

This evening we consider Colossians 2:6-7. We believe in preaching systematically through books of the Bible because we believe that God speaks to us in the Bible and that makes it worthy of our most careful attention. The Bible is our most important connection to God himself because in it God reveals to us the most important things that we can possibly know, because in it God reveals himself and his purposes to us and because in it God relates to us person to person by speaking to us. The Bible teaches us the meaning of life. The Bible teaches us the way of salvation from sin. The Bible teaches us the only way to live that is good and true and beautiful. From the Bible we understand reality as it truly is, and a huge part of that reality is the hope of eternal life with God beyond the struggles of this life. Psalm 119:103 says, "How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" Psalm 119:162 says "I rejoice at your word like one who finds great spoil."

With this in mind we turn one little part of this precious communication from God - to Colossians 2:6-7 where the apostle Paul writes, "Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving." In the previous verses, Paul has been stressing how precious his message of the good news of Jesus Christ is and the absolute necessity of believing that message, living life according to it and rejecting any teaching that in any way contradicts that message.

There have always been teachers on the fringes of the church or even at the center of the visible church who have brought messages which added to or subtracted from the message that God has revealed through the prophets and the apostles. Exposing them and warning against them is a prominent theme in the collection of inspired books and letters that together make up the word of God – the Bible. God's truth builds us up. False teaching is destructive and deadly for life and godliness. In Paul's letter to the Colossians, God gives the church a glorious summary and exposition of the authentic good news of life in Christ which is intended to strengthen the people of God to resist false teaching and to thrive by believing, embracing, internalizing and obeying the truth as it is in Jesus.

The verses that we are going to look at this evening summarize the thrust of the whole letter. "Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving." These verses give a wonderful summary of the Christian life and what they make very clear is how central Jesus Christ is both to the beginning and to the continuation of the Christian life.

The word "therefore" at the beginning of this sentence refers back to everything that Paul has been saying up to this point. In particular we may see a connection with verse 4 of this chapter. "I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments." "Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him."

What Paul is saying here first of all is that the Colossians should not stray from the message which they had received from Epaphras, the missionary who had first preached the gospel to them - whose message had been affirmed and elaborated upon by the apostle Paul himself in this letter. The phrase, “as you received Christ Jesus the Lord” means, in the first place, receiving the genuine inspired apostolic message – believing it, embracing it and submitting to it. The message is a call to recognize Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. The message is an offer of forgiveness and renewal of life by believing in Jesus. The message is a summons to repentance and submission to Jesus Christ as Lord. Receiving Christ Jesus the Lord in the first place means receiving the true message that Paul and the other divinely authorized apostles preached. Paul uses the term “received” in this way more often in his writings. For instance in 1 Corinthians 15:1-2 Paul writes, “Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you....” These words of 1 Corinthians 15:1-2 capture perfectly the point that Paul is making in our text.

But that does not exhaust the point that Paul is making when he says, “as you received Christ Jesus the Lord.” Certainly, he is referring to receiving the message, but the particular way that he puts it here is very significant. Paul is also saying here that by receiving the authentic gospel message believers received Christ Jesus the Lord himself. The glorious thing about the good news that Paul proclaimed is that through that message Jesus Christ presents himself to us to be received as Saviour and Lord.

The gospel that Paul preached, because it was inspired by God is so much more than any old message. It is a supernatural message because it is the word of God and so it does things that no other message can do. That is why it is so important to stick to the real thing. Any human additions or subtractions seriously distort the message. The authentic inspired message is a miracle – a divine word – which is living and creative. And in that glorious supernatural divine gospel – God presents the divine-human person who is Christ Jesus the Lord and so the response to the message is either the receiving or rejecting of Jesus Christ himself.

