

# SERMON TRANSCRIPT

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SPEAKER

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SERIES

Rooted

PART

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TITLE

The Taproot

SCRIPTURE

Colossians 1:1-8



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If this is your first time with us or maybe you've been with us 50 times, if you want to know how to engage and to point your life in a mission that will last forever and ever and ever, we invite you next Sunday, as you just heard. We're so grateful for the amazing privilege that we have to have truth from God within His Word that's been brought to us, that has truly come to us, that allows us to leverage our life into something that's going to last forever and ever and ever. What an incredible privilege it is.

And so there's a little pathway that we have here to just help people know how you can engage and if you could be served, we invite you to that next week. It is a joy to see you. Actually, here this morning, I have the opportunity to talk about something that is the nearest and the dearest thing in my life. Of course, you're like, "It's the gospel. He talks about this every Sunday," and it's true. But we get to talk about what Christ has done for us, who He is. And so would you pray with me?

Father in Heaven, we look to you in faith. And as we look in our bibles, we thank you for the book of Colossians. Thank you for the man who wrote it, for Paul. Thank you for moving in his life in such a way. Thank you for moving in this little church family in a town that we don't know very much about these days, it's so far from us, and yet people created in Your image who were dealing and wrestling with the issues of life. And we thank you, Father, that what You have put upon the heart of Paul to write to the little church that has been recorded, it's been preserved, and we have it in our own lap. What a privilege it is to have a Bible and to have the book of Colossians within that Bible.

I pray, Father, that You would open up our eyes and help us to see remarkable things within Your word. We know that this is a work only of Your Spirit, Lord, that we can sit here for these moments and we can leave here in 30 minutes or 40 minutes completely unchanged unless You intervene and move in our lives. And so I pray, Father, that You would open our eyes, help us to see, open our heart, help us to believe. God, open up our minds, help us to think. And we ask, God, that You would do great things during this time. Would You help us to believe? And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

So if you have a bible with you, if you want to turn with me to Colossians chapter one. It speaks a lot about hope and the importance of hope. It's not the most important thing but it's a significant thing. Hope is powerful. You know that hope is powerful. It's powerful for our hearts, it's powerful for our homes, it's powerful for nations. It's important for the human spirit to be able to dream and run because hope is an enormous, powerful fuel. You see if we could find a way to encapsulate hope and to package it and market it and send it out, we would actually have a pill that is more powerful than anything on the market because we're all familiar with the feelings of despair.

Now what that word really means is the same as hopelessness but the idea is this, is when you get to the place in your life to where the uncertainty in the world collides with unbelief in our heart, you despair. And so you're in a job or you lose your job and you have applied for so many jobs in a row and none of them have happened and so now all of a sudden there's an uncertainty in your life in terms of the next job, there's an

uncertainty in your heart, there's an uncertainty in your financial like the bank and the whole situation. And yet there's now this collapsing of belief in your heart that the next one is going to work and when that happens you don't apply for the next job.

Despair is powerful. It's powerful. In marriage, some of you maybe right now to where the home, your home, is maybe it's really difficult. Maybe you know there needs to be reconciliation and attempts at that and yet the last time you tried it just was absolutely brutal and so the uncertainty now in your life and in your home combined with the unbelief in your heart that it's going to be any better this time than it was last time can lead you to despair.

It is hope that injects belief back into the equation. It's hope that is often the very last life jacket in the boat that seems like it's sinking. Or like this picture, it's hope that is the very last flower in the desert. When everything seems dry, when everything seems like it's dying or death has already taken place suddenly hope is there and hope is powerful. Hope allows us to dream again when the last time that we dreamed about something it didn't go so well. Hope allows us to fight again when the last time that we chose to fight over a cause maybe it didn't end so well. Hope allows us to apply again or to love again or to share again.

And Paul wanted the Colossians to be brimming with hope and that's what he's really seeking to do. But he's going to tell us how which is the most important thing. Let me first map out for you because we're starting the book here, why it was written, what was happening, and when it was happening. And so there's a guy and his name is Paul and Paul was a really religious guy. He loved religion and he was working it hard and he believed that he was earning his way before God and suddenly Jesus comes on the scene, he resists Jesus, he doesn't believe in Jesus and then all of a sudden he resists people who believe that Jesus rose from the dead, who believe this gospel, this idea that the work of Jesus could be accredited to our account and therefore our work, our works of deeds of righteousness, that they're really of no account before God.

