

# He Has Rescued Us

Colossians 1:1-14

Key Verse: 1:13,14

**“For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”**

Recently, the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life published a major study on religious affiliation, beliefs and practices in the United States. One of the significant findings was that 70 percent of all Americans believe that many religions can lead to eternal life, including 65 percent of all self-identifying Christians. More surprising, 56 percent of Evangelical Christians believe that there are many paths to God and eternal life other than faith in Jesus Christ (See <http://pewforum.org>). We are living in times of growing apostasy. Loyal Jesus-followers are branded as narrow-minded. Is Jesus the only way to God? Is Jesus alone sufficient for our salvation? Do we need something more than Jesus? These were the questions that were plaguing the Colossians. They did not deny Jesus. But they were influenced by false teachings to think that Jesus was not sufficient for salvation. Their faith was mixed with many human ideas. Apostle Paul wrote to them to help them understand who Jesus is so that they might recognize the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ, take deep root in his words, and grow. We must know who Jesus really is. Sometimes we think we know who Jesus is. But in fact, our understanding is very partial and limited. Moreover, we often fail to live up to what we know. Though we claim to be Christians, our lifestyles may be self-centered or family-centered. We should be Christ-centered in our personal lives, families and community. In order to do this, we must really know who Jesus is, take deep root in him and grow. Then we can experience true joy and happiness and give a good influence to our families, neighbors, nation and the whole world. Let's learn who Jesus really is.

In today's passage, in his thanksgiving for the Colossians in verses 1-8, Paul mentions three essentials of Christian life - faith, love and hope - which were produced by the gospel. In his prayer for the Colossians in verses 9-12, Paul asks God to fill them with the knowledge of his will so that they might live lives worthy of the Lord and please him in every way. Finally, in verses 13-14, Paul reminds them of what God has done for us.

**First, faith, love and hope (1-8).** Verses 1-2 are Paul's greeting to the Colossians: **“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To God's holy people in Colossae, the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ:**

# He Has Rescued Us

**Grace and peace to you from God our Father.”** Paul emphasized that he was an apostle of Christ Jesus, not by his qualifications or achievements, but by the will of God. As an apostle, Paul was not writing his own ideas or opinions, but the words that Christ Jesus wants them to hear. So his words deserve the respect of the church. In his greeting, Paul included Timothy. Though Timothy was like his spiritual son, Paul honored him as a coworker. Paul called the Colossians **“God's holy people.”** Even though they were sinful, they became holy through the blood of Jesus. Paul referred to Timothy and the Colossians as brothers and sisters in Christ. God is our Father, and we Christians are all brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus who share joy and suffering together, and who are destined for eternal glory. As Paul shared in this letter, we receive grace and peace from our Father God.

Verses 3-5 tell us Paul's thanksgiving topics for the Colossians. Paul had not met the Colossians personally. But he always thanked God when he prayed for them because he heard of their faith in Christ Jesus, their love for all God's people, and their hope in heaven. Most people share thanksgiving topics in regards to visible blessings they have received. But Paul was very thankful for the spiritual blessings God had given the Colossians, which are the essentials of Christian faith. We too should be thankful for these.

In the first place, Paul mentioned faith in Christ Jesus. Faith is essential. Without faith we cannot have hope and love. Faith in Christ Jesus is not just believing a doctrine; it is trusting a person. This is the difference between Christianity and other major religions. Those religions emphasize believing the doctrines of the founder. This is also the difference between vibrant, healthy Christians and legalistic Christians. Faith is not memorizing doctrines, but encountering Jesus very personally and putting our trust in him. Faith in Jesus means to accept what Jesus has done for us, to love him, to trust in him, and to grow in relationship with him more and more. It is like a marriage between a husband and wife. It is not just a legal contract but a relationship of love, trust and respect. It is ongoing, developing and growing until the two become fully united in mind, body and spirit. Therefore, faith is not static, but dynamic. Faith is not just head knowledge; it is a heart-to-heart relationship with Christ. Some people think that faith is one thing and practical life is another. This is false. Faith transforms our inner person by the power of God, influencing our personality and lifestyle. So Jesus said to us, **“Everything is possible for him who believes.”** Faith in Jesus is the source of power to overcome elements of fatalism in our lives and do God's work.

