

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you^[f] to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. 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. (Colossians 1:9-1)

Twenty-five years ago this week, *Saving Private Ryan* hit theaters in America. Directed by Steven Spielberg and starring Tom Hanks and Matt Damon, this award-winning film tells the story of a family with four boys, all of whom were fighting in WWII. When three of the boys were killed in combat, the US military decided to find the family's only remaining child, Private Ryan, and send him home so these grieving parents would have at least one child still alive. A small detachment of men commissioned with the task risk their lives in battle, and several are killed. At the very end, Tom Hanks' character is mortally wounded, shot in the chest by a prisoner of war to whom he earlier showed mercy. In his final words to Private Ryan, he looks at him and says, "Earn this." All these men, me included, gave our lives to save yours. Earn this. The movie concludes with Private Ryan, fifty years later, at that man's grave, saying, "Every day I think about what you said to me...I hope I earned what all of you have done for me." It's such a gripping movie, such a powerful final scene. Mindful of the price that was paid to save him, the lives that the men sacrificed, he wanted to live in a worthy way!

As we continue in our series in Colossians, we are going to see Paul share a similar sentiment with us. The gospel of Jesus Christ is a gospel of grace; salvation is God's free gift that could never be earned, but Paul does call us to live a life that is worthy of the price paid for our redemption. If we could put the sermon into a single sentence, here it is: **God's great salvation summons us to a life of full devotion.**

To unpack that, let's begin by talking about **God's great salvation**, which is explained toward the end of the passage in verses 12-14: "The Father has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. 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." In these verses, Paul unpacks five aspects of the salvation God has brought us.

God's Great Salvation:

Inheritance—Some people's lives are changed by the inheritance they received. Before Luis Carlos died in 2000, he didn't have any relatives or close friends, so he picked out seventy people at random from the Lisbon phone book and divided his vast estate amongst strangers. Can you imagine getting a call like that? When Leona Helmsley died in 2007, she left her dog with 12 million dollars, I hope he spent it wisely! When Sam Walton, the founder of Walmart died, he left the vast majority of his fortune to his children; the family now has a net worth of almost 250 billion dollars. They are the richest family in America today. They didn't have to do anything to earn their wealth; it was given to them as a gift, an inheritance. The word "inheritance" is used over 240 times in the Bible, and most of the time it's used in reference to the Promised Land. God brought his people out of slavery in Egypt and when he led them to the land of Canaan he said, "I will not leave you empty handed. This land is your inheritance. It is a rich, fertile land, flowing with milk and honey; it will be your possession." God gives us an inheritance, too.

But it is not a deed to a plot of ground; it is an eternal inheritance. We inherit the greatest gift in the world: a personal relationship with the one true living God; we inherit the gift of eternal life. The beautiful thing is, there never has to be any fighting over the inheritance and who gets what—God has endless resources and freely shares everything with every one of his children who places their faith in him. In God’s great salvation we are given an infinitely valuable inheritance.

Rescue from the dominion of darkness—The Bible makes it abundantly clear that we have a very real spiritual enemy whose name is Satan, and Satan is a desperate dictator over the kingdom of darkness. Most non-believers do not realize it, but at a spiritual level, they are trapped inside this kingdom of darkness. Paul says that this is the place that everyone is at initially, simply following our desires, in bondage to pride, enslaved to greed and lust. At a spiritual level, it’s like being in Nazi Germany, a pervasive darkness leading to destruction and death. Our great salvation not only leads us out of the concentration camp of darkness, we are given...

Citizenship in the kingdom of light—We are not only set free from our bondage, but we are also given permanent status in the kingdom governed by Jesus. When I was 20 years old, I had the chance to live overseas for two months. I visited three different countries, all of which were severely impoverished by American standards. I spent a summer without air conditioning and without ice in my beverages. Sanitation was certainly something to be desired. And I missed my family. I’ll never forget landing at the airport in Denver, Colorado, then going through customs and border security. After the officer inspected my passport, he looked at me, smiled, and said, “Welcome home.” Those are the words God himself speaks to everyone who places their faith in Jesus—welcome home. Welcome to the kingdom of light and life. Welcome to a land ruled by selfless love, a land marked by faith, hope, joy, and peace. Through Jesus, we are rescued from the worst imaginable place and brought to the best imaginable place! Paul goes on to say that transfer of citizenship was able to take place because of...