Well, that didn't find a home in this religious man who was trying to find his way, earn his way, home to heaven. And so we're told that Paul opposed the church, he opposed Christians. Well, then Jesus gets ahold of Paul. He comes to him and He says, "Why are you persecuting me?"; after He's risen from the dead. And suddenly, Paul's eyes are opened, his heart is opened, he believes the gospel. And in a matter of time, he says people have to know. They just have to know this news. And so he goes to a city called Ephesus. Now this is sort of a crude map but it's there, okay. Here he is and he's there for a while and he's preaching and he's teaching, he's loving people, he's doing ministry.

And while he's there, a man named Epaphras comes to faith in Jesus Christ. He believes the gospel. And Epaphras is so overwhelmed with the freeness of the grace of God and the freeness of salvation, of being accepted before God and being able to go to heaven that he says, "My people need to know." And we believe that he's from a town called Colossae. And so he goes, "I got to go home and I got to go tell them." So he goes back to hometown to Colossae and there he preaches what he heard in his life in Ephesus from the mouth

of Paul and suddenly people begin to believe in Jesus Christ in Colossae and suddenly a church is founded.

Years pass and now Paul has been arrested for his faith in Jesus and his resolve to preach that He rose from the dead. And so he's now in prison in a place, in Rome, we believe. This is where most people believe that he wrote the book of Colossians from a prison cell all the way over in Rome, a thousand miles from this little town Colossae. And Epaphras has a problem and that is things are happening in this town and in the church that he doesn't know quite how to help. And so what he does is he travels all the way to Rome in order to consult Paul. You say, "Now what was the problem?" Well, this was the problem. Just like nearly every other town in the Roman Empire, there was roads. In fact, Rome built 50,000 miles of roads, went through all the towns to towns all connecting back to Rome.

And what this did was it really created a sense of independence and transience of the world they'd never known. Until this time, traveling was a very risky thing and so if you grew up in a little town you stayed in that little town your entire life. But now all of a sudden Rome came started conquering all these places in the world and building 50,000 miles of roads. And so what it did was it interconnected all these towns and all these different peoples. And so it became a melting pot. Each one of these towns became a little melting pot of belief, of culture, of language, of people who were so different. And Colossae became one of these melting pots of belief.

And what that means, and we're going to look at this, we'll actually see this more in about a month from now when we get to chapter two. But the church began coming to Epaphras and this is what they said. They said, "Look, Epaphras, Jesus is our God. We believe in Jesus. That's the gospel, we believe in Him. But here's the deal, we have all these neighbors. We have these Celtic Druid neighbors and we have these Jewett Mystic neighbors and we have these Greek neighbors and the thing is is they all have their own ideas about God and some of those ideas they're just really appealing. So we're going to hold fast to Jesus because Jesus is our God, we still love Jesus, we still believe in Jesus, and yet all of our neighbors they look at us as being so narrow-minded and so what we really want to do is to be able to incorporate some of what they're doing and some of what they're believing to help us to grow in our faith, and not only to grow in our faith but also to become more inclusive in our neighborhoods."

Does this sound familiar? We live in one of the fastest growing cities in the world. It's a small city in comparison to many but in terms of its growth per capita it is a growing city. And as it's growing, it's not just growing from people from the south, from all over the world, from all over the country people are coming to our city. And now, maybe 50 years ago that wasn't the case, but if you live in just an average, normal neighborhood anywhere you have people on that neighborhood who are Hindu, and who are Buddhist, and who are Muslim, and who are atheistic or who are agnostic and they have all different ideas about God. And you may feel like that you are so narrow-minded or in fact they may make you feel like you are so narrow-minded.

You see how pertinent this is for us? And so Epaphras is seeing the church begin to struggle with where they're living and how to engage and what do we do if all of these other ideas ... And so he goes all the way to Rome, consults with Paul. And Paul, while he's in prison, he writes them a letter, gives it back to Epaphras and Epaphras brings it all the way back to Colossae. You can imagine the day, there's only one letter, they don't have their own Bible, "Hey, turn to Colossians." No, there's one. And so he gets back and he goes, "All right, everybody gather. You've never met Paul. Paul's never been to our church, he's never been to our town but you know who he is and this is what he says to us."

