own hearts. That in the gospel, God is bringing about fruit. If you were here with us a couple of weeks ago when we went through verse 6, do you remember me talking about those ghost apples? Western Michigan, this ice storm comes through and they

encase rotten apples and the rotten contents melt out of the middle and all that's left is a pure and undefiled casing of what that apple was intended to look like. Maybe you googled it since we were there. That's the picture that Paul is giving here in this moment. This idea of bearing fruit. That when God is at work in our lives, it naturally overflows in doing good works. But here's the thing. Doing good works isn't unusual and unique only to the Christian religion. If you look around at world religions around the globe, every one of them will have at the center of their religion the idea of doing good works. But here's the difference. Every other religion will tell you that you need to do good works in order to earn your salvation. But what Paul is reminding us of here, is that we are not called to do good works in order to earn our salvation, but to express our salvation. To show what God has done for us in Christ. To put the gospel on display through us. But I want you to notice that when the gospel is at work in the way that we walk in a manner worthy of the gospel, it doesn't just bear fruit through us. It also bears fruit in us. That's why he says there at the end of verse 10 that we should increase in the knowledge of God. This idea of growing, increasing, expanding, developing. That when the gospel takes root in our heart, it brings about growth. And the reason for that is because healthy things grow. And that's what Paul is reminding us of. That we are to grow in the knowledge of God. Now that word knowledge is the same one, if you look back at verse 9, he uses the same term there when praying that we would grow in the knowledge of God's will. So he's prayed that we would grow in God's will so that we can walk in a manner worthy of the gospel, and when we do that, one of the effects is that we are going to increase in the knowledge of God. And as we increase in the knowledge of God, it's going to better enable us to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel. It's this virtuous cycle that's there. Verse 9 he prays that we'd increase in knowing God's will. But now he's praying that we increase in knowing God Himself. Are you captivated by God this morning? Does a longing to know Him more fuel your life? Is that the relentless desire of your heart? That's what Paul is speaking of here. And one of the great ways you can measure that in this moment is just this past week we crossed over the six-month mark in living in this unusual COVID season. It was the middle of March whenever everything started to change for every one of us. So just ask yourself the question. Look back over that last six-months and ask yourself, would it be right to say before God that my life has been marked by bearing fruit and increasing in the knowledge of God? Would that be a defining characteristic of these last six months. And if not, then what Colossians 1:10 is reminding us of is that we need to be crying out to God to shape our walk in such a way that it produces the fruit of God.

But notice the way that this text closes out. Because Paul turns our attention to a third thing to pray for in our walk in verse 11 when he tells us that we should pray for a walk that perseveres on the way of God. Look at the way that he says it there. He says, being strengthened with all power according to His glorious might for all endurance and patience with joy. So Paul isn't just calling us to walk with God for a season, but for a lifetime. And if we're going to do that, if we're going to persevere in the faith, Paul is going to show us that several things need to be true. The first one that we see there is that perseverance depends on God's power. So look back at how verse 11 begins. He uses three words related to power consecutively. Being strengthened with all power according to His glorious might. Those first two are from the same root word, being strengthened, experiencing God's power. And notice the verb, being strengthened, is in the passive voice. It's not something we can do for ourselves. The Christian life cannot be lived with endurance depending on your own strength. Instead, we've got to cling to God's power. What kind of power? The kind of power he calls there, God's glorious might. If you were to look throughout the New Testament, anytime this word that is translated might is used, it's

always in reference to God and to His strength. It's the type of power that's perfect, complete, unlimited, lacking in nothing. And Paul is calling out to us to press on in our walk with God by depending on His glorious might. And just think about that power. That wonder-working power that we see all throughout the Bible. It's the same power that spoke the world into existence by God's voice in creation. It's the same power that when Pharaoh's army was pressing against Israel as they fled from him that parted the Red Sea and brought them over dry ground and collapsed those waters of judgment against the enemies of God. It's the same power that worked even in the life of Christ who resisted the pull of temptation, who went to the cross to die for our sins, and that same power raised Him three days later victorious over the grave. That's the kind of power we're talking about. That's the kind of power God has put in your life through His Spirit so that you can walk in a way that perseveres on the path that God has called you to. And unless we recognize that power, we miss how God can work in our lives. That the power of God can break every stronghold. It can overcome every addiction. It can bring home every prodigal. It can accomplish every task. It can withstand every pandemic. There is nothing that can stand before the power of God. Not even death itself. So what are we afraid of? What's causing us this difficulty to press on in the faith when we can cling to the reality that God has given us His power by His Spirit. The pathway to perseverance is by recognizing God's power. But we also, in addition to that, need to depend on God's perspective. So that's why in verse 11, as it ends, Paul tells us there that we should do, that we should cling to that power for all endurance and patience with joy. In other words, when we see the world the way that God sees it, it enables us to live in a way that sustains us so that we can persevere through the difficulties of life.

