

Concluding Words

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 17 July 2019

Preacher: Lee Roberts

[0:00] Tonight we are going to finish our study in Colossians.

! Verses 7-18 of chapter 4 have Paul's final words in this letter. Let's go ahead and read all of those verses. Starting with verse 7, Paul wrote, And with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you.

They will tell you of everything that has taken place here. Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, greets you, and Mark, the cousin of Barnabas, concerning whom you have received instructions.

If he comes to you, welcome him. And Jesus, who is called Justice. These are the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me.

Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in the will of God. For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis.

[1:25] Luke, the beloved physician, greets you, as does Demas. Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea and to Nympha and the church in her house. And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans, and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea.

And say to Archippus, see that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord. I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains.

Grace be with you. So in these closing lines, we hear names, greetings, and references to the situation of both Paul and his readers. Paul encloses with his letter a verbal group photograph, so to speak.

He includes in it a number of those who have helped him in his ministry while he was imprisoned at Rome. And he gives recognition to some of the unsung heroes of the New Testament. He also uses them as an encouragement to those who read this letter.

This section actually adds a warm personal touch to what has largely been a letter about doctrine. Many of those mentioned in the passage tonight had stuck with Paul for years.

[2:34] And to Paul, these people were indispensable assets to his ministry. He knew well that he couldn't do it alone. No one can do it alone. And if you think about it, God's leaders always have depended on others to support them in their work.

Proverbs 27, 17 says, Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another. And listen to this advice from Ecclesiastes 4, verses 9-12.

It says, So in our passage tonight, Tonight, we're going to see three major sections.

From verses 7-14, Paul introduces us to eight people who were ministering with him. And we'll spend some time considering what the Bible tells us about each one of those eight.

Then from verses 15-17, Paul includes some additional instructions for the Colossians. And then finally, verse 18 has Paul's handwritten conclusion.

[4:00] We're actually going to split the introduction of Paul's eight companions into multiple categories. So that means we'll cover the final verses in five sections.

And the first section comes in verses 7-9. And in those verses, we see the delivering to. The delivering to. T-W-O. Paul chose two people to deliver this letter to the Colossians.

So let's go ahead and read about them. Verses 7-9 say, Tychicus was a man who had accompanied Paul on his missionary adventures for some time.

We hear about him in the book of Acts. He'd been with Paul on the Greek campaign, and he traveled with Paul to Troas at the end of the so-called third missionary journey. You can read about that in Acts chapter 20, verse 4.

Tychicus was probably included in the we of whom Luke talked about in Acts, of the group that was traveling with Paul on that journey. And he may have accompanied Paul to Jerusalem to get the collection for the churches for the needy believers in Jerusalem.

[5:32] He's mentioned in four of Paul's letters. He's mentioned here. He's mentioned in Ephesians. He's mentioned in 2 Timothy. And he's mentioned in Titus. So Tychicus was clearly a loved and trusted colleague, and he was entrusted with a number of important tasks.

Apparently, the Colossian people didn't know him. So Paul introduces him to those Colossian believers. And he came to Colossae with an impressive letter of recommendation from Paul. Look at how Paul describes Tychicus. First, Paul describes him as a beloved brother. Think about what a remarkable thing it was for Paul the Jew to be speaking like this about a Gentile. Here's actually another example of how the gospel unites believers from different ethnic backgrounds and different walks of life. Paul also describes Tychicus as a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord.

Tychicus's willingness to travel with Paul shows his servant's heart. Such a journey was not to be undertaken lightly because travel in the ancient world was far more difficult and dangerous than it is in our day.

[6:45] Tychicus was with Paul during his imprisonment at Rome. And after Paul's release, Tychicus remained with him. And when Paul needed a temporary replacement for Titus as pastor of the church on Crete, Tychicus was one of the ones considered for that role.

So Tychicus had begun as a messenger, but he was now a candidate to fill in for Titus. At the very end of Paul's life, during his second Roman imprisonment, Tychicus still was with Paul.