Starting in verse one, "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the saints and the faithful brothers in Christ at Colosse: 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 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 is come to you, as indeed in the whole world; that is bearing fruit and increasing, as it also does 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 fellowservant, he is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, and has made known to us your love in Spirit."

Now, many of us here, we love to read the epistles in the New Testament, that's just a letter. And Paul wrote a lot of them and Paul had a lawyer mind which means that he would think of, "Here's the conclusion that I want to lead people to. How do I get there?" And so he would write a sentence that would be built upon another sentence built on another sentence in order to get us there. And so he had this amazing sharp mind. But sometimes Paul was so overwhelmed with the gospel that he had to add so many superlatives and adjectives and adverbs that sometimes when you read these paragraphs from Paul that seem like they don't end, it's like a sentence that just keeps growing and it gets bigger and bigger and bigger that you read to the end and all of a sudden you go, "What did he just say?" And so sometimes you have to go back up to the top.

And so one of the things I like to do any time that I'm studying something that's written by Paul, in particular, is to create an outline. It's sort of like a body. So my body, there's a bone structure, then there's muscles, and there's skin. And so sometimes it's healthy, it's helpful, to see the skeletal structure of his argument without all the muscle and all the fiber, just the bones, and then we'll take the words that were inspired by God and bring them back. But first, let me help you see what he's doing. If that was confusing to me when I read those eight verses, this is what he's doing.

Verse three says, "You know what? Look, I'm Paul, you're the church, and we thank God for you." That's one through three, okay. We thank God for you. Now why, why do we thank God for you? Well, he tells them why. He goes, "Since we've heard of your faith and your love." He goes, "You know, every time we think about you, we give thanks. And the reason," he says, "is because we've heard from Epaphras about your faith and your love." And then he tells them and he tells us, "How is this faith and love possible?" Well, this is how it's possible. "It's because of your hope that's in heaven." Because your hope is in heaven, that's what he says. He

goes, “Because of the hope laid up for you in heaven.” And so once again, let’s go back, he goes, “I’m thanking God for you because I hear about your faith and love that’s only possible because you have such a hope in heaven.”

So then we have to ask and he answers the question for us. Well, how did they have hope in heaven? In verses five through seven, he says, “It’s because you heard and believed the gospel.” You heard and believed the gospel. You think oh, okay. So this is what he’s saying, he says that, “We thank God for your faith and hope and love only made possible because of hope because you heard the gospel.” How did they hear the gospel? Well, Epaphras told you. Now, that’s the skeleton. But so that you can see the emphasis of what he’s about to do and showing us at the taproot of all spiritual life is the gospel itself.

Let’s just go backwards. “Had Epaphras not told you the gospel, you would not have heard it and therefore you would not have believed it. And if you had never heard the gospel and never believed the gospel, you would not have a hope stored up for you in heaven. And if you don’t have hope for heaven, we wouldn’t be hearing about faith and love that’s generated from hope. And if we never heard of your faith and love when we would pray for you, we may not thank God so much like we do.” Now if you can trace that then what you’re seeing is this, is this gospel. This gospel is what makes hope possible. This gospel not only makes hope possible but makes faith and love possible. Why is that important? This is why. Because some of you came in here and you’re looking for marriage advice. You need to learn how to love.

Some of you are struggling to believe some of God’s promises. And so you say, “You know what I really need is I need growing faith.” Some of you right now you walked in this room and you feel full of despair and you say, “You know what I really need is I need hope. Brian, just preach a message on hope.” And what Paul is saying is this is if you need anything as it relates to faith in God’s word, love towards one another, or hope then what you need to hear today is the gospel.

The first point I want you to see is this is that the gospel is the taproot of spiritual life. You see when seeds sprout, a seed will send a taproot, just one, one taproot into the ground and it sends a shoot up into the air. Now, we don’t see the taproot, we only see the shoot. So you plant a seed and all of a sudden you go out there in a few weeks after you’ve been watering it and you get a little green leaf, you’re like, “Yay. We’re farmers. Look at us. We’re amazing.” And what you don’t see is that there’s a taproot that has gone down.

