

Last week when we started our series here in the book of Colossians, we were focusing that time on how we need answers for life's problems. Because if we don't have those answers, Christians, we're going to start to feel anxious. We're going to start to feel worried about what it is that is happening. And so we need something to hold on to, something that gives us stability, something that gives us an answer. But the problem is--and this is one of the main points of the whole book of Colossians--that the world also tries to give us answers. It also tries to tell us things that it thinks is going to solve things, things that are going to make us feel better, even be comforted in the midst of our grief. But the problem with the world's answers is that they are always incomplete. They always lead to nothing, because they don't deal with the real issue. They don't get to the heart of the problem. And in many cases they lead to more problems than they solve. But if we want to find a real answer, we want to focus on what Jesus has done, because it is the Gospel that gives us an answer to life's problems. It is the Gospel that is the solution to the things that we need.

And this is what Paul is trying to teach us, and he's also teaching the Colossians in our reading this evening as we continue through the book. Because he is gently leading them to this truth. And he says to them that "I am praying for you." Praying for what, exactly? This is what he says, verse nine: "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 in the knowledge of God." Now, that's a long sentence. Paul likes to do this. In fact, this isn't even all of the sentence. It keeps going on into the next verse. So what is it that he's focusing on? What is the heart of his prayer? It's right here when he says that we "have not ceased to pray for you, that you may be filled with the knowledge." It is knowledge that he wants them to have. It is the knowledge of God that is going to help them in the midst of their troubles. Because when they have the right knowledge of God, it will lead to all of these other things. When they have a knowledge of God, then they will understand his will. When they have a knowledge of God, they will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord. When they have a knowledge of God, they will bear fruit in every good work. They'll even increase in that knowledge. It all centers around knowing the Lord. Because if they don't know the Lord, Christians, then they're going to get off track. They're going to go into some place they should not go.

But what is it about knowledge that's so important? Why is Paul focusing on this? Why does he pray for this for them? Because, Christians, being a Christian is about what you know. It's about knowledge. Being a Christian is not about your feelings. It's not a matter of the heart, at least not at first. It will influence those things. But being a Christian is about a matter of the mind. It is a matter of what you know about the Lord. Because what you know about God is going to influence everything else. It will influence the way that you think. It will influence the way that you speak. It will influence the way that you act. It will influence the way that you feel. The knowledge of God and of what he has done is at the very heart of what it means to be a Christian. And so the Colossians, for their part, are lacking in this knowledge. There's something they just don't yet understand about the Lord, and as a result everything else has gone astray.

But we shouldn't be surprised by that, Christians. Maybe they were just new Christians. Maybe they hadn't been Christians for very long, and they needed to learn something more about God. But in reality, we're all like this. We need to know more and more about God. Because when you

first became a Christian, you didn't know everything about God. You couldn't. You had to learn. You had to grow. You had to understand more and more about God's will. That's why we're here this evening, isn't it? So that we can learn something about the Lord as we come to worship and to praise him? It's why we read the Bible, so that we can learn more and more about what it is that God has done for us and about the things that he has promised for us. To be a Christian is first and foremost a matter of the mind. It is a matter of thinking, so that when we think about what it is that God has done, that will change everything else.

But the Colossians weren't doing this. Instead of turning towards the Lord, they were looking to the world, looking to the world for its knowledge, looking to the world for its answers. And the reason why they did that was because the world's answers sound pretty good. They sound pretty wise. They sound pretty knowledgeable. Maybe this would actually help me deal with my problems. Maybe this would actually help me get through all of these things. It made them feel in control. It made them feel like they had power and like they had a grip on the situation. But it didn't. It just led to more problems, if only because it led them away from the Lord. But Christians, this is a problem for us too, because the world's answers are always going to sound good to us. There always going to sound like they solve something when fact they don't.

Let me use some examples so you understand what I mean here. We talked a little bit last week about people who want to rebuild society, who want to tear it all down in the interest of saying, "We're going to make it better when we build it back up." And they always phrase it in terms of justice, that we're doing the just thing. Because what we have right now is wrong. What we have right now is bad. So let's start over, and then we'll have something better. Or they'll frame it in terms of tolerance, that we won't hate each other anymore. And for that reason, this is what we need to do. Tear it all down and start over again. But does that really work, Christians? Does it really work to try to tear everything down, hoping that we can build something better back up in its place? Does it not just lead to violence? Does it not just lead to crimes? We've seen that happen over the past year. We've seen the result of this kind of thinking. Can we call it actual progress, can we call it an actual good if it takes such evil and such violence to bring about? Think of last century, when there were governments who, in the interest of making the world better, murdered millions of their own citizens. How can we say that that is good? How can something good come out of that? Because the problem with this way of thinking, Christians, is that it wants to rebuild society while it forgets the most basic problem. Society isn't evil because it is society. Society can be evil because of the evil that lurks within all of our hearts by nature. As long as there are people who are coveting their neighbor's possessions, as long as there are men who lust after their neighbor's wives, as long as there are people who want to rule over others regardless of the consequences, there will always be problems in society. We can't just tear it down and hope for the best.

