Two weeks ago when we introduced this book, it is said that Paul is trying address two things primarily. One is the belief among most people in this age that Rome was the light and Rome was going to be the great salvation. Now, really from all perception, that looked to be right. Now we’re going to get to look at it a couple thousand years later and see how false it was, but Rome ruled the world from India to England for 1,500 years. The United States will be 234 years old this July, and it feels like we’ve been around forever. We act like we’ve been around forever. For 1,500 years, Rome ruled the world and did it in relative harmony within the Empire. Now there were always skirmishes here and there, but there was no big civil war outside of one year, the Year of the Four Emperors. You don’t get a lot of what you read in history about this guy murdering this guy and this guy murdering this guy’s son. In the middle of that, you have Rome who ruled the world for 1,500 years in relative peace, building roads, creating laws and doing a lot of things that haven’t been done before then and hadn’t been done since then. In fact, we’re still borrowing from them to this day in regards to law, and there are still roads that they built that are actively being used, including some bridges. So the Empire was vast and brilliant, and a lot of people put their hope in Rome’s ability to take care of them. And Paul is going to go, “Wait a minute. There are going to be some problems with that.”

The other thing that was happening, because the roads shrunk the world, is people would begin to borrow from other cultures. The example I gave last week was people would go, “Yes, Jesus is my number one, but my Jewish mystic neighbor is such a good prayer. I’m not a good prayer, so I’m going to borrow some of his stuff. And then my Druid neighbor over here, he does some weird things at night involving cloaks and animals, but this cat loves his wife like nothing I’ve ever seen. So I’m going to borrow some ideas from him...” This is called syncretism where they would take from different religions and create this new one. And Paul is going to go after that too. And so that’s what we’re going to see in Colossians over and over again, him questioning the Empire and him attacking syncretism.

This week, I want to read what we read in week 1, so let’s look at Colossians 1:3. “We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and growing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth...” We said last week that he’s going, “Thank You God for these things that You’ve done in the lives of the men and women at Colossae.” What are those things? One is that they were living in such a way that their faith was public. We know that because Paul hadn’t been to Colossae; he’s in prison at this time. So it was Epaphras who was converted in Paul’s ministry in Ephesus that lead to the church being planted in Colossae. And so he’s going, “Man, we’ve heard of your faith and that you love one another deeply because of the hope that you’ve laid up in heaven.” So we talked at length that if your only hope is here, on this earth, in this bit of time, you tend to be a miserable person and you’ve got a hard time loving anybody because all you’ve got is right now. So everybody becomes means to your happiness and your satisfaction now. That usually makes you a miserable person, because everybody exists to meet your needs. So he’s going, “That’s not where your hope is. Your hope isn’t in just this life. Your hope is in the gospel and in the future we have with God.”

So he’s going to unpack this idea and then move from there to how they heard the gospel, the applied the gospel and it began to grow all over their city as it has everywhere else. And I want to just keep saying this, that he’s not thanking them. He’s not going, “Thank you guys for loving each other well. That’s such an encouragement to me. Thank you guys
for putting your hope in heaven.” He’s not giving them the active agency in this. He goes, “We thank You, God. . .we thank You, God. . .” The active agent in their transformation was the Holy Spirit, was God Almighty. It was not their own effort, their own might, their own power, their own ability to pull themselves up from their own bootstraps and get it done. That’s now what’s happening here. You’ll hear that over and over and over again as we move into the next part of this text.

Look at verse 9. “And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding. . .” Now I want to stop there because we’ve got to have a hard conversation. Paul says, “I am praying that you would be filled,” which means right now we’re not full. Now here’s why that’s so important. It has been my experience that Bible-based Christianity is based off of a conversion experience that usually dates back to when you were a child, and most people have very little transformation that is actually in their lives. They don’t really follow the Lord, they haven’t really been transformed. They’ve got this moment where somebody said, “Do you want to go to hell?,” they said, “No, I’d rather not,” and they got baptized after they repeated something that someone told them to say. But they have no real relationship with the Lord, they don’t read the word, they don’t pray, there hasn’t been any real change and yet they go, “I’m a Christian. . .Why am I a Christian? Well I went to Vacation Bible School, we put matches together in a cross and lit those crosses. And as I saw those flames, my VBS teacher said that the cross saves you from the flames of hell. And in that moment I went, “Okay, that’s what I want. I want the cross. I want Jesus.” So there’s not an understanding that sanctification is progressive and that we should be growing in our relationship with Christ, that we should be growing in our relationship with God. We have got to get back to the fact that we are not full and that we are being filled. Are you tracking with that? Those are two different ideas. Now we are 100% justified before God, which means I am seen as perfect and spotless in His sight by the blood of Christ alone. But He is sanctifying me over time. He is growing me over time. He is maturing me into the fullness of faith.