Now, what is a taproot? The taproot is the central root from which all other roots will eventually sprout. In other words, from the seed itself there’s only one root that goes down. It’s a taproot but then, like you see in this root ball. You see this taproot that’s right down here in the middle, what happens is all of a sudden it begins to form all kinds of things. Next week, we’re going to look at the next set of verses which is the root system that grows off of the taproot. You see, there’s a lot of things in spiritual life that feed us. We have a Bible. It’s encouraging to our faith when we hear one another sing. It’s encouraging when somebody prays for us. We, each one of these, is like a different root. Each one of these helps us to grow. And yet every other

root, it grows off of the taproot, which is the gospel.

And that's what verses one through eight is all about, the taproot. You see, the gospel is the good news that Jesus Christ died to provide forgiveness for our sins and then He rose from the dead in order to provide eternal life to all who would believe in him. And Paul in verses five, six, and seven, he can't leave the gospel. Notice what he says, "Of this, you have heard before in the word of the truth," that's a synonym, that's another way to say the gospel, "which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world, it," that would be the gospel, "the whole world," the gospel, "is bearing fruit and increasing as it," or the gospel, "also does among you since the day you heard the gospel and understood the grace of God in truth," another synonym for the gospel, "just as you learned the gospel."

The gospel. From these words, we learn that the gospel is truth. You see it here, he says it's true, it's truth, and then it happens to be truth, it has to be ideas, it's statements, it's truth statements that can be learned and understood and it must be heard. The gospel is truth statements about God, about man, about love, about justice, about relationship, about sin, evil, about eternal life, about heaven and hell. The gospel is truth statements about all of these things. It's true. If the gospel was more than a truth statement, he tells us that the gospel is power. Notice unlike other truth statements that may sit in a book or a library that you have to go to the book or to the library in order for those things to have any impact in your life. No, the gospel has power. The gospel comes to you. It has legs, it has an engine.

And not only can it move towards somebody, that's why sometimes you can hear the gospel one day and it's the true gospel and yet it doesn't come to you, you just go, "Huh, that's interesting." And then at some later time in your life, like for those of us who have trusted Christ, when it came to us and all of a sudden it felt like, "Oh, it's true." Well, suddenly now the gospel has come to us. The presentation may have been no more persuasive, it may have been less and now all of a sudden this gospel has power. And not only does it have power to convert us, what does it do? It also has power to bear fruit and to increase not only among you but also in the whole world. The gospel is truth, the gospel is power, the gospel is also grace. It's the grace of God. Grace means unmerited favor. In other words, it comes to people who don't deserve it. Isn't that a good thing?

Aren't you glad that God doesn't give you good things only if you deserve it? Because who would get any good things? We have all sinned against God and broken fellowship with Him. We have all fallen short of His glory. Romans 3 says that every single one of us has gone our own way, we looked at God and we said, "I declare independence against You." That's what sin is. I have a better way to live than the way that You have prescribed for me to live. It's offensive to Him. God is offended by sin and yet in His tremendous love for you and me, the Bible says that He sent His son to this earth where He died on a cross to pay for our sin so that we could be forgiven and then He rose from the dead in order to give eternal life to all who would believe in Him. It comes to us by grace.

And one of the saddest things that I'll hear every now and then, people will write in or I'll hear people say it, they'll infer it, it's such a sad thing. But some people think Christianity is just such a weight. It's like this overwhelming, like I'm pinned down by it. It's like this burden in my life. So many people view Christianity and the gospel just like this guy where it started so well, this guy's probably really strong yet for whatever reason it didn't end well. His bench press didn't end well and now all of a sudden he's pinned. And some people, probably just like this man, they look at Christianity and the gospel and they say, "You know what? If I could just get out from under it, I would be free." If you have ever thought that Christianity is a weight, that if that weight was removed from you, you would find freedom you have missed the whole gospel. Because the gospel says that Jesus did all the heavy lifting. He did it all.

His invitation is, "Are you tired? Then just come to me and let me carry it." Well, that's not an exhausting way to live, for us. He loves you. And so let me encourage you to believe the gospel and believe in the gospel to trust Christ. For those in the room right now who have not yet trusted Christ, I want you to know something and that is that you do not have a deeper need and you will not find another savior. I know some of you, you're overwhelmed with school, you're like, "Give me five steps to peace" or "I got some marriage problems" "I got finance problems" "I got mask problems" "I got COVID problems" "I got problems in my life, just give me some help." I want you to know something, if you don't know Christ as your Savior and Lord, you don't have a greater problem because the Bible says that the wrath of God remains on you.