## He Has Rescued Us

In the second place, Paul mentioned love for all God's people. True faith produces true love. Galatians 5:6b says, **“The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.”** Before having faith in Christ, most people do not love God's people. Rather, they think that God's people are weird. But after having faith in Jesus, they suddenly love God's people. They see God's people as most noble and wonderful. They want to be around God's people and to be like them. There was a young woman who shared her testimony recently. Before having faith in Jesus, she really did not like hearing people testify that Jesus changed them immediately in their inner person. She thought such people were fake. But after she herself came to faith in Jesus, she was changed. She began to see God's people as the most beautiful people in the world. She began to love God's people. This miracle happens in the hearts of those who have faith in Christ Jesus. Where does this kind of love come from? It comes from God. We cannot love others with our own strength. We only love ourselves and those who are lovable. God's love alone enables us to truly love all of God's people. God's love is amazing.

In the third place, Paul mentions hope stored up in heaven. When we read verse 5, we can misunderstand that faith and love come from hope. But this is not the real meaning of the Greek text. Rather, it simply says that because of hope in heaven we can live by faith in Christ and love God's people. Hope in heaven is the source of power for our lives. People can endure all kinds of trials and hardships when they have hope. But the problem is what kind of hope we have. Worldly hopes cannot be our ultimate hope for they are all perishing, spoiling and fading away. But hope in heaven is eternal. This is our lasting hope. With this living hope in our hearts, we can give ourselves fully to God and serve God's people with sacrificial love. This hope is like an anchor for our soul. We will not drift away from God even when we face difficult storms of life (Heb 6:19).

Thus far we have thought about faith, love and hope, which are the essential virtues of our Christian life. Where did the Colossians obtain these? Verse 5b says they came from the true message of the gospel. Here, “the true message of the gospel” means “the word of truth.” In this way Paul contrasted the gospel with the deception of false teachings. Faith, love and hope are not given as a consequence of our effort. They are given as a gift when we hear the truth of the gospel. It is mysterious and amazing. When we just hear the word of truth - the gospel - we can have faith, love and hope. This shows how great the power of the gospel is. Verse 6 says, **“In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world.”** Here we can learn the character of the gospel. The gospel is the truth. The gospel is not a bit of good news among many others, but it is the good news. The gospel is not “a gospel,” but “the gospel.” The gospel is the good news

## He Has Rescued Us

that saves us from the power of sin and death and gives us eternal life and entry into the kingdom of God. In addition, the gospel bears fruit and grows. It is because the gospel has life in it. We were dead in our sins. But when we hear the gospel it gives us new life and changes us into a new creation. The gospel changes families, communities, and the world through changed people. The gospel begins like a mustard seed, which is the smallest seed. But it grows until it becomes a large plant. Furthermore, the gospel is universal. The gospel is not limited to special persons or nations, but it is for all peoples on earth throughout human history.

This gospel came to the Colossians through Epaphras. He was a faithful minister of Christ and also Paul's fellow servant. He heard the gospel from Paul, most likely during his ministry in Ephesus. Then Epaphras shared the gospel message with the people of Colossae, Laodicea and Hierapolis. This kind of work of God is still going on in our times.

**Second, please Jesus in every way (9-12).** Verses 9-12 contain Paul's prayer for the Colossians. Verse 9 says, **"...we have not stopped praying for you..."** Paul had a sense of urgency and he prayed for them persistently. Why? When they heard the gospel, they began to grow well. However, false teachers came and presented fine-sounding arguments. Then the Colossians were confused by many human ideas which could lead them astray. They needed correction. Paul's prayer topics gave them a right direction in which to grow. His first prayer topic was that God would fill them with the knowledge of his will. Paul did not pray that God would remove all the cults and false teachings from the Colossian church. Rather, he prayed for the Colossians to be filled with the knowledge of God's will through all wisdom and understanding. When we know God's will, we can discern right and wrong, good and evil. Then we can make right decisions and do the things that please God. We are not saved by our own efforts. We are saved only by God's grace. But based on this grace, we should live to please God in our daily lives. Why do we have to please God and not ourselves? Pleasing God is the purpose of life. When we please God, God pleases us and blesses us. When children please their parents, parents want to please their children fully, not as a duty, but as an expression of love. One father came home after a long journey. His two sons came to greet him. One said, "Dad, did you bring me a gift?" The other ran to his father, threw his arms around him and said, "Welcome home, Dad." Which of the two do you think pleased his Dad?