So what would the Colossians have had to endure? He speaks there of endurance. Just think about it. They're living in a pagan culture where there was almost certainly oppression from the outside. But in addition to that, they were experiencing difficulties from within. We'll learn later on that there were false teachers amongst them that were leading them astray. And you could imagine for those in the church, maybe they were at a point of despair, disappointment. Maybe they were ready to quit or walk away. There was frustration that was there. But instead, Paul tells us that the path that God has called us to is one of perseverance. That we press on in the faith, even in the difficulty. And he says that we should not just have endurance, but all endurance. You see that word all? That same word used five times in those three verses of 9 through 11. There's this emphasis there that regardless of the circumstances, God can supply the strength to meet our needs. From His abundant riches, from His glorious might, He can sustain us for the long path, for that endurance to the end. It's what one author calls a long obedience in the same direction. That's the pathway that God is calling us to. That's what Paul is telling us to pray for. That God would persevere us on the path that He has called us to. And in this moment, as we're reflecting on endurance, it reminded me that this week marked the 25th anniversary of a significant milestone in sports history. I don't know if the number 2,131 means anything to you, but as a 13-year-old boy in 1995, it meant a lot to me. Because 2,131 games were the consecutive number of games that Cal Ripken, Jr. played in in order to break the streak of Lou Gehrig. It was a monumental accomplishment of perseverance in sports. And I remember him there at Camden Yards and he's run around the entire ballpark and everybody is celebrating and revering him for this accomplishment. And just imagine all the types of hardships you'd have to endure to play that many seasons without skipping a game. I remember there was a time where he was in a bench-clearing brawl and his knee was injured and yet he was out there the next day. Or at one point in his career, he herniated one of his discs and the doctors told him, "You shouldn't play anymore." And his question was, "Well will it make things any worse if I do

keep playing?” And when they said, no, he was right back out there the next game and played over 50 games with a herniated disc. That’s the kind of perseverance, the type of endurance that marked this man. Now how could that be the case? It’s because of his perspective. He was an everyday player who was committed to playing every day. He recognized that what he was called to was to take things one day at a time, one inning at a time. And when Paul speaks here of this idea of all endurance and patience with joy, isn’t that the image we’re seeing? That we keep pressing on, that we keep sacrificing ourselves for the sake of others, that we keep pursuing the path that God has called us to regardless of the circumstances? He speaks there of both perseverance and patience. That we can bear with difficult situations and with difficult people. And that that patience should be marked with joy. That there should be gladness mixed together with our grit. That we’re not just muscling up and pushing through miserable through the entire season of persevering with the Lord. But instead, we are steadfast with joy. That it is pleasing to us to suffer and to endure these hardships because we’re reflecting our Savior who did the same thing.

That’s one of the reasons I’m so glad that Tim and Jamie Skaggs have come back to join our team. This Sunday marks the first Sunday that Tim is here as our Legacy Adult and Pastoral Care minister. And part of what they’re here to do is to enable our Legacy Adults to finish the last chapter of their life well. To do exactly what Paul is calling us to here in this moment. To persevere with endurance and patience with joy. And imagine why that should be true for us as Christians. It’s not just because that is what God has called us to; but it’s because He has modeled it for us in His own Son. Remember the way that Hebrews 12:2 says it. You don’t need to turn there, but just listen to how the book tells us. He says:

²Looking to Jesus the founder and perfecter of our faith, now listen to this, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross despising the shame and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

We endure because Christ has endured for us. He resisted the wiles of satan. He took on the wrath of God. He suffered in our place. He was buried in the grave for three days. He was raised to walk in newness of life. He is now seated victorious on the right had of the Father and He is inviting each one of us to come to know Him and to press on in the faith in a way that reflects His own endurance. Now I’ve had a number of you ask me about this pulpit that I’m standing behind. It just showed up last week as a gift from our staff. We had our all-team meeting just a couple weeks ago. And Curtis Wellman, one of our facilities crew, gave a presentation at the end of that. This pulpit was constructed by hand by him. And I love this pulpit. And it’s not just because it was a gift from the team to your new pastor making me feel more welcome and connected with our staff. And it’s not just because it is set up well in order to enable me to faithfully preach the word of God each week. One of the reasons that I love this pulpit is because of what it’s made of. Every aspect of this podium that was built by hand by Curtis was taken from culled wood that was discarded and considered unusable after other projects that have happened in this church. The types of scrap wood that was there laying on the ground or not needed because it didn’t fit. It had no value. It was seemingly insignificant and yet in the hands of a master craftsman, what was seen as useless has now been made useful for the kingdom. And I want you to hear something that he shared with our group when he presented this pulpit to us just a couple weeks ago. Here’s how he said it.

Everything in this pulpit is leftover from something else, including the stain to match color. The boards were all warped and twisted and cracked when I glued and fastened them together. And you can even see the marks from the cuts and the clamps. In the hands of a craftsman, something nobody wants can be made into something everybody likes. And every time someone looks at this pulpit, it is like looking at a reflection. Each of us carry many marks from sin. But those sins have been stained with the precious blood of Christ. Those wounds from the sin and the destruction of this world are now scars that have been healed and been sealed by a divine, unbreakable, promise.

When Paul speaks to us this morning about walking in a manner worthy of the Lord, when he challenges us to pray that we can persevere in the way of God, he is reminding us of the reality that we are just like this podium. Broken on our own. Useless, of no value, discarded, and yet in the gospel, we have been restored. We have been given a path to walk in and the call of the gospel to each one of us today. It's that we would pray that God would give us a walk that pleases the heart of God. That produces the fruit of God and enables us to persevere in the way of God.

Let's pray together.

Father, what a gift to us You've given us in Your Son. Your word tells us that apart from You we can do nothing and we feel that even in this moment, there is no way we can walk in a way that pleases You without Your help. Without Your Spirit's work in our life. Lord, we're praying in this moment that You bear much fruit in our hearts. That You help us to increase in the knowledge of God. And Lord, would You renew our hearts and minds so that as we press on in the faith, You'd enable us to persevere all the way to the finish so that one day we might hear the same words that our brother Jesus Himself heard from You. Well done, good and faithful servant. You are my beloved Son in whom I'm well pleased. We ask all these things in Christ's name. Amen.