Jesus wants to take it from you. He has. It will be applied to you if you trust Him. You've got to trust Him. How do you trust Him? It's like being in a house that's on fire and you look out and you see firemen down there. The first thing you have to do to trust Him is to admit that you have a problem, that the house is on fire and that you can't save yourself. That's the very first thing. That's called repentance. Repenting from the belief you can save yourself, that's the very first thing you must do. I can't save myself.

The second thing is you look down there and you got all kinds of people down there and they're all shouting. You have different religions, different philosophies, different life goals and they're like, "Hey, if you just jump here, I'll catch you." Over here, it's a religion, over here it's making money, over here it's power and influence and like, "Just jump into my arms." And you have to look and to trust Jesus what it means is you look down at the face of Jesus and you say, "I trust You. I'm jumping in Your arms," and to confess Him Lord. What that means is saying, "I know there's a lot of other voices calling for my attention but You are the One that I trust." The Bible says that if we trust Him, admit, believe, and confess that He forgives us of our sin. He gives us His righteousness. And He gives us eternal life in heaven forever. And you know what that does? It gives us hope.

And that's why the second thing I want you to see is that the gospel is a taproot of hope. You see when we trust in Jesus Christ, what happens is we receive hope. Hope. Look at what it says in verse five, "Because of the hope laid up for you in heaven," and then it tells us how we get the hope, "it's because you heard," in four, "the word and the truth," the gospel. This is where hope comes from. It's the gospel. We have hope in this world because the gospel says that we have already been accepted, we have already been forgiven, we have



already been justified, we already have a place in heaven. It's laid up for us there, it's waiting.

It's waiting for us. And that changes the way you live your life, you understand. Let me explain it this way. Let's just say there's a Super Bowl and there's two teams just like there's always two teams in the Super Bowl. But in this Super Bowl, it happens to be a Dynasty team and a Cinderella team. And so there's one team who is supposed to be in the Super Bowl, preseason everybody says that's the best team. Every game they were favored, every game. And let's just say they won them all. But they haven't won the last one yet.

But then there's the Cinderella team. There's a team that was literally picked to lose all of their games. They were the worst team, everyone thought they were the worst team and yet miracle after miracle, week by week something happened and they just kept winning these games and now suddenly they're in the Super Bowl. Now what's the difference in the Super Bowl between these two teams? Let me tell you what it is.

For one team, the verdict is already in. The coach has already been named Coach of the Year. In their city, their players are already legendary, they're already talked about. They already have posters in restaurants. But for the other team, they still have everything to prove. They lose the last game and they will forever be remembered as the team that failed at the end.

And so it is with the gospel. You see, for the Christian, don't you see that there's no audition, there's no interview, there's no scoreboard, there's no success or failure that is a referendum on our value before God. The verdict is already in. The gospel is the taproot of hope. And so let's set our hearts on the hope of heaven. For those of you who are in Christ, I'm telling you set your hearts on the hope of heaven. What does that mean? Well, it means this. When life is punishing, and it is and it will be, when it's punishing consider what is laid up for you in heaven.

This is how Peter said the exact same thing that Paul said. He says, "Preparing your minds for action and being sober minded, set your hope fully on the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." Set your hope. Now, that's an interesting thing, isn't it? Set your hope? Is hope in my hand? Set it, I know how to set the table, I have dishes here and they need to be spread out on the table where people sit, that's how you set the table.

What does it mean to set your hope? Hope is something that's invisible. Well, where is it? And so Peter does the Peter thing and he says, "Hey, let me spell it out for you really clearly." Sometimes we think that there's three verbs going on here, there's actually one verb and two participles. And you're like, "All right, I'm not an English major." If any of you are, you can probably help. But this is a participle and this is a participle. You normally see a participle because it has an I-N-G at the end of the verb. Being, singing, hoping, helping, those are participles. And what they do is they help you get the verb done.