In verses 10b-12 we can find four participle phrases that show us how we can please God. We can please God by bearing fruit in every good work, such as

## He Has Rescued Us

sharing the word of God and praying for others, visiting the sick, counseling the distressed, and caring for needy people. We can please God by growing in the knowledge of God. We cannot master knowing God through a few Bible studies. The knowledge of God is so profound and transcendent that it takes a lifetime to grasp. We can please God by being strengthened with his power to resist evil and persevere in doing good. Our struggle is not against flesh and blood. It is against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. We cannot fight this battle in our own strength but only in the strength God provides. We can please God by giving joyful thanks to him. 1 Thessalonians 5:18 says, “**...give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.**” No matter our circumstances, we have no reason to complain. But we have a clear reason to give joyful thanks to the Father. What is it? He has qualified us to share the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light (12). The word “qualified” implies that there is a standard. When we apply to schools, or for a job, we need to have the right qualifications. To enter the kingdom of light we need the right qualification. Actually, we were alienated from God and had no part with him or claim on his promises. We were objects of God's wrath, living by our own desires and plans. We were by nature deserving of his wrath. But God, because of his great love for us, made us his children. Only by his grace were we saved. Not only did he make us his children, but also he made us heirs of his kingdom. We have many thanksgiving topics. But none of them is greater than that his grace qualifies us to become his children and heirs of his kingdom. Sometimes we complain to God, saying, “You did not give me what I want!” But God already gave us his glorious kingdom. We have to overcome the bad habit of complaining and form the good habit of thanking God always.

**Third, he has rescued us (13-14).** Verse 13 shows us what God has done for us in order to qualify us to inherit his kingdom. Let's read verse 13. “**For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves....**” In this verse the verbs “rescued” and “brought” are very meaningful. These are action verbs. God did not sit down in a high place in heaven and save us by words alone. God took the initiative and acted on our behalf. God made promises to save mankind. He sent many servants to call people to repentance. Finally he sent his one and only Son Jesus to us. Jesus came down into this world and lived among us. He taught us his word, bound up our wounds, healed our diseases, bore all our weaknesses, encouraged us, guided us into all truth, showed us a good example, and finally died for our sins on the cross and rose again from the dead. In this way he rescued us from the dominion of darkness. “Dominion” implies power. No one can escape from the dominion of darkness by their own power or ability. The power of the darkness is too strong. When the

## He Has Rescued Us

people of Israel were in Egypt they became slaves of Pharaoh. Pharaoh's power was so strong that no one could resist. They had to work hard and were mistreated without remedy. They were oppressed in many ways, even in regard to birth control. They were hopeless, helpless and powerless. They were groaning in deep despair. In this desperate situation, God heard their groaning and sent Moses and raised him as a deliverer in a mysterious way. When God punished Egypt, God delivered the Israelites through the blood of the lamb. This event anticipated God's salvation of mankind through Jesus Christ. Through the Exodus, God told us in advance what Jesus would do for us. Jesus, while eating the Last Supper, told his disciples how his death on the cross fulfilled the Passover. As the blood of the lamb was shed to deliver the Israelites, Jesus shed his blood to deliver mankind from our sins. We are liberated from the power of sin and Satan through Jesus' blood. When we are in the dominion of darkness, we don't know what is going on. We don't know why life is so miserable and meaningless. We don't know where to go or what to do. We only grope around and gradually die. But God, in his great mercy, rescues us from the dominion of darkness. Thank God!

Not only did God rescue us, but he also brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves. These days we often hear of people who take their own lives due to many reasons, such as unbearable guilt and shame, depression, betrayal, meaninglessness, and so on. One person who suffered from meaninglessness and guilt jumped into a river to commit suicide. But he was rescued by a passerby who risked his own life. Afterward the rescuer said, "Don't do that again, okay?" But the person could not bear his hard situation. He tried again and did so because no one was there to rescue him. After rescuing us, God did not leave us. God brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves. Wow! God transferred us to a totally different world. What kind of world did he bring us to? The kingdom of the Son he loves. This kingdom is the kingdom of light, the kingdom of love, and the kingdom of life. Here the "light" is contrasted with "darkness." All the elements of the dominion of darkness are gone and we experience their good and godly opposite. Instead of condemnation, there is forgiveness; instead of hatred there is love; instead of lies, there is truth; instead of despair, there is hope; instead of sorrow, there is joy; instead of shame, there is honor. It is indeed amazing grace. How was this possible?

Let's read verse 14. **"...in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."** This tells us what Jesus has done for us. God is love, and at the same time, God is holy. So God cannot bear the presence of sin. Sinners must be redeemed by paying some price. Sin cannot be paid for with cash. The wages of sin is death. That means we must die because of our sins. But Jesus died for our sins in our

## **He Has Rescued Us**

place. Jesus paid the full price of sin by shedding his blood. In this way he forgave all our sins. It was costly to Jesus to make us children of God and heirs of his kingdom. But Jesus offers it to us free of charge. Through Jesus' great sacrifice this blessing came to us. Thank you Jesus! Praise God who rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves! Praise Jesus who redeemed us from slavery to sin by forgiving all our sins.