

Colossians 1 v 1 - 8

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- [0 : 0 0] So, we're going to start a new series this evening in Colossians, and if you want to turn there, please do.
- I'm going to read again the first eight verses this time, the first eight verses of chapter one. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy, our brother, to the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Coloss, grace and peace to you from God, our Father.
- We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we've heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love you have for all the saints, the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven, and that you've already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel that has come to you.
- All over the world, this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth.
- You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, who also told us of your love in the Spirit.
- [1 : 2 1] Just a few weeks ago, the Pope, Pope Francis, canonized two popes and made them into saints in the Roman Catholic Church.
- This is what he said, or some of what he said. He said, we declare and define blessed John the 23rd and John Paul the 2nd to be saints, and we enroll them among the saints, decreeing that they are to be venerated as such by the whole church.
- This was his official proclamation on Sunday, April 27th. It was a unique event as the two 20th century popes were canonized together at a special mass in St. Peter's Rome to a congregation of over 800,000 people.
- I read just yesterday that another Pope is on the way to being canonized. He's being beatified, I think, in the next few weeks. I think, I can't remember his name, but he's on the way.
- Now, in the light of all that media attention that was given to this canonization and these two new saints in the Roman Catholic Church, it's a little confusing for us when we read in Colossians chapter 1 of Paul speaking and writing to the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossus, and later on, of the love you have for all the saints.
- [2 : 5 4] Now, I know the NIV has put holy, but other translations on the right word is the saints. And this is something that Paul uses quite often through this letter.
- It's there in verses 2. It's there in verses 3. It's there in verses 12, the inheritance with the saints. It's there in verse 26 as well, where Paul speaks about the saints once more.
- Now disclose to the saints. It's a title that Paul used often, his most common title really, to refer to the churches he was writing to. Each one of them begins in a similar way.
- Philippians chapter 1, to all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi. Ephesians chapter 1, to the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus. So what are we meant to understand by that, that Paul is writing this?

We're meant to understand that in these early churches, there were lots and lots of very special holy people who were somehow a select group, as it were, within each church, who were elevated above everybody else.

[4 : 08] Well, clearly that's not what we're meant to understand. That's clearly not what Paul is saying here when he uses the phrase saints. It's obvious he's writing to every Christian. He's writing to the Christians at Colossus, the Christians at Ephesus, the Christians.

But he uses this phrase saints. And these Christians were just like you and I. They were those who had faith in Christ Jesus.

Verse 4, because we've heard of your faith in Christ Jesus. They were those who became a family of brothers and sisters to the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossus.

They were those who are now children of the heavenly Father. Grace and peace to you from God, our Father. And this word, this phrase saints, means, yes, holy ones, but it means to be set apart, separated for God.

And those who are saints are those that God himself has separated from the rest of humanity to be his own people, to be his own possession. This isn't just something that Paul picks up on.

[5 : 16] It's something that Peter writes to the Christians there in his first letter. He says, you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God.

And this is the reality. The letter then is written to saints. It's written therefore to us because we are saints.

But this letter is written to these saints at Colossus. Colossus. Now, I know some people will, or maybe many more people will use the word Colossi. There's nothing wrong with Colossi. I just happen to use the word Colossus.

So there's no right and wrong, though I'm probably wrong and you're probably right. But it doesn't make any difference. We found out where it was on the map. So we know that it was a real place.

It was a local church of believers in this now southwestern part of modern Turkey. Close by, as we saw, were these towns of Laodicea and Hierapolis.

[6 : 17] They're mentioned later on in the letter in chapter 4 where we're told that this letter to the Colossians was to be shared with the church at Laodicea. And they also had a letter from Paul which was to be shared with the church at Colossus.

And Paul knows about these churches. He says there in verse 13 of chapter 4 about Epaphras, how he works hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis.

So they had these churches nearby, about 10 or so miles in either direction, as it were. So they weren't on their own. And Paul is in prison.

He's writing from prison. And he's got a prison buddy, as it were, with him. Again, chapter 4, we're told about his fellow prisoner Aristarchus in prison with him.

