

Date of sermon: 9/12/2020
Speaker: Pastor Mark Hanke
Bible passage or verse: Colossians 1:1-8
Title of sermon: **Where Hope Begins**
Series: Against the Tide - #1

Col. 1:1-8 NIV:

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, **2** To God's holy people in Colossae, the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ: Grace and peace to you from God our Father.

Thanksgiving and Prayer

3 We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, **4** because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people— **5** the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel **6** that has come to you. In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world—just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God's grace. **7** You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, **8** and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.

Well friends, I just want to say again -- thank you. Thank you for joining us. Thank you for your flexibility, as Pastor Jeff shared. Thank you for the remarkable way that you just continue to be a church for the City. As Pastor Jeff had mentioned earlier, it's really fun -- Facebook and a variety of other things. Kerri and I and our family, we were out today. We were involved in some rescue work of animals, and helping with some organizations, and -- it really is, it's inspiring to watch people. I think out of the ashes of all of these things that are happening, what you're seeing is the inspiration of really incredible people, and so, maybe for once we're kind of getting our eyes off of riots and we're getting our eyes onto redemptive help and benefit of people. And it's really kind of a beautiful thing to watch. And so -- that's kind of a special thing, so -- things are still happening, and there's a long way to go, I know. But it's really an incredible thing to watch.

We are gonna start a new series. We were hoping to do it live and with you and et cetera, but we're gonna still do it, and we're gonna launch it this weekend, and we're gonna go for a number of weeks. As we were thinking about, and stuff coming up, it has been -- I'm not gonna use the "p" word. I was scolded the other day not to use "unprecedented" -- and so, I won't use that word anymore. And -- it is very, very difficult times. Different. Strange. Times like we've never seen before. And there's a part of me that would love to address certain things. We've done that as a church. We've looked at very, very culturally sensitive issues. Remember when we touched the issues of poverty and the poor, and the issues of gender. And some have requested that we hit head-on this issue of race, and we had scheduled this year, in the end of October, for our Priority One, God and Politics. There comes a point when you look at these things and you realize that people can get to the point where they're just exhausted. Frayed. Emotionally beat up. And I think that's where a lot of people are. They're tired. Kind of the fire took us over the edge, if a lot of people weren't there before. And instead of taking on -- it's not that these aren't important issues, they are. And it's not that we're going to set them aside and never address them. We will, as we continue to wrestle through them. I'm on a variety of boards -- Corban and WorldVenture, and each of those boards are looking at the issues of equity and -- in wonderful ways, actually. And we are as a church. But as a series, I felt very strongly pulled to something different. Something not so much of a topic of race or of politics, but something that maybe took us in a different direction. Much like what a church that Paul was addressing was dealing with. It, too, was facing some unstable times. It happens to be one of only two churches that Paul had never visited prior to when he wrote to it. It's the church in

Colossae. Paul writes to them, and he says, "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother. To the holy and faithful brothers, to the sisters in Christ at Colossae: Grace and peace to you from God our Father."

Paul often will address in any of his books contra to what he most thinks they need. When Timothy was thinking about resigning, he spoke to Timothy about enduring. When certain individuals were contentious, he talked to them about reconciliation. And when this church is discouraged, hopeless, he talks to them about hope. And he talks to them about something that I want to begin our series with. The series is called "Against the Tide." Why is it "Against the Tide"? It's because where there's tension today, we want to move against the tide. Where there's conflict, we want to move against the tide. Where there is combative nature and people who want to fight about everything, we want to move against the tide. And so, we want to come to the book of Colossians. And we want to wrestle with this issue and ask the question, "What is it that God wants to do in us? And how does God want to speak to us as a church through the scriptures?"

Where do we turn? We turn to a word of hope. Why? Because our culture needs it. Had a phone call -- a gentleman called me -- a pastor -- and he said, "Mark, you've dealt with something like this before. Can you tell me -- how do I handle this situation?" There was a woman who'd committed suicide. She -- for the vast majority of her adult life, we would consider her to be an outstanding Christian woman. Outstanding. Godly woman. She lived with an alcoholic husband. Endured through her marriage, 23 years with this man. And got him to the point through her prayer and faithfulness to the point of sobriety -- for a year. He was sober for a year. And oh, how she enjoyed that year. But he relapsed. He went back into his alcoholism, and he came home one day to a note. And the note simply said, "No more." He went out into the garage and she was in the garage, and the car was running, and she was dead. And the pastor's question was this -- "Mark, what words of hope do I give to this man who realizes it was his life that caused this woman to take hers?"