Redemption—This is originally an economic term, used to describe the price paid to eliminate a debt, often the debt of slavery. In the ancient world, it is true that some people were born into slavery and others were taken captive and forced into slavery, but without bankruptcy court, many people actually sold themselves into slavery to pay off their debts. But when they sold themselves into slavery, a redemption price was always set so that their family would know the price they would have to pay to be able to buy back their freedom in the future. Paul tells the Colossians, just like he tells us, that before Christ, we were in slavery, we were in bondage to sin, we had no way out, no way to pay the debt ourselves. Then Jesus paid the price on our behalf. 1 Peter 1:17 says it was not with silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. We have been ransomed by the blood of Christ. Bought back. Set free. That leads to the final aspect of salvation that Paul describes:

The forgiveness of sins—There are seven different words used in the Bible to refer to the forgiveness God has given us, several in the Old Testament Hebrew as well as in the New Testament Greek. What I love about the word Paul chose to use in this passage, “aphiemi,” is that the original meaning technically means to send away, to dispatch, like an aircraft controller sends an airplane away off the runway to make its way to another state. God takes our sins, and as part of redeeming us and bringing us into his family and kingdom, he sends them away! Psalm 103 tells us as far as the east is from the west, that is as far as he has removed our transgressions from us. No matter the sin. No matter the mistake. No matter the intensity of the sin or the repetitive nature of the sin. If we call on the name of the Lord, he is faithful and just; he forgives our sins. We can live with the certain confidence that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

This is the salvation we have been given! We have a great inheritance; we've been rescued from the kingdom of darkness, given citizenship in the kingdom of life, and been bought out of slavery. Our sins have been washed away and entirely forgiven. Remember the key takeaway from the sermon: **God's great salvation summons us to a life of full devotion.** Paul writes about what that looks like: "...so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and giving joyful thanks to the Father" (Colossians 1:10-12). Paul wants the Colossians to live a life of faithful devotion because God's salvation is so wonderful, so vast, so magnificent, that it calls us to a life lived no longer for ourselves, but for his glory!

I saw this on display in such a beautiful way last weekend when Keren and I were at the wedding of a young couple from our church. The groom gave his life to the Lord about a year ago; he was baptized here at The Creek. When he was preparing to ask Kaylyn to marry him, he asked to meet with Keren and me. He came over to our house for dinner and he said, "I am so new to the faith. I am a brand new Christian, and so I want to ask you two: What does it take for me to be a godly husband? What does it look like to be a Christ-like leader in the home?" Such a humble, incredible question. He asked her to marry him. She said yes. They got married last Sunday. At their wedding, he grabbed the mic and thanked everyone for coming, then he said: "I want to give all glory to God. Without him, I wouldn't be here today. In my former life, I was a different person. I made so many mistakes. I don't even want to talk about the man I was. But Jesus has changed everything about me. He saved me. And now I am living my life for him. With his help, I am going to love my bride like Christ has loved me." And get this—at his wedding he said, "If anyone else wants to make that decision, and live their life in full devotion to Jesus, we would love to pause our ceremony and help you make the decision to be baptized!" Before the night was over, the bride's own father, having seen the gospel on display in their wedding, hearing the testimony of his new son-in-law, said he wanted to respond to the gospel and surrender his life to the Lord. So in their wedding clothes, the bride and groom stepped into the pond and helped her father make the best decision of his life. There were two eternal covenants entered into that day. At the end of this sermon, I am going to give a similar invitation. If anyone wants to come forward to be baptized, today can be that day for you.

God's great salvation summons us to a life of full devotion. Now, what does full devotion look like in our lives? Paul spells that out in four different ways.