Facing the imminent execution, Paul wanted to see Timothy one last time. Because Timothy could not leave his congregation at Ephesus without a replacement, Paul sent Tychicus to Ephesus.

So once again, Tychicus's name comes up as a replacement for one of Paul's prominent associates. And that speaks highly of the character of Tychicus. In verses 7 and 8, Paul says that he's sending Tychicus to them to tell about Paul's activities and to encourage them.

So he must have had an encourager's heart like what Barnabas did as well. The second person that Paul mentions is Onesimus. And we know about Onesimus from Tom's study of Philemon a few months ago.

[7:58] Remember that Onesimus was Philemon's runaway slave who very possibly stole from Philemon when he ran away. Paul describes Onesimus as our faithful and beloved brother.

That's pretty significant as well. When a person comes to faith in Christ, the past is no longer an issue. Onesimus was a power or a testimony to the power of God to transform a life.

Paul tells the Colossians that the man who left Colossae as a runaway slave now returns as one of you. He was actually one of you in more ways than one.

He was from Colossae and now he was one of them as a member of the church there. And he was to be treated as a member of the church. We know that in Christ there is no such thing as a slave or a free man.

Paul shows his regard for Onesimus by having him, along with Tychicus, inform the Colossians about Paul's whole situation. Put yourself in Onesimus' place, though.

[9:01] He must have been very nervous coming back to Colossae. It was a brave thing to do, and Paul's words testify to the power of Christ to make that very situation different.

Not only do Tychicus and Onesimus carry Colossians, but they also carry the letters to the Ephesians and probably Philemon as well. And just a little bit about the trip from Rome to Colossae will help you see how difficult a trip that it was.

First, they would have had to cross much of Italy on foot and then sail across the Adriatic Sea. Then they would have to go across Greece on foot and then sail across the Aegean Sea to the coast of Asia Minor.

And after that, they still faced a journey of nearly 100 miles on foot to reach Colossae. And all that time they had to hang on to the letters that they had been entrusted with.

So now that we've seen the Delivering 2, we're going to see three more people that are with Paul. Verses 10 and 11 introduce us to the Jewish few.

[10:07] So the Jewish few goes into your second set of blanks. Listen to verses 10 and 11 again. Verses 10 and 11 say, So we know that the three men listed here are the Jewish few because Paul says in verse 11, these are the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers.

And of course, men of the circumcision is another way of describing Jews. Paul describes Aristarchus as his fellow prisoner. Commentators debate whether Aristarchus was with Paul in prison voluntarily.

If he voluntarily chose to be with Paul, that is even more impressive. Any leader would benefit from having a faithful Aristarchus at his side throughout his trials.

The Lord's work would not be done if it were not for people like Aristarchus who humbly bear hardships without the fame of those they serve. Think about that last sentence again.

The Lord's work would not be done if it were not for people like Aristarchus who humbly bear hardships without the fame of those they serve. So we may not be able to be an Apostle Paul, but maybe we could be an Aristarchus to somebody.

[11:46] The next person listed is Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. And this is the same Mark who's also known as John Mark. And Mark and Paul have quite the past.

Mark was a companion of Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey, and he deserted them when the going got tough. Listen to Acts 13.13.

Acts 13.13 says, Now Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia, and John left them and returned to Jerusalem.

And that John there is John Mark. Mark's desertion was later to become a source of friction between Paul and Barnabas. Barnabas wanted to take his cousin along on the second missionary journey, but Paul didn't trust Mark to be loyal, and so he refused to take Mark along.

And that led to such a sharp disagreement between Paul and Barnabas that they separated from each other. Acts 15.37-39, and also verse 38 as well, tell us about that separation.

[12:54] Listen to verses 37-39 of Acts 15. Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John, called Mark. But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work.

And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus. Fortunately, the story doesn't end there.

By the time Paul wrote Colossians, Mark had become a changed man. He had been restored to usefulness probably through the ministry of Peter, because he was often a companion of Peter.