That's why we turn to the text of scripture. We don't drum up things from human psyche. We come to God's Word. And it's in God's Word that we find Paul, who says to them that the pillar of a great life is hope. It is. "We always thank God," Paul says, "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you." Why? "Because we've heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love you have for all of the saints. The faith and the love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven that you already have heard about in this word of truth, the gospel that has come to you." Paul notices that hope is that thing that becomes the pillar. What is the pillar? It is the pillar that produces faith, and that faith grows into love. That's a theme that Paul has spoken of in many of his other books. I Corinthians chapter 13 says, "Faith, hope and love." I Thessalonians says, "This work of faith, this labor of love, and this patience in hope." It's almost like hope is the root, faith is the tree, and fruit -- well, it's love. And he understands that the pillar -- that thing which births all of this in this text, he tells us this faith and love that spring from where? Hope. See, hope is kind of the pillar, the foundation of this whole thing. It produces faith, it produces love, and it moves. And so, the question that we want to wrestle with is, "Hey, Lord, where's this hope come from?" Because in the midst of really difficult situations where maybe everything is burned up -- we were talking, Kerri and I, today, to a situation where a woman was literally looking in her rear-view mirror, ash all over her. She looked in the rear-view mirror and her entire farm was in flames. Her home was in flames. And the only thing she had left was her truck, her trailer, and a horse, and she handed the horse over, and she said, "Here. You can have it. I have nothing." She walked away. Well, what hope do you give her? What hope do you give to a person who's lost virtually everything that she had? Paul says, "This hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you already have heard about in the word of truth."

Now, I think a lot of you, when you'd look at this, you would suggest that this hope comes from a person who has Heaven to look forward to, because that seems to be what it says. This hope that is stored up for you in Heaven. Hmm. Well, that would make sense. But actually, that's what the Marxists suggest. They say that for Christians, Heaven is the opium that allows them to live with this hell on earth. The reality is, I'm not sure that that's what this text is saying. I don't actually think that the text is saying that the hope that you and I have to look forward to is Heaven. We get to look forward to Heaven -- I'm not suggesting that that's not true. I just don't think that that's what the text is saying, because if you go back and look at the language here, you go back and check and verify this -- the text -- your text, my text, gives you a singular heaven, but it's not actually singular. Lot of you have a little note, a little [a] or a little [b]. It actually says, "the faith and the love spring from a hope that is stored up for you in the heavens."

Paul uses this word a number of times. He used it in the Book of Ephesians, and he talks about the heavenlies. He's not talking about the place called Heaven. He's talking about the spiritual forces, the spiritual kingdom of God. What is he suggesting? Well, let's read on. He says "that is stored up for you in the heavenly realms and that you have already heard about in the word of truth the gospel." Where does hope come from? I want to suggest to you, it's not that you and I get to look forward to Heaven -- we do, but that's not ultimately where you or my hope comes from. Hope is awakened by the gospel. The hope stored up for you in the heavenly realms. What is the gospel? It's good news. And my friends, it's not good news just for Heaven, it's good news today. What is the good news? Jesus says, "In this world you've going to have trouble. But take heart! I've overcome the world!" Jesus didn't suggest that to say, "You know what? The only time that that's really gonna be applicational is when you get to Heaven." No, it's true today. You see, the gospel is as powerful today as it is the day when I get into Heaven. Why? Because it frees me today! It delivers me today! Jesus is with me. He'll be with me in Heaven, but He's with me today. See, the reason I can have hope is not just because I'm gonna have fire insurance and I'm gonna get to Heaven! It's because I'm gonna live with Him here today. He's gonna open doors today. He's gonna do the miraculous today. He is going to be my guide today.

Kerri and I were with some friends this week, dear friends. We've known them -- well, I grew up with my dear friend, since I was a little kid, and we went to college together, so we've known each other -- goodness, for 50-some years. He works for an organization in this state. We would probably consider this organization on the more liberal bent. So it's rare that he's a vice president. It's very rare that he acted as a vice president for three years before he was even given the position. And I asked him, I said, "Why did they have you serve as the vice president before they designated you the vice president?" He said, "Well, it's -- in our state, in our city, in this company, they don't really like conservative people with 12 children. Let's just say they didn't trust me." He said, "The reality is, God and I had to get the job." And he began to tell me the story of how God gave him favor in this job. Now, he's working with numbers far beyond what I work with. His first project, one billion dollars. And he talked about how God literally made this project which they thought was going to be a disaster turn into something of an unbelievable boon for this company. And one project after another. And as my friend was unfolding these, he continued to remind me, "God got me this position. God opened this door." See, that's the hope of the gospel. The hope of the gospel, the hope is not that God is gonna get me to Heaven, but the heavenlies come to earth. See, that was what Paul was stating when he said in Ephesians chapter three, that "now through the church the manifold wisdom of God is going to be revealed in the heavenly realms, the principalities and the airs of the earth." They're going to see this Jew and this Gentile manifested in the church. God was going to put the church on display. He was going to take the vision of Heaven and He was going to unfold it on earth.