A fellow prisoner and probably almost certainly a fellow believer. But he also had other friends outside of prison who cared for him. There's a list of them there. There's Mark. There's obviously Timothy mentioned at the very start of the letter.

[7 : 22] There's a man called Jesus. There's a man called others as well. And Luke is there. And Demas is there. And so on. So Paul is not on his own.

He's in prison. But he has a group of friends around about him as he writes. Now, Paul is writing to the Colossians not because it's one of those churches that he'd planted. If you read to the book of Acts, you find that you have Paul's missionary journeys and how he would go to places like Athens, how he'd go to places like Ephesus and Philippi.

And there God would use him to start a church, plant a church, and usually establish it over the course of several months or even years. And then he'd go back and visit them again.

But Colossians is unique in that sense. It's one of the few churches that Paul writes to that he's never been to. He didn't plant the church.

He hasn't preached the gospel in the church. He's never met them. He tells them that in chapter 2, verse 1. I want you to know how much I'm struggling for you and for those at Laodicea, for all who have not met me personally.

[8 : 30] So these are places he's not been to. But he knows about them. He knows about them from Epaphras. Epaphras was the one that God had used and raised up to be the missionary to go to Colossus and preach the gospel.

Paul tells us this in our passage, verse 7 of chapter 1. You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, who also told us of your love in the Spirit.

So Epaphras has reported to Paul. Perhaps Epaphras might have been, if we might put it, one of Paul's workers that he would send out. And he'd sent Epaphras out.

And Epaphras had planted this church with the wonderful work of the grace of God. And he brought report back. He's there with Paul at that time. In fact, chapter 4, verse 12.

Epaphras, who is one of you, servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. It's a young church then. It's not a strong church in the sense that it's well established over many years.

[9 : 31] It's a young church with a mixture of both Jews and Gentiles. And a church that really Paul has taken to his heart and sees that part of his apostolic ministry is to send them and teach them something of God's word.

He can't be there with them. He's not able to visit them. But his letter is there to encourage them. It's full of that encouragement. It's also full of very practical as well as doctrinal teaching.

It's one that we might call almost like a general letter. It's a letter that he feels has got all the essential nutrients for what the believers need that they can be established and grow in the Lord.

And in fact, his blessing at the start of the chapter there, grace and peace to you from God our Father, is almost what his desire is. That this letter may be a means of grace to them.

A means of peace to them. A help to them in their faith. A means of grace to them in their faith. So let's get back then to this thought about who they are. And particularly what it is to be a saint.

[10 : 33] What it is to be a Christian, we might say. Now, it's very important as well to recognize that there is no such thing as a saint Peter. Or a saint Paul.

Or a saint so and so. The Bible only uses the word saint in the plural. It's always the saints. There's never anybody who just has that title or that name.

It's always found in the sense of plural. So in one sense we might say saints always come together. Birds of a feather flock together. They're always found in numbers. They're always found in local churches.

They're always found in community with one another. They're always found in families. And this is something, again, that's so important to recognize for ourselves. That we know very well that going to church does not make you a Christian.

But being a Christian makes you go to church. Or rather makes you do church, if I'm going to put it that way. Which is much more than just meeting like this, isn't it? This is important and it's imperative.

[11 : 34] But it's much more. The church is much more than simply a meeting on a Sunday. And again, we see that the believers there were committed to one another. Were in fellowship with one another.

This letter was to be read out when they were gathered together. It wasn't something that you sort of passed around from one to another. It was something to be read out to all of them. And how vital it was that they were together.

And how vital it is that we are together as one family. We have been brought together to be saints together in Christ. And so we need to ask these questions.

Questions. Who are these saints? What does it mean to be a saint? Should we recognize a saint? If we stumble across one, would we be able to tell who they are? I don't know about you.

I think some of you probably are ornithologists. Or have an interest in bird watching. I'm not an ornithologist. But even I can tell apart certain birds.

[12 : 30] In my garden or in the road. You know, you see. Not in the road. Dead in the road. I mean in the road. I can tell a robin. Because you've got a red chest. Or I can tell a wren.