So this is what he's saying. He goes, "In line with what the Lord has done in your life, I am telling you to set your hope on heaven." And to help you do that and to help you get to so that you have some concrete examples of how you go about doing it, he goes, "Let me give you two." Start with the second one, being sober minded. Being sober minded is the opposite of being drunk minded. So what he's saying is don't submerge your mind in those very things that numb it to the value of God. Every single one of us has things, and it's not always the same thing, that when we just jump into it, we swim in that pool for whatever reason that thing it wages war against our soul and we just stop hoping in the Lord because we're hoping in it.

He says, "Don't swim in the pool that numbs your heart to the value of God." And the second thing he says is, "Prepare your minds." Now the word prepare, some of your translations it says, "Gird up your minds." They used to wear these long flowing robes, these big tunics and so they'd be very difficult for you to run in. And so if you ever had to run or move quickly, you would pick it up and you would tuck it into your belt so that you could run, you could move, your legs had freedom. This is what he says literally, "Tuck the word of God into your mind" or "tuck your mind into the word of God," to think about the truth, to go back to the truth repeatedly, that when you need hope to go back to the pages of scripture that tells you the gospel over and over again.

I know that for many of us what happens is this is that we get cold. Our heart gets numb, sometimes it happens and frankly sometimes it happens to me. In fact, if I'm being totally frank, I meet with the elders several times a month and one of those times they just do me a great service and that is they pray for me. And so we take about 30 minutes and I will just say, "This is what's happening in my life. This is what's happening in my heart, this is what's happening in my relationship with the Lord, this is what's happening with my wife, with my children, with the church. These are my anxieties and stresses." And then they just pray. Such a blessing.

And the last time we met, this is what I told them. I said, "You know what?" I said, "There's no known sin in my life that I'm just not repenting of but here's the deal for whatever reason or if this is a season, I just feel dry. I open up the Bible, personally, and it just feels like crackers.' 'So, what are you doing?'" I say, "Well, I'm going back to the Bible. I keep reading it because I know one day it's going to turn into a banquet." And this is the reality, this is what happens. I want to encourage you to resist the inclination to close the Bible during dryness in your life. You come to church, "Hey, I really hope for something," and all of a sudden you may not get it so you go home and you take this book that's in your hand now, you close it, you put it on a shelf, and you don't pick it back up the whole week. This is destructive to your hope. This is destructive to your hope. You got to keep it open.

And sometimes I don't know why, honestly I don't know why sometimes it's like a banquet and you're just learning and you're just happy and it's like, "Wow, that's so cool." It just feeds you, it's like an enormous meal. And other times it's like a sleeve of saltines where you're just like, "Man, it is so dry."

When it's dry, keep going back, and this is why, if it's dry and you say, "You know what? It's no use anyway. I'm not getting anything anyway," what happens is this is you close off your soul to the very thing that's going to provide the meal when it's ready to provide the meal. And so you keep it open and you keep reading and you keep saying, "God, teach me. Help me to hope, grow my hope."

And what happens in my life, and it's happened so many times through my life but without fail is that I will persist in the word of God, the word becomes so rich that I never forget the banquet. Most of my seasons of dryness in life I can point back to a particular chapter of the Bible that the Lord opened up and it became a banquet. And as a result of that, I find myself not only thanking God for the meal but sometimes even for the adversity that led to the meal. Hope.

And the last thing is the gospel is the taproot of faith and love. I know some of you say, "Man, just enough of the gospel. Just help me get along with my friends." I want you to know though that if you want to thrive in loving relationships you must hold fast to the gospel. Verse four and five says that, "We heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love that you have for all the saints," and notice the word because "these two things are possible because of the hope of the gospel." I know you came and you're like, "Just do something with my relationships." But I want you to see is I did. I did.

You want to grow in love? You got to look at Jesus' love. You need compassion and mercy and kindness in your relationships? You got to look at His compassion, mercy, and kindness. You need resolve to forgive again? You need to look at the One who has resolved to forgive you again. You look at the love of Christ, what happens is it warms your heart to be able to love others. We have to hold fast to the gospel.