And of course, Peter was no stranger to failure in his own life. In Philemon, verse 24, Paul names Mark among his fellow workers. The man whom Paul once rejected became one of his greatest helpers.

Listen also to how Paul describes Mark in 2 Timothy 4.11. Writing to Timothy, Paul said this in 2 Timothy 4.11, Luke alone is with me.

[14:00] Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry. Paul tells the Colossians to welcome Mark if Mark later comes to visit. Similar to what Paul did for Philemon, Paul wants to make sure that Mark's past is no longer an issue.

The third of the Jewish few is Jesus, who's called Justice. We read about him in the first part of verse 11. Verse 11 actually is the only time this person is mentioned in the Bible.

Paul tells us nothing more about him than what he says about all three of the Jews. At the end of Colossians 4.11, Paul wrote, They have been a comfort to me. If someone is only going to be mentioned in one place in the Bible, being mentioned as a comfort to the Apostle Paul is a decent way to get recognized.

So we met five of the eight people who are with Paul. The third section of our lesson tonight mentions three more people who send greetings to the Colossians, and we'll call them the greeting crew.

So the greeting crew is your next set of blanks. Look at verses 12 and 13 again.

[15:17] Verses 12 and 13 say, Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God.

For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and Hierapolis. Luke, the beloved physician, greets you, as does Demas.

We spent a lot of time talking about Epaphras at the beginning of this letter. He was the founder of the Colossian church, and he most likely was its current pastor. He had journeyed to Rome, bringing the news to Paul of the dangerous heresy threatening the church in the Lycus Valley and the other churches around it.

Through this letter, we've learned several things about Epaphras that earned him this commendation from Paul. Here in verse 12, Paul describes Epaphras to the Colossians as always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God.

Our English word agonized is derived from the Greek word translated here as struggling. Paul used the same word in 1 Corinthians 9.25 to speak of the grueling competition endured by athletes.

[16:34] In John 18.36, the same word is translated fighting. Related words appear in Romans 15.30 to speak of fighting in prayer and in Luke 22.44 in reference to Jesus' agony at Gethsemane.

Epaphras was a living example of Paul's command to the Colossians in verse 4.2 that we looked at last time. Paul said, And we see that Epaphras was doing just that.

The end of verse 12 summarizes why Epaphras prays. Epaphras wants the Colossians to be mature and fully assured in all the will of God. Fully assured there could be translated persuaded or satisfied fully.

Epaphras, like Paul, wanted the Colossians to be mature and satisfied in all the will of God. Only those who live in obedience to God's will can grow in the fullness of Christ and be content.

Having observed Epaphras firsthand, Paul could bear witness to his deep concern for the Colossians and those at nearby Laodicea and Hierapolis. Epaphras' fervent, agonizing prayers and his single-minded passion for his people's maturity must have greatly encouraged Paul and his other co-workers.

[17:55] Luke is mentioned next and we know quite a bit about him. Luke is the author of the third gospel. He's the author of the book of Acts and he's a companion of Paul to the end.

Luke was Paul's personal physician as well as his close friend. He was a Gentile believer who traveled frequently with Paul on his missionary voyages. And it may have been Paul's recurring illnesses on the first missionary journey that prompted Paul to take Luke along on the second.

And like Paul, Luke was an educated, cultured man. It may surprise you to know that Luke is mentioned by name only two other times in the New Testament.

And all three times his name appears, it does so in Paul's writings from prison. In case you want to check him out, those other two places are Philemon 22 and 2 Timothy 4.11.

Luke is a good reminder to us and he's a reminder that not everyone in the Lord's service has to have a seminary degree. God's work needs specialists too. And Luke surrendered his special talent to God, giving up what might have been a lucrative private practice.

[19:05] In return, God gave him the privilege of writing a sizable portion of the New Testament and of being the beloved companion of the Apostle Paul. Demas is mentioned last in this section.

About Demas, we know very little except that at some time later he deserted Paul in rather sad circumstances. In Paul's last letter, which is 2 Timothy, Paul mentions that Demas, in love with his present world, has deserted me.