Let me use another example. There's this idea out in the world that money is going to solve our problems. Well, maybe it won't solve our problems, we'll say, but it'll at least make us a lot more comfortable, right? I'll have enough money to be able to take care of my bills. I'll have enough money to be able to take care of all my major expenses. Maybe I'll have something left over for myself. I can send the kids to college. Whatever it may be. Money will help us get all of these things. And so in the interest of that, we work very, very hard. Which is fine. But then suddenly that working very, very hard turns into more and more and more, because we're always looking

for just a little bit more. And so we take on a second job, or we take on even more work, whatever it may be. Or maybe we even skip church on Sunday morning, because we're just so busy! Because we need to get money. But does it actually solve our problems? Does it actually give us the comfort that we want? Not really. Because the problem with money is that when you get a little bit, you're never going to say, "Well, now I finally have enough." You're going to say, "I want just a little bit more, and a little bit more, and a little bit more." And it never becomes enough. Because it doesn't actually solve the real problem, Christians. It doesn't deal with our problem of needing contentment with the things that we receive from God.

Let me use one last example to show you what I mean here. There's this idea in the world today that all of our problems in society are the results of a few bad people. There's a few bad eggs out there that are causing trouble for all of the rest of us. Maybe we think of them as a tyrant. Maybe we think it's the president. Maybe we think it's politicians. Maybe it's our boss. Whatever it may be. They're the ones messing it up for all of us. Because the rest of us, us average folks, we're doing pretty good. If we didn't have all of these other things going on, the world would be a lot better. But is that really true, Christians? Is it really true that if we got rid of a few bad eggs that everything would be just fine, that there wouldn't be all of these problems which we face in the world today? Is our problem that we have one big tyrant ruling over all of us that's causing all of our issues? No. The problem is that the world is full of tyrants, Christians. Yes, there's big ones, the ones who influence the lives of millions. Yes, that is a problem. But there's also all the little tyrants, the ones who ruin their family life, the ones who wreck their marriages, the ones who cause trouble in their community or their work or whatever it may be. As long as men are still sinners, there will always be troubles in this world. And we can't say that just getting rid of a couple of people is going to take those problems away.

But that's what I mean here, Christians. That when we look to the world and its answers, they ultimately prove to be insufficient, because they don't really get at the root. They don't really get at the very heart of the issue. But the Gospel of Christ does. And that's what Paul wants us to learn in our reading for this evening when he points us to the real answer. Because listen to what he says, verse 11: "Being 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." That's a big sentence again. But we want to focus on Paul's main point. And so he says that we are being strengthened. Being strengthened for what? What are we being strengthened for? He tells us: "for all endurance and patience with joy." That's the focus here. That's what he wants us to see. That we will have that endurance, we will have that patience, we will even have that joy when we are in the Lord. Because all of these things will be ours, Christians, when we have that knowledge of God and what he has done for us. And that's everything else that Paul tells us throughout the rest of this section, the things that God has done.

God the Father has "qualified you," he says. He has made you worthy of heaven. You didn't do that on your own. That wasn't your own doing. But God out of his love in his Son, Jesus Christ, has made you fit for heaven, so that you now have an inheritance with the saints in light. We have something to look forward to, even in the midst of all of our troubles. God the Father has "delivered us from the domain of darkness." He's broken the power of Satan. Because we were

once enslaved to sin. We were once in the devil's kingdom. But God has broken the power of the devil, so that we are no longer bound to him. We are no longer bound to sin, but we are now in God's marvelous light. God the Father has "transferred us to the kingdom of his Son." He has made us part of a new kingdom, so that Jesus Christ reigns as king over us forever. And all of these things are what God has done for us. And when we know that, we can face all things. We can face all of life's questions. We can face all of life's problems, knowing that Jesus has taken care of the real problem. Jesus has overcome the devil and sin and death so that we will be with him forever.

So Christians, this is why this knowledge is the real answer. This knowledge of God is the secret to facing all of life's troubles. When we know what it is that God has done for us, what is there to be afraid of? What can the world do to us? We belong to God forever. We can endure all things, because we know that God is for us. We can have patience in all things, because we know that God has given us his Son. And we can even have joy in the very worst of circumstances, because we know that Jesus lives as our King forever.

And just as a way of closing that thought, Christians, think of the martyrs. Those who have given their very lives for the sake of the Gospel. What was it that made them able to face such things? It was the knowledge of God. Because they knew the Lord, they could face torture. Because they knew the Lord, they could face death. Because they knew the Lord, they could face anything, and trust me, they had to face some pretty terrible things. But they knew that no matter what happened, they belonged to God. And so even as they were being tortured, they could sing and give praise to God and laugh, because they had a joy which the world could not take away. They knew that God was for them. And if God is for us, who can be against us?

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, we thank you for all the things that you have done, especially for giving us your Son, Jesus Christ. We pray that you would increase in us the true knowledge of you, so that we may learn to trust you through all of our days. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.