Because they're very small. A starling. Of course you can tell those apart. And if there's one bird everybody in Whitby can recognize. That's a seagull. If not by the actual presence of seeing it.

By the deposit it leaves behind. But we can see these things. We can recognize differences. We can recognize. So what about a lesser spotted saint? What distinguishing marks do they bear?

Well there's three very clear, as it were, markings that every saint possesses. Clear characteristics. And they're there for us in verses four and five. They are faith, love, and hope.

That triplet of graces that are to be seen in every Christian. And of course they keep propping up, don't they? Faith, hope, and love.

[13 : 31] They keep popping up. 1 Corinthians. We read some of that this morning, didn't we? Chapter 13. Now these three remain. Faith, hope, and love. The greatest of these is love. And in fact as you go through this letter, as we will do.

We'll keep seeing that Paul keeps bringing up these three. Hope, and faith, and love are always there. Always just waiting, as it were. To pop out for us.

And it's important for us to recognize that these three are the hallmarks of the work of God in a person's life. When somebody becomes a Christian, when God does a work in their lives, there always will be present these three.

They will not be just one of them. They will not just be love. They will not just be faith. They will not just be hope. There will be faith, hope, and love together. Because they are, as it were, the very fingerprints of God upon a person's life.

The true telltale marks that God has done a great work of grace. Now this is clear, isn't it? In the sense that what Paul has to say at the beginning shows that he knows that the faith, love, and hope that these saints possess is God's work.

[14 : 48] We know that because of what he says in verse 3. We always thank God when we pray for you. Now, why would he thank God except that it is God's work in them that has given them the faith, hope, and love?

He thanks God for their faith, for their love, and for their hope. But he thanks God for it because he knows that it's God who's done this in them. It's not their own efforts. It's not because they've stirred up some faith.

Not because they are naturally loving or naturally given over to being hopeful. From start to finish, we recognize that a saint is somebody who God has worked in.

And to him is the thanks. To him is the glory. So what are they? What are these three markings, as it were? These three characteristics that the saint possesses?

Well, here we have it. It's come up already in verse 2 to the saints and faithful brothers. But there, particularly verse 4, because we've heard of your faith.

[15 : 51] In Christ Jesus. It's not any faith. It's not just a vague belief. Every single person in the world has faith. But faith is diversified into all sorts of different things.

We thought about that a few weeks ago. You can have faith in yourself. You can have faith in the medical systems. You can have faith in technology and so on. But those things are not the faith that makes a saint.

Notice it's a specific faith which has a specific object that it believes and puts its trust in. It's Jesus Christ. Faith in Christ Jesus. Paul has spoken of them as being faithful brothers.

And in that sense, he means those who have continued in the faith. Those who have kept the faith and lived out the faith. But specifically, that faith is a single faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, there are some people, of course, who will talk about having a faith. And often, I don't like it too much when people say, oh, yes, it's their faith that's brought them through.

[16 : 59] It's not their faith that's brought them through. It's the God in whom their faith rests that's brought them through. And there's this depersonalizing, isn't it, with faith. And it becomes individualistic.

It's my faith. And, oh, I'm glad you've got your faith. No, it's not my faith. It's my Savior, my God, in whom I've placed my faith. But it's not mine.

And it's not my faith that keeps me. It's his faithfulness that keeps me. But faith itself is a work of God.

This type of faith is not something that we can summon up or create. It has to come as God's gift. When Paul writes to Ephesians, he makes that eminently clear. He says this, It is by grace you have been saved, through faith.

And this, speaking of the faith, not from yourselves. It is the gift of God. Not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus.

[18 : 02] It's given to us by God. It's a gift from us. And again, people might say, I wish I had your faith. Well, we can't give it to them, can we?

But we can point them to the God who is able to give them faith. If you really want this faith, if somebody says this to you, I wish I had your faith, then say to them, you can have it. Ask. Ask.

Ask God to give you that same faith. That real faith in Christ Jesus as your saviour. The sad truth is that they don't often really want that faith in Jesus. Because they know that you have to live out that faith.

It has commitment. It has repercussions and consequences. But it's faith in Christ Jesus. Faith in the person. That he is truly the son of God.