So Paul here is praying, “Father, fill them with wisdom and insight. Grow them and make them more full in their knowledge of You.” This is what he’s asking for. This is what he’s praying for. We see this over and over again. In fact, Paul tends to get perturbed with churches in the New Testament that don’t understand this. Like he’ll start talking and go, “I can’t even talk with you about that, because you’re still so immature. You’re like a 40 year-old man still drinking from a bottle. I would love to talk with you about this, but I can’t. You should be on meat, but you’re still on milk.” Try to understand it this way. If you see a grown man in the kiddie pool, without kids, having fun, isn’t there something wrong with that. I would want to call someone. I’m thinking intoxication. I’m thinking something has gone wrong. If a grown man at a restaurant is drinking from a bottle, and he’s not Flavor Flav, I’m nervous. So Paul here is going, “Man, you’re still drinking milk. You should be on meat. You should be eating meat.” So over and over again in the New Testament, you’ll see Paul start to try to explain some things about the nature and character of God and just stop and go, “You know what? You’re not ready.” And if you have children, you can absolutely appreciate this. You’ve probably tried to explain something to your kid and you’re like, “What am I doing? This isn’t happening. They’re not going to grasp this. I’m trying to teach complex ethics to a six-year-old. This just isn’t happening.” So, Paul will hit this wall often.

Here at the Village Church, we have a very simple mission statement. We’ve just tried to boil down the Scriptures into what Jesus is trying to accomplish, and our mission statement is very simple. It’s all we try to do. We exist to bring glory to God through lives changed by the gospel of Jesus Christ. That’s what we want to see. It’s why at least two weekends a month you’re going to see video testimonies during worship, just a three minute “Here’s what Christ has done in my heart. . .Here’s what He’s done in my life.” It’s just a testimony of a life that has been transformed by the gospel. When we do baptism services here, it’s a rare thing for pastors to baptize. The people who are baptizing are usually people who were instrumental in sharing the gospel and walking with their friends. There’s nothing in the Bible that says the ministers have to be the ones that do the baptisms. Because we have a built out five paragraph response that we use
for e-mails asking, “Why aren’t the pastors baptizing? Why isn’t Matt baptizing?” It’s because I don’t know you. Now, if you were my neighbor and went that route, I’d love to baptize you. But just you and I, who don’t know each other, we’re not going to go, “Hey, I’m Matt. Your name is Dave? Okay, let’s do this. Tell me your story….” We’d much rather it be someone you know, who is instrumental in your life. Because there are two things that happen in that moment. Somebody gets to say, “I was nervous and nauseous and felt like a fool, but I knew I needed to share the gospel with my coworker.” And then somebody gets to say, “Dave was acting real weird and nauseous and nervous, and then he started telling me about Jesus and then I came to that place…” So you get both of those story lines in the water. Both are healthy and both are good. But both are lives changed by the gospel of Jesus Christ. And so we want to actively communicate that via baptism testimonies and via video testimonies. Any way we can get that in front of you, we want to celebrate the fact that lives are changed by the gospel of Jesus Christ, that we don’t stay the same, that He changes us and we become new creations. So that’s what Paul is saying here, “that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.”

Let’s keep reading. “And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him…” Now, I’m banking that a bulk of us are interested in what that means. I am interested in what it means to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, and I am interested in what it looks like to live a life that pleases Him. Now he doesn’t leave us hanging. We don’t have to guess. He’s going to begin to unpack it, and this is where it’s going to get really circular. “…so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work…” So how do we walk in a manner worthy of the Lord that pleases Him? We bear fruit in every good work. Let’s keep reading. “…bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.” At the very end, we’ll read this backwards, because here’s how it works and here’s the kind of circular movement we’re going to get into. He’s saying that we’re going to please God and live lives worthy of the Lord by bearing fruit and by doing good works that we do because we see and understand the character and nature of God, that we have a knowledge of God that leads to works. It’s not works that leads to a knowledge of God. Are you tracking with that? Because one is the gospel, and the other is religion. Religion will kill you, and Jesus came to destroy religion. So it’s unbelievably important that you get this. It’s not that we do good works and fall in love with Jesus as a result. We fall in love with the nature and character of God, which leads us into a transformed life. That’s what he’s unpacking here. This is where it’s going to get circular. In fact, it’s just going to repeat itself over and over again for the next four verses. So we bear fruit, and we’re increasing in our knowledge of God. 2 Corinthians 3:18 says, “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.” So how are you transformed? By seeing and understanding the nature and character of God.