And so in the supernatural gospel message, Jesus Christ himself is presented to us – both as the Lord to whom we must submit and the Saviour in whom we must trust. When we receive the gospel we receive Christ Jesus the Lord. We receive Christ as the promised messiah who brought and is bringing the kingdom of God. We receive Jesus as the one who came to save his people from their sins. We receive the Lord as our Lord and the Lord of all. It is vital that we understand that in receiving the gospel we receive Jesus himself which means that we are brought into this multifaceted relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

What this teaches us is the inseparable connection between Jesus and the gifts of forgiveness and renewal and fullness of life. We do not just receive salvation. We receive a Saviour. Because we have been created to live in relationship with God there is no salvation without that relationship – salvation is all about the relationship with God and with Jesus. The purpose of salvation is to restore the relationship. The state of salvation is the relationship with God.

So in terms of this text, we receive not some impersonal gift, but Jesus himself. Motivated by love he gave his life for us and then on the basis of his resurrection from the dead, he gives his life to us. He gives himself to us so that he is our Saviour and our Lord. The good news then is not only supernatural, it is also intensely personal. It is not just a gift we receive. It comes in the form of a relationship. We see this in the way that Jesus speaks of himself as the good shepherd. John 10:11, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." Jesus does not just give a gift. He gives himself in loving sacrifice.

This is what Paul is stressing when he says that the Colossians received Christ Jesus the Lord. To believe the message is to receive Jesus himself as our Saviour and Lord. As our Saviour, Jesus grants us his righteousness and his life and that is an on going reality. There is the one time gift of reconciliation with God, but we live the rest of our life and through all eternity in the reality of that gift. But there is also the on going reality of Jesus gradually transforming us into his image and protecting us from our enemies and so Jesus being our Saviour is an ongoing relationship. And so it is with Jesus being our Lord. It is an ongoing relationship of submitting to his lordship and living under his authority with joy and thanksgiving. This is a beautiful thing. It is a personal thing. It is an ongoing relationship of love. That is what it means to receive Christ Jesus the Lord.

Now what Paul is urging here is that the Colossians continue as they have begun. "Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him...." The point he is making here is a very important one. The point that he is making is that the ongoing life with Jesus is a continuation of the beginning of life with Jesus. Paul is urging the Colossians to continue as they have begun. Again the initial reference is to sticking to the same message over against the false teachers, but also again there is a profound meaning here for the nature of the Christian life.

What this means is that the ongoing Christian life is nothing more than the continuation of the beginning of the Christian life. When we are first saved, we believe in Jesus in order to be right with God. As we continue the Christian life we continue believing in Jesus in order to be right with God. When we are first saved, we submit to Christ in repentance. As we continue the Christian life, we continue submitting to Christ in repentance. Certainly, we make progress as we mature as Christians, but we never get beyond depending on Jesus Christ. We never get to the place where we are no longer receiving Christ Jesus the Lord. The relationship that is established when we receive Christ Jesus the Lord is an ongoing relationship. And so other than growth in grace over time, there is no difference between the beginning and the continuation of the Christian life. That is what Paul is saying when he says, "[A]s you received Christ Jesus, so walk in him" Continue as you began.

What this means is that we never get beyond what brought us to Christ in the first place. We continue to need forgiveness. We continue to need his power to enable us to repent and grow in obedience. As a baby grows towards adulthood, it moves away from its parents towards independence. That does not happen in our relationship with Jesus Christ. Its true that we do not stay babies – we grow – we mature as believers. But we

never move away from Jesus in independence. What we needed from Jesus when we first received him, we continue to need. We continue to trust in him as our Saviour. We continue to submit to him as our Lord. We continue to live by grace. We continue to relate to him as our Saviour and Lord.

We walk **in him**. Paul says, “[A]s you receive Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him.” Paul often uses the language of believers being in Christ. It is a central concept in his understanding of our relationship to Jesus Christ. We are in Christ. Its hard for us to imagine what it means to be in another person. We need to understand that Paul needed to use language in creative ways to try to express ideas that are beyond our normal human experience. Jesus is God and he can take us into a relationship with himself which is beyond our regular human experience.