Who is truly man. In his nature, it's faith in who he is. But it's faith, of course, in what he has accomplished. Our salvation. By his death and resurrection and ascension.

[19 : 03] It's that specific faith. And notice again, he says, it's faith in Jesus Christ. Christ Jesus. A lot of people like the use of the word Jesus.

We like to speak about Jesus. He's a lovely man. It is a sense of a kindly man. A thoughtful man. But Christ Jesus roots him in who he is. He is the Christ.

He is the everlasting son of God. He is the Messiah who came into the world as God's king. To establish God's kingdom. Under which we must come and acknowledge him as our king.

So, it's faith in Christ Jesus. That's what marks out a saint. And the second thing, of course, that marks out a saint. Is that he has love.

Or she has love. For the saints. Because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus. And the love you have for all the saints.

[20 : 00] Again, it's not a general sort of love, is it? It's not a love for something or someone because that's our natural desire. Or lust, if I can put it that way.

It's not a sentimental type of love. Or a mere passing emotion of love. We spoke about love a bit this morning. But the sad reality is that it's a word that is used so frequently to be debased.

And mean nothing more than a passing fancy or a momentary feeling. To fall in love and to fall out of love. But that isn't the love that God has placed within our hearts.

You see, it's a real love. It's an unswerving love. And it's a love which is for the saints. Not for those Roman Catholic saints.

But for those Christian saints. For brothers and sisters in Christ. Those who are our fellow children of our Heavenly Father. And it's a possession that is ours.

[21 : 06] Which is the evidence that we truly are God's children. John, in his first letter, chapter 4 and verse 7, says this.

Dear friends, let us love one another. For love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. That's why we do love.

Why do we love one another? Why do we love all the saints? And let's be honest again this evening. We are not altogether lovely, are we? Oh, you are.

You're the lovely one. Sorry, that's my mistake again. You are also lovely. Alright, I'm not very lovely. We aren't though, are we? We're still selfish. We're still foolish.

We still get it wrong. We still get things out of place. We still muck up. And if we're honest with one another. None of us would naturally choose to be together.

[22 : 04] If it wasn't for Christ. He's given us a love for one another. How has he given us that love for one another? Because he's made us to be born of God. So, infused into our hearts is the same love of God.

That genetic love that belongs to him now belongs to us. So, we love one another with a supernatural love. It's a real love. And it's a practical love. And it's a sacrificial love.

And it's a love which displays and reflects the love of Christ. But it's a love that is born of God. It's not natural. And if we want and need love for Christ to increase.

Then we need love for one another to increase, don't we? We need to love each other more. We need the Lord's help to do that. That's why we have here at the end of the passage, we're looking at verse 8.

I've heard of from Epaphras, your love in the Spirit. It's the same love he's been talking about back here. As I said, these things, faith, hope, and love keep cropping up.

[23 : 06] It's love by the Spirit. That's what Paul means. He doesn't mean it's a sort of a spiritual love which is different from a material love. He means it's a love that is by the Spirit.

It's a love which is the Holy Spirit at work in us. What's the very first fruit of the Spirit? Love.

So that's exactly how it should be. So we've seen that a saint is someone who has faith in Christ Jesus. A saint is someone who has a love for all the saints.

And again, we see that a saint and a believer is someone who has hope. Verse 5. The faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth.

Again, it's not a vain hope. It's not a dreamy sort of hope. People often again use this word hope. I hope I'll win the lottery. I hope my horse will come first.

[24 : 09] I hope that it won't rain tomorrow. All sorts of hopes, aren't they? But they're very much a vague hope. They're sort of a wishful desire.

Then there's nothing certain about them, nothing genuine about them in the sense that they are real. No, hope is something that the Christian has which is a solid reality.

And notice it's a solid reality because it's a hope that is stored up for you in heaven. It's something that already exists. It's money in the bank. It's there.

Except it's more secure, isn't it? Something that we haven't yet seen but we know for sure exists.

And again, from that very hope, we have this faith and love. They come together. Notice they're intertwined.

[25 : 04] They're interconnected. Faith and hope, love that spring from hope. Hope has caused love and faith to grow.