Let me unpack it to you this way. If you go into Recovery, if you go into Step Studies, if you go into small groups, if you go into marital counseling, if you go into anything like that and your mindset is, “Fix this problem,” whatever this problem is, it has been my experience that it rarely works and you tend to bail quickly. If you go in and go, “I want to know who God is, I want to know what God is like,” then you have a tendency to stay with it longer. Because what you’re doing is getting yourself under the waterfall of who God is, and you’re getting swept up and cleaned by who God is and not trying to manage your behavior. Managing your behavior is exhausting and it doesn’t work very well. You tend to be able to subdue it over here just in time for it to pop up over here. It’s like in the Spring when your yard is half grass and half weeds. You mow it and it looks good for two days, except the weeds grow faster than your grass. So two days after you mow it, it looks like trash again. That is managing your behaviors. You can mow it down a little bit, but it’s not long until you see all that stuff again. So instead of going in and going, “Here are the problems that I need fixed,” we instead need to go in and go, “I need to know who He is. I need to press in and figure out the nature and character of God.” And if we go in like that and behold Him, we’re transformed from one degree of glory to the next, which leads then to lives that bear fruit through good deeds.
Now watch, he'll circle it up one more time. Verse 11, “May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might...”. So the power we need to press in and know the character and nature of God that leads to transformed lives is not ours. We don’t muster it; He grants it. It’s our job to ask for it, submit to Him, to plead for it, but we can’t muster it. The reason the Bible is going to say over and over again, “All glory is His...all honor is His...all worship is His,” is because it is. That’s why the Bible keeps saying that, because it’s right. It really is all His. If you’ve been given the grace to pursue Him and know Him deeply, it’s because He has been merciful to you, not because He looked at you and said, “I think you’re pretty, so I’m going to give you a little extra,” or “I think you’re ugly and I feel sorry for you, so I’m going to give you a little extra.” That’s not how it works. You don’t have this beautiful gift set that God saw and went, “You know what? I don’t think I could make My kingdom last much longer if I don’t have this guy in my team. So I’m going to give him a little bit more grace, I’m going to give him a little bit more mercy and open up his eyes a little bit more.” You have a way too high view of yourself. And you hear this all the time in Evangelicalism. You’ll hear people say, “God has just given me all of this stuff, and I just know He wants to use me because of all this, this and this.” Um, God has never gone, “Oh, I hope this works out for Me.” That has never happened to Him. He has never gone, “I would really like to do this, but what am I going to do? Nobody’s listening to me right now. It’s Super Bowl Sunday. Maybe We’ll try it again next week.” That’s not how it works.

Now watch what he pulls here, because I want to talk for a little bit about this in light of what I believe is a false and horrible gospel that you hear often. “May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience...”. I’ve heard this said before, so I’m just going to throw this out there. If it’s God’s will for all of us that nobody gets sick and nobody has any trouble and we’re all supposed to be wealthy, if that’s true, why do we need to have patience and endurance? If all we have for loving Jesus is a life of ease ahead of us, then why is this in the Bible over and over and over again? My problem with the Prosperity Gospel, despite the fact that it’s such garbage, is if you just take a step back and look, is this true for anyone? That’s the thing that I get confused by. Who doesn’t bleed? Who doesn’t suffer? Who doesn’t get sick? Who doesn’t have bad years? Who gets this life? If you can show them to me, you’re showing me some three-year-old. And I’ll say, “Let’s hold off until he gets to puberty, okay?” So I don’t understand the mindset of the Prosperity Gospel. This is why people get angry when you say God is part of this cancer that I have. People get real angry because they’ve been taught that God’s purpose in the universe is to make much of us, make much of me, make much of you, that there is no hurt or struggle for us. But the Bible just said, “May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience...”

