

Colossians 1:1-20 St Botolph's Church 11 October 2015

Anyone who has any ambitions of accomplishing something truly monumental needs first to have the "big picture" in clear view. When Michelangelo was commissioned to paint the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel he didn't just pick up his brush and begin painting. He laboured for months over hundreds of sketches, colours schemes, and themes before he ever began setting his scaffolding in place. Michelangelo painted while lying on his back from 1508 to 1512, working meticulously on every detail until the Chapel was completed. It has been said that one day Michelangelo was painting in an obscure corner of the Chapel when he became frustrated with his work. He was so frustrated that he decided to blot out what he had done and start over. One of the workers who was working in the Chapel said, "Michelangelo, why do you worry over something nobody will ever know about?" The great artist said, "Because I will know." It was the big picture that gave him the endurance, stamina, and vision necessary to complete the details of his work with such determination and focus.

Likewise, when Jesus prepared to leave His disciples and ascend to the right hand of the Father, He gave His followers a plan that was much more than details -- it was the big picture. Jesus told His followers in Matthew 28,

"All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

Jesus didn't tell them how to build the buildings they would meet in one day. He didn't insist that they use one particular kind of music or certain musical instruments. There were a lot of details that He could have instructed them on but instead He planted within their hearts the big picture of all the nations of the world becoming His disciples. The big picture is crucial if we are truly going to make our mark on our world for God's Kingdom!

It is not that details are unimportant. They are very important! Jesus took time during the three years that He lived with the disciples to instruct them on the little things of faith, the particulars of living in relationship to the Father that make a big difference. He taught them how to pray, He taught them what truly matters to God, and He showed them by the way He lived how to be a servant. Details are important, but details without the big picture can quench our spirit and wear us out.

As Paul begins his letter of encouragement to the church in Colossae he gives them the big picture. Paul lets them know that he is praying for nothing less than for them to possess full knowledge of God's will and for them to be empowered by the might of Almighty God Himself. Paul doesn't begin by digging into the details of what he will share with them later on. He paints a very big picture of his hopes, dreams, and prayers for the church. So what is this big picture that Paul wants to share?

He wants them to experience the fullness of Almighty God. The fullness of the Lord results from living the kind of life that Paul will lay out for them. In verses 1-14, Paul shows us: The Big Picture of Gratitude and The Big Picture of Growth. This morning I would like us to concentrate on verses 1-6, which show us the Big Picture of Gratitude, a determining factor in our having a fulfilling and strengthening walk with God that will touch the lives of those around us.

The big picture of gratitude is the beginning point of our walk with God. It is gratitude that enables us to maintain a right relationship with the Father and with each other. You may ask, "What do I have to be thankful for?" First and foremost we can be grateful that God has provided a way for our sins to be forgiven. The Psalmist was well aware of the misery and despair that accompanies sin when he wrote in Psalm 130 verse 3, "If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?"

Sin will drive us to the depths of despair in our relationships. Sin will separate us from God. There is no argument against that truth because we experience its reality every day in what we read in the newspapers and hear in the news.

The Good News is this: It was God's perfect love for us that led Jesus to the cross. Through Jesus our sins are forgiven and we have the opportunity to have a meaningful, life-changing relationship with the God of the Universe who loves us so much! Surely that is Good News, and good news that we will all want to share.

Our gratitude can also be expressed towards our brothers and sisters who are walking faithfully with God. Paul says to the Colossian church in verses 3 and 4, "We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints,"

We need to express our gratitude to God for what He has done for us. But we also need to express our gratitude towards those among us who are demonstrating their faith in Christ and their love for each other.

Expressing gratitude to those around us is almost a lost art in many communities and churches today. We are quick to express our disappointment with one another. We are highly skilled at determining what is wrong with those around us. But we are often slow to pat someone on the back and let them know what a blessing they are to us and what a strong witness they are for God's Kingdom. Paul embraces the church in Colossae from the beginning by letting them know that they are the focus of his prayers because of their faith in Jesus and their love for the saints.

There are many today who want to point out all of the problems that have come about in the Church throughout the years; and the reason we are so skilled at dissecting and demolishing one another is because we lack a key component that was prominent in the early church of Colossae. Paul alludes to this in verses 5 and 6,

“for the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel; “

The believers in Colossae were looking ahead. They had set their sights on the future that God had promised them. The Colossian Christians knew that they were to look to others as being more important than themselves, bless those around them, and live in faithful obedience to God no matter the cost. They were empowered to live this type of lifestyle because of their hope for the future.

Many of us today have our sights set on the present. We look to the future as some kind of "pie-in-the-sky." We want the promises of God, but we want them now. Culturally, many have become used to everything being immediate. When we lose sight of the hope of Heaven then we focus on me and mine, and our love will be shown only to those who are easy to love. The hope that Paul talks about is a unique attitude of expectation that permeates everything a person does. It is this hope that enables us to continue to love the saints even when they are not acting so saintly. It is this hope that causes us to continue to bless others even when we are being cursed. It is this hope that causes us to bless God when our world is falling apart at the seams. It is this hope that gives us a vision of a brighter day, some day! Hope, not immediacy! Hope has eyes to see what

our eyes can't see! Hope has ears to hear a Heavenly choir when the sounds of turmoil and tribulation thunder in the night! We need hope and when we possess the hope of God it transforms our lives and equips us to be a blessing to each other, our communities and in the wider world!

Paul's prayer for the people of Colossae is the same prayer that he would pray for us today. It's a prayer from the heart of God. The big picture God is holding before us today is that we might find completeness in him; so that we will become the people he has made us to be; so that we will be a blessing in the world and bring light in the darkness. In Jesus name, Amen.