Where does hope come from? It's when God takes the vision of Heaven and He unfolds it in your life. And He says, "I'm with you." And He takes you, and He moves you into a company that doesn't really like conservative people -- and He makes you a vice president. And He moves you into a place, and He gives you favor. And He takes you in a very difficult situation, and He makes you strong and gives you endurance. And He gives you the capacity in a really dark moment to forgive somebody that you never thought you could forgive. What is hope? Hope is the belief that Heaven can come down to earth, that the heavens can come to earth and can enter my life, that Christ when He said "I will be with you" actually meant that. The hope stored up for you in Heaven. The heavenlies come down to the earthlies. Hope is the pillar of a great life. Why? Because it is the belief that God who is almighty gets very personal, very engaged in your life. That's hope. And this hope, he says, is grounded in the word of truth.

Dorothy Sayers once made this statement. She goes, "The test of any religion is not whether it pleases us or that it's even comfortable. The question is whether or not it's true." The test of any religion is not whether it pleases us. Or whether it's comfortable. The question is whether it's true. You see, the test of Christianity is, did Jesus Christ raise from the dead? If He did, then you have to deal with it. If God sent Jesus Christ and He lived on the earth and He lived a perfect life and He died on a cross and He was in a tomb and He was raised three days later and He walked out of that tomb victorious -- if that's true, and if history has verified that and it's been authenticated externally from scripture and internally within scripture -- it's true. And that's what this hope is based upon. That's the gospel. That's the veracity of the gospel. That's the truthfulness of the gospel. And that's why Paul says it's hope -- there's hope. Why? Because it's based upon something that's true. And it works. Paul says, "I'm not ashamed of the gospel," Romans 1:16, "for it is the power of God." The power to do what? The power to change a life, the power to change your life, the power to change my life. See, that's why the hope is the pillar of a great life -- because it is the fundamental belief that Heaven can come down to earth and touch my life. That's the gospel. That Heaven, Jesus Christ, came down to earth and walked this earth, and died on this earth, and rose on this earth, but didn't just remain disconnected. But enters into your life. And when God says "I'll be with you," it means that "I will take a project that your company expected to fail, and I'm gonna help birth success. Why? Because I want to create a platform for you to succeed."

Hope. It is the pillar of a great life, and it is, secondly, the pillar of a productive life. Paul goes on to say in this text, "This gospel that has come to you, it is all over the world." All over the world this gospel is doing what? Bearing fruit. Ah. "It's growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all of its truth. Yup, you learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who was a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, and who also told us" -- about what? -- "your love in the spirit." Fruit. What's fruit? It's the byproduct. It's your love. Hope births faith and faith produces love, and love is the fruit of the spirit, it's the manifestation of the reality of the work of the gospel in a person's life.

And by the way, love never fails, and hope always produces fruit. What kind of fruit? Well, I see in this text at least two. Number one, there's a corporate fruit. What is the corporate fruit? It's church. You have a church that is manifesting this. You have a church that is manifesting this grace. That's what Paul is writing to. But you also have a personal fruit. Let's deal first of all with the corporate fruit. What is the corporate fruit? Well, he talks about them. He says, "He's also told us about your love in the spirit." What does it look like when a church is manifesting this corporate love, this corporate fruit? Thom Rainer, a research writer for Southern Baptists, wrote a wonderful book called *The Simple Church*. And he identifies six manifestations of fruit when a church is manifesting the life of the spirit, which I've always found kind of helpful. He says, number one, when the spirit of God is moving throughout a church, there's an increased morale. The morale of the church is positive and they're

excited. I remember going to one church years ago when Kerri and I went there, and I went to the church, and a gentleman walked me around, and he told me story after story after story of what used to happen in the church. He told me about a boiler room, took me down to the boiler room, he said, "This is where the junior high boys used to meet, and there was a day when this whole church was filled with excitement!" But that wasn't today. They weren't alive. And the only living thing that church had was Roy's memory. Because, see, when the life of the spirit is moving, there's an increased morale. There's an urgency. There's a sense of urgency to see people get closer to God. There's a sense where it rises to the top like cream rises to the top. And there's a sense of which everything else kinda takes a distant second. Don't really matter about much other than getting people closer to God in relationship to God, much like our mission -- bringing people into a lifechanging relationship with God and each other. And when the life of the spirit, when the church is bearing fruit, there's a sense of urgency.

Third, he says, there's a spiritual growth. They see believers grow in their commitment to Christ. They're making strides in their relationship with God. They're making changes in their relationship with God. There's growth, there's excitement, there's things that God is teaching them. Number four, there's conversions. People are being saved in a great church. That's what Paul was noticing -- he says, "All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit, and --" what? -- "growing." That's that line. People are being converted. Stewardship. I've never known a church where the movement of God is evident and visible that they aren't seeing an increase in stewardship. I've never witnessed it in 36 years of pastoring. When the spirit of God moves, stewardship is not an issue at all, and whenever the spirit of god is quenched, stewardship is almost always an issue.