So believers are in Christ. Christ and his people are one body in some mysterious way and so it is possible to be in Christ. It means that we are one with him in a very profound way. We are connected to him in a very profound way. We are one with him in that he represents us before God so that his righteousness is our righteousness. We are one with him in that his life is in us so that we are strengthened to live the life he is calling us to live. This part happens through the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit of Christ who dwells in us and that is part of what it means to be in Christ. There is mystery here. But we can understand enough of what it means to understand the blessings of being in Christ and how dependent we are upon Christ.

The language that Paul uses in verse 7 gives us some ways to imagine what it means to be in Christ. It means being rooted in him. “[A]s you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted ... in him. A tree is rooted in the ground. It draws its nutrients from the ground. Its life is sustained by its rootedness in the ground. Its grow happens through the nutrients that it draws from the ground. Also it is kept from blowing down in storms by its rootedness in the ground.

This is a picture of the believer in relation to Christ. We grow through our connection to Christ. It is significant that the term “rooted” is passive. We do not root ourselves. God plants us in Christ. But we are then called to draw our sustenance from Christ as we walk in him. We are called to grow by means of the nutrients that we draw from Christ. What does that look like? It looks like all the ways that we are sustained and fed by our connectedness to Christ. It looks like realizing that the life of Christ is working in us through the Spirit so that we can grow towards Christlikeness through this supernatural power at work in us. It looks like the nurture that we receive through the word of God and through the sacraments and through prayer.

But we can get more specific. Being rooted in Christ involves our thoughts. We are not trees that just grow because they are trees. Our growth in Christ is not like the growth of our bodies that just happens. We are involved in our growth because God has given us minds and wills and hearts. And that means that our growth is related to our thoughts and what we do with our minds and here the point is that we grow through our decisions and though increasing in our love for Christ and through things like encouragement and hope and zeal. And these things come through thinking of Christ. They come through speaking to Christ and listening to

him. In practical terms, being rooted in Christ involves our minds dwelling on Christ and what he has done for us and what he provides for us and what he desires for us so that our love for him grows and we are encouraged so that our hearts energize us to do things that are pleasing to Christ.

And key to that is the grace of Christ in forgiveness and acceptance. Growth in obedience and imitation of Christ is rooted in the joy and peace we feel because of God's loving embrace because of what Christ has done for us. This is the key to everything, and it is at the heart of what it means to be rooted in him. It is in him we are forgiven. It is in him that we have acceptance with God. It is in him that God is pleased with us – that he delights in us – that we live in the sunshine of his favor.

So walking in Christ, rooted in him means that we live our lives out of the fullness of Christ and what he has done for us. That involves the objective connection to Christ through his Spirit which is how his life comes to us and strengthens us, but it also involves our subjective connection to Christ that comes from thinking of him as he reveals himself to us in his word. The objective connection to Christ by which his life empowers us is what we depend upon. The subjective connection to Christ is our dwelling on his glory and his loveliness and his love and all the wonderful blessings of salvation. From that comes the love and the encouragement and the enthusiasm and the joy that energizes us to live the life that he is calling us to live. That is why it is so important for us, not only to read the word of God but to dwell on it – to savor it – to immerse our hearts in the ideas and images and insights that nurture our love for Christ and our delight in Christ and our desire to please him.

Paul gives us another metaphor to think about. “[A]s you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him built up in him....” Here we have another way to think of what it means to be in Christ. We walk in him, built up in him. Again we have the familiar relationship between what God does and what we do. We walk in him while we are built up in him. We walk while God builds.

The imagery of building is a common one for the Christian life in the NT. It is an image that incorporates our connectedness to other believers. It is an image for the church. The building of a building involves connecting many parts together. The church is compared to a building which God is building and this imagery involves pieces that are fit together. The building of the church involves individuals growing in the context of togetherness. Ephesians 2:20-21 gives a fuller description of this picture. The people of God together are “built on the foundation of the apostle's and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure being joined together grows into a holy temple in the Lord.” Verse 22 “In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.”