But it's that hope. It's a heavenly hope. It's a heavenly blessing. It's that we shall be received by God. It's that we shall enter into the treasures and the riches that God has stored up for us there.

It's something future but is ours yet. We haven't yet got to the age where we qualify to have it. It used to be, didn't it, years ago, if you were to inherit some money or to have something.

Well, you can have it when your 21st birthday. That's when you'd get the inheritance or the promised future funds or whatever it may be.

Well, it's the same with us. The money's there. The blessings are there. The treasures are there. We're just not old enough yet. In other words, we haven't yet got to heaven.

[26 : 08] These saintly qualities come from hope. And again, hope is something that God has given us. Because as I say, it's something which is definite and real.

And sometimes it's something that we can't fully explain, isn't it? It's something that we know that we can't see. But we know that we know that we know. I know, says Paul, whom I've believed in.

And know that he's able to keep that which I've committed to him against that day. Don't ask me to explain in that sense fully why. But I know. And of course it's that God has given us hope.

Paul, as he writes to the Romans a little earlier, talks about hope. He says in Romans in chapter 5 that hope does not disappoint us.

Why? Because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit whom he's given us. So it's a spiritual thing. So these qualities are God given.

[27 : 07] Faith, love, hope. Yet amazingly, we realize that these blessings, these characteristics, though they are God given, come through a human agency.

They come through a human means. Notice this. The faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven. And that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel that has come to you.

It's the gospel that brings to us and gives to us hope and faith and love. It's a message which has power in it. Paul says earlier in 1 Corinthians, the gospel is the power of God unto salvation.

It's not a weak thing. It's not just empty words. It has power to affect change in people's lives. It has power to move people from being unbelieving to believing, from being loveless and full of hate to being loving, to being hopeless.

Without God and without hope in the world, to having hope in the face of adversity and whatever circumstances they encounter. It's a powerful message.

[28 : 21] Paul says, so powerful that all over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing. He's giving it a sort of a life of its own, isn't he? It's a living organism.

It's something which is spreading. It's in the most positive way infecting the whole of society, causing change.

That's wonderfully encouraging though, isn't it? That's picked up in the prayer, I think, earlier on. We come back to it in a little bit. But isn't it marvelous? The gospel is growing and bearing fruit all over the world.

And from what started just in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost with just a handful of people, now has gone to the four corners of the earth, hasn't it? There are still those who haven't heard yet.

There are still those to be reached. But wherever the gospel has gone, churches have been planted. Saints have been made. Now why is it so amazing? What's so great about it?

[29 : 19] This gospel that is brought about in us through God's agency. Our faith, love and hope. Well, it's the word of truth. And it's that.

You've already heard verse 5 about it in the word of truth. Pilate, very famously, when questioning Jesus, said, what is truth? If you were to take that question out onto the streets today, philosophers and theologians tell us we're living in a postmodern society.

And therefore, the answer to the question, what is truth? Truth is whatever you want it to be. Truth is whatever you want it to be. There's no definite truth. You see, the evidence that not all truth is truth is observed by the fruit or the product it either produces or doesn't produce.

What makes truth truth is that it works. It's effectual. If we take it just in the very simplest form, you're wanting to construct a building and you're using mathematics.

And you can't say this to the guy who's the architecture. It doesn't matter what figures you make. It doesn't matter if you add four and four and make 12. It doesn't matter because there's no truth.

[30 : 34] It's whatever you want it to be. What sort of building are you going to have? Well, probably like most of the ones we have nowadays that are being built, Prince Charles would say. But no, you just can't have it. You've got to have truth because it works and untruth, which doesn't work.

And the world in which we live is a world which has no knowledge of truth. In fact, it's disparaging of truth. We don't need truth. We don't want truth. But we recognize that here in the gospel is the word of truth, the truth.

That's what the gospel is. It's the truth about who God is. It's the truth about what the world is. It's the truth about who we are. It's the truth about what God has done for us in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And when the Colossians heard this message of truth, it affected them in a dynamic way, didn't it? All over the world, notice verse 6, this gospel is bearing fruit and growing just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood.