And then there was one last word at the end there. It says, “...for all endurance and patience with joy...”. Joy in my circumstance? I’ll give it to you like this. I have stage-3 anaplastic oligodendroglioma, malignant brain cancer. They’ll tell you how long you have, but they don’t know. It’s just the truth. They’ll even say that. Any doctor worth his salt will. All they have are statistics. And I think it was Twain that said, “There are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies, and statistics.” In the end, here’s what I know. Here’s a place of deep joy for me. As a pastor, I know that some people go for a run and they don’t come home. Some people get in the car, maybe kiss their spouse goodbye and don’t come back home. And I know last night, we celebrated my daughter’s 7th birthday, and I got in bed with my wife and I woke up this morning and had breakfast with my children. And I’m going to die just like you. I don’t know when, but it’s coming for me. And I know I have a little window of knowing it’s coming. I don’t know how long that window is, but it means that I get to climb in bed and be unbelievably grateful that I got another day. It means I get to wake up tomorrow (Lord willing) and be unbelievably grateful that I got another day. And that gift has brought me an immense amount of joy. So now, by the grace of God and the strength of God, I’m trying to walk well through what He has for me. And I said it correctly. This is what God has for me. God was not asleep on this thing oligodendroglioma grows slowly. It was probably in my brain for 20 years. Over the last 20 years, God was not blind to that. It didn’t surprise Him. Thanksgiving morning didn’t make Him go, “Oh, Gabriel, get over here. Here’s the plan. here’s what I want to do. You get down there and find him a surgeon. You, find an oncologist. You, go...”. This is not how it played out. It didn’t surprise Him. In fact, He was like,
“Okay, it’s time,” and all that was set into motion before that, things that I didn’t even know about until now, were controlled by a good, mighty, beautiful God. And so that belief enables me to walk with joy, patience and endurance through a difficult season.

Now I want to finish this, because here’s what comes out of it. “May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father…” I’ve been trying to figure out what happened to us as a culture. I mean, we are so negative. The lenses by which most of us see are the lenses of “what’s wrong with it?” So everything is, “What’s wrong with it?” We love arguments. It’s just how we see the world. Think about some of the most popular TV shows, and I won’t even get into CNN and FOX News. Even if we just look at ESPN, look at PTI. The entire show is two men who disagree about everything sitting across from each other arguing for an hour. It’s one of the most popular shows. And we tune into this and love it. We’re like, “These two guys are going to argue about sports stuff. Let’s TiVo it and tune in.” We see through the lenses of “what’s wrong with it?” So it’s hard for us to be able to acknowledge what’s right and what’s good, because we’ve been trained to spot and pull out what’s wrong and what’s bad. So this is very detrimental to our heart. It stresses us out, it’s exhausting and you turn into judgmental, proud, wicked hearted people. That’s what happens with a lack of gratitude. So you don’t go, “Oh, I get to eat good food tonight;” you go, “Oh, there’s an hour long wait?” It shames us in the global scene. We’re so impatient, so impractical. It’s just who we are. It’s the air we breathe. So the Scriptures here are saying, “No, be grateful. Be grateful for what you’ve been given. Have a heart filled with gratitude.” And you can just keep rolling this back up. Have a heart filled with gratitude built on the understanding that God’s strength is at work in you that enables you to endure well with patience and with joy the difficult parts of life that helps you know the nature and character of God that leads to good works and transformed lives.

Let’s finish with this. “…giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you…” I love that. So I’m able, as a sinful, wicked man, to approach the throne of grace with confidence, which means I can go talk to God and know that He is going to hear me and listen to me and not destroy me, despite the fact that I deserve it. And I can do that not because I’m a good man but because I’ve been qualified to do that by the Father through the Son. I can come to the Father because of the cross of Jesus Christ, and when I come to the Father, I come through the blood so that when He sees me, He sees me as perfect and spotless. It’s not, “Oh, you had a bad week, Chandler. I’m not listening to you right now. You struggled, you slipped and fell. You go back and clean yourself up and then come back and we’ll talk.” That’s not how it works. I get to come because of the blood of Christ and plead with the Lord. I’ve been qualified by an act of God, not by my own act. You don’t qualify yourself before God. That’s why I’m constantly preaching against behavioral modification, because you can’t make yourself clean enough to approach God’s throne. It’s grace alone that enables you to do that. So the Father qualifies you.

