



Sermon: "Motivated by Grace and Peace" Brian D Lima

Have you ever been treated with grace and mercy when you expected anger and judgement? It's a shock, isn't it? My father was an emotional guy. He could get very happy and very angry. I was a willful child at times which wasn't a good mix. Emotional father and willful child! Once I was out playing with neighbourhood friends. It was the late afternoon, and I could hear my grandmother calling me in for dinner. She would shout out from the front door!

I remember hearing her, but I was in the middle of playing a game with my friends, so I didn't want to go home yet. So, I continued to play. She shouted again a few minutes later. I still didn't move. After a few more minutes she didn't come out to shout again. The house seemed quiet. Then I noticed my father walking down the street towards my friend's house where I was playing.

Boy was I nervous! I got up from playing on the ground and began walking tentatively to my approaching father. I thought he was going to be angry. He knows that I heard my grandmother call me not just once but several times. Now he's coming himself to get me. This can't be good. So, I braced myself as we met.

To my great surprise, my father smiled, picked me up and placed me on his shoulders and we walked together back to the house! I sat on his shoulders stunned all the way back to the house. It is shocking when we receive grace and mercy from others when we expect negative emotions instead.

In our passage today, we're going to see how God led Paul to serve the church in Colossae. We're going to see both Paul's encouragements and challenges were motivated by grace and mercy. The church family that met at Colossae, weren't willful like I was, but even if they were Paul's motivation would have been the same. We know this because Paul often started his letters with the expression, "grace and peace to you from God our father." Let's notice how this motivation led Paul to write this letter.

First, just a bit of context. It's believed that the church in Colossae was started by Epaphras who is mentioned in Paul's letter. When Paul was on his third missionary journey, he wound up spending a few years ministering in Ephesus about 200km west of Colossae. Colossae, at that time, was said to be a small rural town. It's believed that Epaphras met and heard the Gospel of Christ from Paul in Ephesus and then he went back to Colossae to tell others what he had heard. This was the beginning of the church family in Colossae.

Paul is thought to be in prison in Rome during the writing of this letter. But his imprisonment hasn't brought him low. Instead, he is filled with hope that the Gospel will not return void as Brian Michell had preached about last Sunday. With enthusiasm, Paul writes to encourage the church in Colossae.

He sends a letter of instruction that is not motivated by fear and anxiety, but by grace and peace. The following is what he writes.

In this first section, Paul identifies himself as the one sent by Jesus to proclaim the Gospel. No doubt those at the church in Colossae knew about Paul, knew that he would make his own weaknesses known so that Jesus' strength would be found in him. Paul isn't trying to distinguish himself as perfect to the believers in Colossae, but as weak vessel chosen to proclaim God's patience and grace. Paul isn't special, but the Gospel, God has given him, is!

Next, Paul encourages the church in Colossae. He calls them the "holy" people, the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ. Paul is identifying himself with them. He is not better than them, but is simply a brother in Christ who is faithful. Paul is one brother given one gift from God to share and he hopes to receive the gifts from God given to the church in Colossae.

Finally, Paul underscores the reason he is writing to the church. He comes to them with grace and peace. This may be a common introduction to a Pauline letter, but the words aren't without significant meaning. Everything that Paul will share comes in order that the church in Colossae might have a fuller knowledge of the grace and peace that are theirs in Jesus.

In this first section of Paul's letter, he desires to make himself known as an equal partner in the work of God, a brother among siblings. Paul is not perfect, but a child of God like them who comes only to share what their Heavenly Father desires of them. The Heavenly Father brings Paul to administer greater grace and peace as the church clings to God's Spirit and through the Spirit, God's Word.

In verses three to eight, Paul continues to encourage the church. He tells them that they are walking in faith. They are examples to the Church abroad. Paul says that he is thankful to God because he has heard that the church has faith in Jesus and love for all of God's family. Paul realizes that the church in Colossae is placing their hope in heaven and not in the things of this world.

Remember Paul's goal described in his letter to the church at Philippi, that he lives for Christ and that to die was gain! The citizenship of any follower of Jesus is heaven where their Lord and Saviour reigns on the right hand of the Heavenly Father. Paul is thankful that this rural church is walking in faith just as well as the growing number of other churches where the Gospel is being proclaimed.

Paul reminds the church that they truly understand the grace of God that was brought to them through Epaphras. This is important. Paul points out that their faith in Jesus and expression of love for God's people are indicators that they understand grace. They understand that they have been given power and love by the Holy Spirit through their faith in Jesus.

By grace, they are united with Father, Son and Spirit. This means they need not do anything else but walk in this oneness. This is important because Paul knows that we are often tempted to earn power and righteousness by our own efforts to distinguish ourselves from others. Before Paul talks about the church's temptation to do that, he first encourages them by saying they are already on the right track. The Spirit has placed in their hearts the goal of heaven. They have the fruits of the Spirit which is faith in Jesus and love for others.

In this section, Paul wants to reassure this rural church that they are faithful and complete in Christ. The famous apostle Paul reassures them that their eyes are fixed to the same goals as his and many others around the world who are responding to the Gospel. The church that meets in Colossae are true partners in God's work around the world.