That's the key, isn't it? The key to this powerful truth is not only hearing it, but understanding it. And that's the work of God. And when that work of God comes to our hearts, it validates this truth and says, this truth is real because it has changed and affected us.

[32 : 01] And it changed them. It grew and bore fruit in their lives when they heard it from Epaphras. But we see as well, don't we, what this gospel is. It's the word of truth. But Paul focuses in.

He tells us, yes, it's the truth. It's the word of truth, but it's God's grace in all its truth, verse 6. God's grace in all its truth. Not just general truth.

God's grace. It's a lovely acronym for the word grace, which I'm sure you've heard before. In other words, taking the letters and making words.

I don't know what acronym is. I had to look it up in the dictionary. Okay. God's riches at Christ's expense. God's, G, riches at Christ's expense.

Grace. And again, of course, as those who are saints, we recognize that we are recipients of God's grace. We haven't done anything to deserve this.

[33 : 03] We haven't earned the right to hear this message. And this message itself is not a commonal garden message. In essence, the gospel is the truth of God's grace.

Wow. The truth of God's grace is all there in the gospel. A gospel which is so simple, a young child can grasp and believe it and be converted.

And yet it's so wonderfully, the word isn't complex, but so wonderfully deep and astonishing that we, the greatest mind can't plumb the depths of it.

Because it's God. He's infinite. So his grace is infinite. So the things that his grace teaches about himself is something which shall continue to overflow. And that's the wonderful thing.

It's a message, a full message, an overflowing message to the world. That there is a gracious God who has done gracious things to bring a gracious savior. Epaphras was that messenger, wasn't he?

[34 : 06] You learned it from Epaphras. We know so little about him, apart from what we know in these letters. But he delivered it. And how important it was, says Paul, that he delivered it faithfully.

Do you notice that? You learned it from Epaphras. Our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf. Epaphras didn't deliver just half the gospel.

Or a partial message. Or a corrupted gospel. There were people in Paul's day, as there are now, who speak and say, oh, use the word gospel. And they use the name of Jesus, but they won't preach the fullness of the riches of God's grace.

And so men and women are not hearing the gospel. Not understanding the gospel. But no, here is Epaphras. He had delivered the gospel.

And that's why, in one sense, Paul is not only thanking God for the work that he's done in their lives, but he's thanking God for what he's done through Epaphras.

[35 : 09] God has not only preserved the gospel for us, but do you know what he's done? He's wonderfully preserved men and women to proclaim the gospel. He's given us messengers of this gospel of grace, like Epaphras.

He's enabled them to be faithful ministers. He's enabled them to work in such a way that he works through them and through the message he's given them to transform sinners. Isn't this amazing?

Here we are, these 2,000 years after the life of Christ. These generations upon generations after the first gospel message was given with power to affect and change lives.

How is it possible that that same message has been so kept pure and powerful that people are still being saved today?

Because it's been entrusted not into the hands of men, but it's been kept in the personal care of God, who has passed it on and handed it on and continues to do so.

[36 : 10] It's the saving of souls. That's why we have faith, dear friends, for the future. That's why we have hope for the future, because of the God of the gospel. Because the God of the giving of the gospel and the God of the affecting of the gospel.

And so we close and ask ourselves afresh, am I one of his saints? We would never think of ourselves as saints.

We'd look at ourselves and say, I'm not very saintly. No, you're not very saintly. But, dear friends, it's not because of what you do that it makes you a saint. It's because of what God has done that has made you a saint.

Therefore, like Paul, give him thanks. Give him thanks every day. Lord, that you should have made me a saint. That you should have cut me out from the crowd. That you should have separated me unto yourself.

And given me these things. That I should believe on Christ. That I should love his people. That I should hope and have that certainty. That life in this world is not the end. And then let us pray.

[37 : 14] Let us pray and pray and pray. And say, Lord, your word says that your gospel is bearing fruit and growing. Lord, I want to see that in my day.

Do it, Lord, around the world. And do it even here. Well, let's sing, dear friends, as we close this evening.

Five, eight, six. My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. On Christ, the solid rock I stand.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him.

So that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.