Finally, he talks about unity. Rainer in his book, *The Simple Church*. It's kind of simple. When the spirit of God moves, when hope gives birth to faith and faith gives birth to love. It shows up in a church. Increased morale. Urgency. Spiritual growth. Conversion. Stewardship. Unity. What happens personally? What happened in Epaphras's life? Who is this guy? "Our dear fellow servant who is faithful minister." Who is he? He was a disciple. Who is he? He's a person who risked his life. Who is he? He's a person who went to this church and shared the gospel and disciplined them and shepherded them and pastored them and cared for them. That's what happens in a person's life who has been touched by hope. They get unbelievably sacrificial. They get other-centered. They become a person who lives for the benefit of others. That's what hope does for you. It moves you away from yourself. When a person is moved towards themselves, hope is diminishing. But when hope fuels you and faith begins to fuel you, love manifests and something changes in this person, and ah, how they're moved and how they're changed. It's so beautiful. The gospel works! What happens? Well, when you place your faith in Christ He changes you. That's what happened to Epaphras. That's what happened to Paul. That's what happened to this church.

Reconciliation can happen. Reconciliation, the kind of thing that we need to see today. People not demanding that they be seen, but people who are willing to be humble and servants, like Epaphras. You see, I don't see Epaphras going, "Hey! You need to recognize me!" He's what? What does Paul describe him as? Go back and look at it. "Dear fellow servant who is a faithful minister." So, what happens when hope stirs inside of your heart? Not anger. Not jealousy. Not pride. It moves you to become a reconciler, it moves you to become a person of peace, it moves you to become a person, a facilitator of the gospel. And those kinds of people endure. Those kinds of people, they don't quit. They just keep moving forward. Even when they face catastrophic events.

If you've seen American mission work, you've probably come upon the name of Adoniram Judson. He went to Burma in 1812, and he died there 38 years later, in 1850. He went to Burma. You might know it today as Myanmar. He went there with his wife, Anna, and when he went there they had a

vision to translate the Bible. Anna died there. And Adoniram was just grieved. In fact, those who wrote about it said Adoniram went and he sat by her grave day after day after day and just wept and wept and wept. Days turned into weeks. They wondered, would the New Testament ever be finished? Depressed, he would sit by Anna's grave. And one day he wrote, "God is to me the great unknown. I believe in him, but oh God, I don't seem to be able to find you." Hopeless. But in time, Adoniram discovered again the calling of God, and he began to write again, and he began to translate. And he began to work, and the hope of the gospel to touch these Burmese people stirred in his heart. And he wrote and he wrote, and the Old Testament was finished in early 1834. When he died, they estimate -- imagine this -- 30 plus years, and when he died, between 12 to 25 people were his disciples. That's all. Now, if you compare him to Jeremiah, the guy was an amazing success. But the reality is, nobody here, no minister of the gospel would want to live your entire life and have disciples 12 people.

It wasn't all that long ago at his 150th anniversary of the translation of the Burmese Bible that they were having a celebration. And at that day, there was a gentleman by the name of Mr. Borthwick. And when he got up to preach, just before he did, he looked inside the front cover of his Bible, and it said, "Translated by the Rev. A. Judson." Before he preached, he went over to his translator and he asked him, "Do you know who that is?" Matthew, his translator, began to weep. And he wept and he wept. They suspended the message, and they went back. And he said, "Why are you crying?" And Matthew said, "It's because of Mr. Judson that today there are over 600,000 believers in Burma. And I," Matthew said, "am one of them."

My friends, what does hope produce? Hope produces faith. And faith produces love. And love produces endurance. It gives you the ability, even with a broken heart, to keep translating. It gives you the ability, even with ashes for a home, to get up and rise again. It gives you the ability, even with riots that anger you, to see a city and say, "I'm not giving up." That's why hope is the pillar of a great life. Where does it come from? It comes from the reality. It comes from God, who's present, who through our faith produces in us a love that endures. My friends, hope is everything, because when I have hope, I'm acknowledging that my God has stepped out of Heaven and has entered into this earth, and because God is here, everything changes. And that's why hope is a pillar. It is the pillar of a great life. It is the pillar of a productive life. And it will be the pillar of your life. When Jesus says, "I'm with you," He meant it. He'll change this narrative. Oh, it's gonna be a difficult next six months. Trust me. I think it may be the most challenging for our lives and for our church's life. But my friends, we have hope because God's with us, and because of that we can endure. And because we will endure, we may at the end of this have somebody say like Matthew, "It's because of his persistence that I am here." Imagine somebody saying that of your life. "It's because of this brother's love that I am here." It will be hope that produces that kind of endurance in you. Let's pray.

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