So the Christian life is pictured as believers together through their connection to Christ being built up into a holy temple where God dwells by his Spirit. The Christian life is not just about individual growth in holiness and love and Christlikeness. It is also and always about the growth of the church in size as new members are added but also in collective growth in holiness and love and Christlikeness. This emphasizes the fact that we

grow together, and it emphasizes that the life in Christ is about more than ourselves. It is about building a beautiful building as a place for God to dwell. And this verse emphasizes that the building of this building happens in Christ.

Paul also mentions being established in the faith in the same breath. The Colossians are being called to walk in Jesus “rooted and built up in him and established in the faith.” Being established is what happens when a tree has deep roots and when a building has a solid foundation. The Psalms express this idea when they say numerous times that those who trust in the Lord shall not be moved. Psalm 125:1 “Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever.” In Jesus’ little parable of the wise man who build his house on the rock and the foolish man who build his house on the sand, the wise man was established because he had a good foundation of doing the words of Christ and the foolish man was not established and so his house blew away when the rain came down and the floods came up.

Paul is saying that the Christian life of walking in Christ, being rooted and built up in him goes together with being established in the faith. Being established in the faith means not being tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine. It means standing firm in the face of the temptations and allurements of the world. It means not being moved by when the earth gives way and the mountains are moved into the heart of the sea. Living the Christian life has its challenges. We can be unstable in our embrace of God’s truth because we are not willing to endure sound teaching, but have itching ears so that we accumulate for ourselves teachers to suit our own passions as Paul warns in 2 Timothy 4:3. We can be buffeted by the storms of life and be blown over if we are not deeply rooted in Christ. But what Paul has been saying in this verse is the way to be established in the faith – the faith that they had been taught – the faith that is expressed in the apostolic teaching. The way to be established in the faith is to walk in Christ, to be rooted in him and to be built up in him.

And finally he adds, “abounding in thanksgiving.” Receiving Christ Jesus the Lord and so walking in him “rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught” goes together “abounding in thanksgiving.” The relationship with Jesus Christ the Lord that is described in these verses is so wonderful that “abounding in thanksgiving” also describes the life that we are called to live. We are to walk in Christ abounding in thanksgiving.

Now this is part of our calling as those who have received Christ Jesus, the Lord and who continue to walk in him. But the language of abounding in thanksgiving highlights the incredible blessedness that belongs to having Jesus Christ as our Saviour and Lord. Thanksgiving acknowledges good gifts. Thanksgiving is a response to someone who has given us something that is valuable and precious and appreciated. The thanksgiving that Paul is urging here is an appropriate response for the greatest possible good that can ever be received.

There are no words to adequately describe the value of what we receive when we receive Christ Jesus the Lord. The relationship with Jesus that these verses are about – that the gospel is about – is more precious than any other possible thing in this world. Jesus expresses this idea in his little parable of the Pearl of Great Value.

Matthew 13:45-46, “[T]he kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.” There is nothing more precious and valuable than the kingdom of heaven. And having the kingdom of heaven is essentially the same thing as receiving Christ Jesus as Lord.

It means a loving relationship with Jesus. It means belonging to him. It means the forgiveness of our sins. It means the satisfaction of our souls. It means being delivered from death. It means fullness of life. It means a glorious purpose. It means peace and joy in our relationship with God in Christ and with the people of God. We do not experience all the joys in perfection in this life, but we do experience a beginning and the promise of perfection in our eternal home.

The reason that Paul includes abounding in thanksgiving in the Christian life is that there is so much to be thankful for. This is what we must understand. The reason that there is so much emphasis on thanksgiving in the Bible is that there is so much to be thankful for. But we need to see that. We need to notice. We need to remember. We need to take the time to dwell on how blessed we are in our relationship with Christ. It is easy for us to take it for granted and so we must be deliberate about bringing to mind the riches that we have in our relationship with Christ so that we cannot help but abound in thanksgiving.