Now listen to this next part, and this is where I really want to talk. “…giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” When I got married, there were some things I knew and some things I did not know. And no one prepared me well for it. I did a little premarital deal, but it was junior varsity and I needed varsity. So in my house growing up, I would dry off with a towel and then throw the towel on the floor, and then my mom would handle that. I didn’t know how she handled it until I got married. So she would take the towel and put it in the hamper. So she would take the towel and put it in the hamper. So I get married and I would dry off and throw my towel on the ground. And Lauren would go, “Hey Matt!” So I would come in, and she would go, “What’s this?” And I would go, “It’s a towel.” She’d say, “Okay, what we do is hang the towel on this thing right here. It’s called a towel rack.” So early on, I’m like, “Well, why did you ask me what it is then? That really wasn’t what you wanted.” I told you I needed varsity help. I know now not to talk until I know what she’s really asking. Don’t even look her in the eye. Just look confused. Here’s what happens. I have never, in ten years of marriage, got out of the shower, dried off and gone, “You know what? Lauren...
is kind of getting on my nerves right now. I really want to love her, but I just don’t think it’s there. I know. I’ll hang up my towel. Ah, that act of duty has created in me a deep delight for Lauren.” That has never happened. Now, I have dried off and, just before I threw it on the ground, went, “Oh no, wait. Let me hang it up, because I love Lauren.”

Here is my point. There are two primary ways that people see God. One is unbiblical and incorrect. It is the view that God in the heavens, He’s all powerful, He’s almighty, governs all things and beats people for whistling. If you’re happy, He’s going to destroy you. And all the commands of God and all the commands in the Bible are given because He holds the keys to heaven and hell, and you had better do what He says because He can send you to hell. And that’s a very popular view of God. Some religions actually go, “That’s exactly who God is.” Some Christians would even say that’s who God is. Now the problem with that is primarily going to be the Bible. And really it’s an impossible and exhausting system. And since I got here, I’ve been trying to show you that with just simply the Ten Commandments. We can’t even keep the Ten Commandments. How can we get into the expanse of the Law if we can’t even keep the Kindergarten level of the Law? So when all is said and done, that’s one view of God, where people go, “Here’s what God commands. You had better do what God commands, because if you don’t do that, He’s going to get you. And that’s kind of the world view. So the commands of God feel heavy, they feel difficult and exhausting and it feels like you can’t win. And a lot of people walk in this.

The second view, the biblical view is that God is after worship. He is not after begrudging submission, but rather, the commands of God are leading us life and joy and how He designed the universe to be so that we worship Him, love Him and love the Law. It’s why David, in Psalm 119, just busts out in the longest song in the history of the world about how good the Law is. He’s delighting in it, it’s like honey on his lips. He loves the Law. I’ve never met anybody like that. I’ve never met anybody who’s like, “I just read the Old Testament all day, every day, and I just want to dance.” I’ve just never heard that. Have you met that guy? I haven’t, and if I did, I’d be a little nervous, honestly. No but David loves the Law because he knows that in the Law is delight. He understands that God’s commands are trying to line us up with how He designed things to be, for our joy and for His worship. And those two things are not at odds with one another. They actually walk together. So that’s the correct view of God that then sets us free to be obedient, that then sets us free to walk in joy, that then sets us free to love the Law and commands of God, that then transforms our lives and makes us obedient. So we don’t go, “Let me do these things so I’ll love God.” We get to know the character and nature of God, and in so doing we’re transformed and begin to do good deeds. You’ve got to get that. If you don’t get that, you’re outside of Christian doctrine and you’re in something else. It’s also why I want to constantly push you to not read Christian books about you but read Christian books about God. So instead of You’re Best Life Now, read something like Seeing and Savoring Jesus. Instead of reading Unlocking the Happiness Code (I just made that one up, but give it time), get out of that track and buy books about God, buy books about His nature, buy books about His character, buy books about His holiness, buy older books and get to know the character and nature of God. That’s going to do more to transform your heart and mind than a billion books on, “Let me tell you why you’re so great. . .Let me tell you how to get more out of this life.” You can get more out of this life by seeing and savoring the Creator of all things. So this is going to be Colossians.

Let me pray for us. “Father, I thank You for our short time together today. My prayer is that we would hear and understand these things today. I have no doubt that there are men and women here who are just trapped in what I believe is a demonic system of just continuing to try to earn what You’ve freely given. And so may we turn our hearts and minds to You and not to behavioral modification. May we turn our hearts and minds towards Your goodness, Your grace, Your nature, what You’ve done and who You are. May we strive to know those things, love those things, have You wash over us with those things and in so doing, transform us. For some reason, we just love the Law. We love going back to it over and over again. Free us from that, once and for all. We love You. It’s for Your beautiful name. Amen.”