A man once walked up to Jesus and says, "What's the most important command?" And you know what he said, "You must love the Lord your God with all of your heart, and your soul, and your mind." He goes, "This is the great and first commandment. And the second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Now Jesus was just a master of words. He never sinned with His mouth. And so when a lawyer came up and says, "What's the most important commandment?" And He gave two, we need to assume that you cannot talk about love for God without also talking about love for one another. Those two things are interconnected. But Jesus did say one of them is number one and one of them is number two. Why did He do that? I think this is why because those who fail to enjoy the love of God will need people to fill their void and therefore it will keep them from loving people who have a void.

Some of us, we need people so bad. We need their approval because we don't have the approval of God and therefore we need them more than we can love them. The gospel is the fuel of the future of your relationships. And so let's hold fast to the gospel as we aim to grow. This gospel it saves us, it strengthens us, it moves us forward. But I want you to notice also one very last thing is that you notice everything here is happening in the context of relationships.

Epaphras cares so much for them that he goes to Paul. Paul is writing with Timothy. They're writing to the whole church family. Everything is happening in the context of community. If you ever wondered, let me tell you why and I always start the applications to the points with the word let's. Let's hold fast, let's mean let us. And you know what that means? It means none of these applications, maybe with the exception of trusting Jesus Christ, you're supposed to do by yourself. Let's hold fast to the gospel as we aim to grow. You see, we need each other to remind each other of the gospel and we get confused and that's why we have life groups.

It's so interesting that we've been in COVID this thing for long enough that there are actually people who call Providence their home and yet they have never been here when Providence was here, when everybody was here. Some of you, you don't even know what a life group is. You're like, "What's a life group?" Well, a life group is the life blood of Providence. It's where you take the big group and you break them down into smaller groups where people can know you and love you and help you and where you can know and help and love other people. And we want to encourage you even during this season to connect to a life group. But you know there's some of you here, and what's interesting is sometimes I'll get emails and so I know this is happening, there's some of you who are listening even right now and again you're like, "I don't know why, I just keep tuning in and I don't know why."

And in the email like, "Look, I don't believe this stuff but it's clear you do and for whatever reason I just keep tuning in. I don't know why I do." If that's you today, I'm just so glad you're still here. I know some of you you're like, "Man, I swore this stuff off so long ago after I got burned by it," or whatever it was and yet for whatever reason today you cannot turn it off. I want you to know if that's you I want to encourage you to keep tuning in, keep leaning in. You say, "I would never be ready for a life group." Well, there's a life group that we have that is really specifically for you. It's called Starting Point. If you have questions, if you look at it and go, "You know what? I'm interested but not real interested," well, this may be for you where you can come and can ask real Christians, meaning sinners who have been saved by God's grace, and you can ask them questions about faith and what it means to follow Jesus as you talk about the core tenets of what it means to follow Jesus.

We would encourage you to do so and if we can help in either one of these whether it's a life group or whether it's Starting Point, you can send us a text today, PBC1 and send it to 313131. I want you to know though if you're not ready for this, it's okay. And if you're not ready, let me encourage you to just one last thing and then I'll stop. I would encourage you to pray to God to help you believe. You're like, "Wait a minute, I don't even know if there is a God." Well, just play with me okay. Pray to God, say, "God, if you're really there, would you help me to believe?" You'll actually find things like this happening in the Bible.

Jesus, one day He came up and there was a dad who had a son who was in deep problems and Jesus said to him, "I want you to know something, if you believe, he can be healed. The Lord can do anything." And you know what the man said to Him? This is a beautiful statement. It's so human. He says, "I believe but would you help my unbelief?" The fact is this is the statement that can be uttered from every single human heart,

every Christian in the whole world they're saying, "I believe but man, why do I keep not believing?" Some of you are like, "Man, I'm just not quite ready to trust Jesus Christ." Let me just encourage you to pray.

God, if you're there, if this is real, help me believe. So let me pray for us. Father in heaven, we love you. We thank you that you love us. And I ask, God, that you would help us to believe. For those who are even skeptical of your very existence or the reliability of the Bible, I pray, Father, that you would help them to believe. And God, we want to come to you as people who do believe and say we thank you for the truth and for the power and for the grace that you pour out to us in the gospel. We thank you for the hope that it produces and we thank you for how much faith and love is produced by that hope. And God, I pray for Providence. I pray for us as a people that you would help us to continue to grow in faith and love as we are reminded of the hope that comes from the gospel. And so we sing of these things now and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.



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