In verses nine through fourteen, Paul encourages the church further by saying that he and others have been partnering with the church in Colossae in prayer. They are asking along with the church that God would deepen their knowledge of His will through the Spirit He had given them. Paul desires that the church would know God more. Not that they would know more ideas about God.

The church was given the Gospel and the teachings of Jesus. Paul wants them to experience, to know God as they learned to trust in Jesus regardless of their circumstances. Paul wants others to see Jesus in the church in Colossae. It was said of Jesus that he learned obedience to his Father by what he suffered. Paul desires that the church in Colossae learn the same lessons.

Paul knew that the church would experience "great endurance and patience" that they would be "strengthened with all power according to (God's) glorious might" if they continued to have faith in what they had already been given. The goal wasn't to find out more ways to God, but to trust in what God had given already as different trials and temptations came their way.

Paul concludes that God has already rescued them and already given them an inheritance in heaven. Now, they were being asked to trust in this reality regardless of the trials and temptations that come up. Paul encourages the church in Colossae saying that they have already been brought into the Kingdom of the Son through whom they have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

In all three sections of Paul's introduction we see a brother in the Lord who seeks to encourage this rural church. He desires to show them that they have a relationship with the Father, Son and Spirit and that relationship is growing and producing wonderful works of service. This encouragement is meant to keep them focused on what they are doing right so they might not be distracted through trials and temptations.

What's our application for today?

1.) Be Motivated by God's Grace and Peace

Walk with God's Spirit by bringing grace and peace to others. Allow God's Spirit to cause you to truly serve others. It is very easy for us to want others to serve us. When we aren't filled by God's Spirit and guided, as Paul was, we feel needy. We want others to act in such a way that makes us feel better.

As a young Christian, I had a friend whose name was Alex. He was a Cuban-American who had just been discharged from the Navy and was relocating to Hawaii. He joined my church and started to spend time with a number of our church's younger adults. Alex is a very emotional guy. When he gets anxious about something, he can voice his frustration quickly and often.

Alex had been having, I think, a tough week and he seemed to be constantly on edge. I remember feeling called to speak to him about it, but I didn't want to. A bunch of us were at someone's house

and I could really sense that I needed to say something to Alex about his behaviour. But I didn't want to because I thought it will only create more drama!

It would create more drama because I wanted to lash out at him in frustration as well. But I felt God's call to speak and when I finally did, all of the frustration I was feeling went away. In its place was God's grace and peace. I found myself, very gently asking questions and giving Alex the opportunity to reflect on his behaviour.

To my surprise, Alex became quiet and reflective and after I had spoken with him, thanked me for speaking to him in such a graceful way. Inwardly I was thankful because I thought for sure I was going to lash out in frustration with his behaviour, I thought speaking to Alex was going to make matters worse. And it would have if God didn't call me and empower me to speak to Alex with Him.

When we are tempted to act in frustration this week, realize that frustration is coming from our own unmet expectations, not God. God desires that we be more like Him and He has given us His Spirit to empower to do so. Speak to others motivated by God's desire to give grace and peace to those that would receive it.

Also protect your heart from those that are expressing their frustration at you. Realize that this isn't coming from the one source that truly matters, God. Instead, be filled with God's Spirit, God's grace and peace, and in that extend grace and peace to those who may even be expressing their frustrations to you.

2.) Be Careful Not to Judge

Often, we think others need to understand our frustration. We think we have been too gracious and merciful. We think others need to see God's righteous judgement! People do need to be disciplined or punished, but does that mean that they need to be judged by us? There is a difference. We can discipline or punish someone without judging them. Paul can exhort the church to repent without acting as if he is better than others. Paul often shared his weaknesses so that Jesus would be glorified in him.

I think I've recently shared the story of how I messed up at an evangelistic outreach in Hawaii. I was a young Christian and I joined a few of my friends from church to be a volunteer counselor for those who made a first-time decision for Jesus. At the event, there was a call to come forward for those who wanted to follow Jesus. Hundreds of people came forward.

My friends and I were overwhelmed with the numbers of people coming towards us for information on local churches. We were told weeks before not to give out our packs of information because sometimes people from cult-like churches would come to these events and try to get those who made a decision for Jesus to go to their church.

As you might imagine, I was speaking to a young couple and a very confident person came up and joined us. He energetically said that he had already given out his packet of information and was keen to join in our conversation. He was so charismatic that the couple I was speaking to found it difficult not to be aware of his presence. The charismatic guy told me that he knew of some useful sections in the resources and asked if I would give it to him so he could share it with the couple.

He was confident. I less so. So, I gave him the material and the couple completely focused on him. Just then the director for this portion of the event approached us with two of his helpers. The helpers joined with the young couple and the charismatic man and calmly took the materials and counseled the couple.

Yes, the charismatic man turned out to be a person from a cult who was looking to direct those who wanted freedom in Jesus to submission to the leaders of their cult. The director approached me, and I thought, "I'm in trouble!" But the director looked at me with grace and peace, with a smile and told me not to worry. I've remembered that lesson and it's one I hope I can show to others.

Judgment from others doesn't help. Correction or discipline through grace and mercy does help. It helps us to know that we can turn to others for help when we need it. Let's be a church family motivated by God's grace and mercy. Let's be filled with His Spirit today and in the week ahead so that we would not judge others but would motivate them towards good work in Christ.