A Life of Full Devotion:

Bearing fruit for God—Paul says he prays that we could bear fruit in every good work. Teachers are kicking off a new school year this week. When you give that student the specialized attention they need, when you honor your administrators and take a load off your fellow teachers, that's good work that bears fruit to God's glory. I'm good friends with several construction workers here at church. When you show up on time, do your job with excellence, clean up your job site at the end of the day, and charge a fair price, that's good work that bears fruit to the glory of God. When you have a new neighbor move in next door and you grab one of our "For the 317" bags, drop in a personal note and a gift card, and show up on their doorstep with a generous gift of a spirit of warmth and hospitality, you are bearing fruit to the glory of God! On Jesus' last night he looked at his disciples and said, "I am the vine, you are the branches, if you remain in me and my word remains in you, you will be much fruit." If we stay intimately connected to Jesus and we live our life in his strength, not our own, we will bear fruit for God. This is what Jesus called us to. He said that his followers are to be like a city on a hill, that others would see our good deeds and praise our Father in heaven. But it's not just the outward expression of bearing fruit to the glory of God, there is also an inward component.

Growing in the knowledge of God—This phrase, “growing in the knowledge of God,” that Paul uses can initially sound either vague or intimidating. How does one actually know God? But it’s actually straight forward and extremely attainable. We grow in the knowledge of God like we grow in the knowledge of people. When I first met my wife, I wanted to get to know her better. I asked if we could spend time together. She told me no. I asked again. She said no. But eventually she said yes. We went on walks. I asked about her passions, her dreams, her values. I listened. I paid attention. As I grew in my knowledge of her, I fell in love with her, and came to trust her with my entire life. Growing in the knowledge of God is not rocket science; it doesn’t require an advanced seminary degree. Simply spend time with him. Read his words. Go on walks with no agenda other than to pray and listen to God’s voice. Jesus said, “This is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” A life of full devotion is a life spent pursuing the knowledge of God, and also one marked by...

Relying on strength from God—Everyone of us draws strength from something. You see a co-worker with their cup of coffee in the morning, “It was a rough night; I need some strength.” Though of course we draw strength from caffeine and food, in a life that is fully devoted to God, we draw our strength from him. When it is hard to forgive the person who wronged you and you don’t have what it takes, rely on strength from God. When it is hard to follow the path of righteousness when all of your friends are pursuing pleasure and the ways of the world, rely on strength from God. When you are physically tired and emotionally drained from caring for your aging and ailing parents, rely on strength from God. We were never intended to live the Christian life in our own strength, but in the strength God provides. That’s how we have endurance to honor Jesus through all the seasons of life. And the final expression of a life of full devotion is...

Joyfully giving thanks to God—One of my favorite things as a dad is when my kids recognize something that I’ve done for them, and without prompting, say thank you. Thank you for dinner. Thank you for playing a game with me. Two weeks ago, I took my son on a trip with all the other guys in the family on a two day camping trip. On the second day, after we taught all the kids to shoot a bow and arrow, with no prompting, Hudson came and sat next to me and said, “Thank you for bringing me here, Daddy. This is the best day ever.” He was joyfully giving thanks. Young kids have no way of comprehending how much their parents have done for them and how much they should be thankful for—their mom carrying them for nine months, waking up at all hours of the night to feed them, changing them, buying everything for them, reordering their entire lives in order to love and care for them well. Just as a toddler can never fully appreciate all that has been done for them, but parents still love to hear the words thank you, in our weakness and limited understanding, we will never be able to fully understand all that God has done for us. But it brings him so much delight, when, with a heart full of joy, we tell him thank you and mean it.

In that scene from *Saving Private Ryan*, the soldier looks at the young man and says, “Earn this.” When we look at Jesus on the cross, he never says, “Earn this.” We could never earn what Jesus did. We could never pay that price. But we can look at such a great salvation and, with his help, live a life that is worthy of the Lord, striving to please him in every way. Paul says that every time he thinks about these people, that is what he prays for, that they would live a worthy life of full devotion that brings glory to God. I want to pray that for you!