That is 2 Timothy 4.10. Jesus had his Judas and Paul had his Demas. Even the two greatest leaders in the world had people who failed them.

So, so far we've seen the delivering to, the Jewish few, and the greeting crew. And now that Paul has finished his summary of the eight people with him, he changes gears and gives the Colossians some additional instructions.

In verses 15 through 17, Paul gives the Colossians the things to do. The things to do is what goes in your next set of blanks. Listen to verses 15 through 17 again and we'll see what those things to do are.

[20:23] Starting in verse 15 of Colossians 4, he says, Paul closes by asking the Colossians to greet the brethren in nearby Laodicea for him.

The manuscripts there vary between the name of the next person he mentions by name. Some say Nympha, which is feminine, like what the ESV has it, and some say Nymphus, which is masculine, like some other translations have it.

The church that is in her house may have been the church at Laodicea, or it could have been the church at Hierapolis, which otherwise would go unnamed. Regardless of whether a Nympha was a he or she, we learned something important here, and that's that house churches are mentioned on several occasions in the New Testaments.

Remember that Christians didn't congregate in larger public facilities until late into the third century at the earliest. In some smaller towns, the entire body of Christ would have gathered in one

person's home, while in larger cities, several other house churches would have existed.

And of course, other parts of the world have house churches more common today. If we use the word church today, the vast majority in our society, both Christian and non-Christian, immediately think of a building or a physical structure of some sort.

[22:04] People who think that the church is a building are wrong about what the church is. And we see that reminder here, too. The church's people and assembly have gathered believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Whether they meet in a cave to avoid arrest, or on a hillside to enjoy the beauty of God's creation, or in a home because of lack of money to meet elsewhere, or even in a 10,000-seat auditorium, the church is the body of Christ.

Paul's second instruction in this section is, and when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans, and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea.

All of Paul's letters were passed around from church to church and read aloud to the whole congregation. The churches believed that the apostles had a unique, inspired word from God, and of course, that was correct.

Their desire to hear all of Paul's letters written to other churches and on other occasions shows how the Bible relates to everyone of every age. And we don't know for sure what the letter to Laodicea was.

[23:12] Some scholars think that the epistle to the Ephesians was actually the missing letter that's referenced there, but that idea is just pure speculation. The fact that this Laodicean letter likely has been lost doesn't mean that we're missing a part of God's inspired word.

Some of Paul's correspondence with the church at Corinth also has been lost. God not only inspired his word, but he providentially watched over it so that nothing would be lost that was supposed to be in that word.

Instead of wondering about what we do not have, we should be applying ourselves to what we do have. In the first section of this lesson, we talked about how difficult the journey to Colossae would have been.

If God wanted us to know what the letter to the Laodiceans said, he would have preserved it just as he preserved the letter to the Colossians. Paul's last words before his salutation are directed at Archippus as an encouragement to continue faithfully in his ministry.

Archippus may have been the son of Philemon and Apphia and the pastor of the church that met in their home. Philemon, too, is the other place where he's mentioned. And perhaps Archippus needed this word of encouragement to not give up in the face of the fierce battle with the false teachers.

[24:32] So we have one more verse remaining in our study tonight and in our study of the book of Colossians itself. In verse 18 we see the ending true.

So the ending true is your last section. Let's look about what that ending true is. Verse 18 says, I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand.

Remember my chains. Grace be with you. We could have also titled that Grace to You as well. Paul asks them to remember his imprisonment in their prayers and he closes with his common salutation which is Grace be with you.

And that sums up the message of Colossians itself. Salvation is by grace through faith in the all-sufficient Christ not through human works advocated by false teachers.

May the grace of which Paul speaks be known among us as it was known among this wonderful assortment of ordinary people like us. And we've gotten a chance to glimpse at some of these ordinary people tonight in the letter's conclusion.

[25:41] In tonight's passage we've read about a number of the actual people mentioned by name who were either with Paul as he wrote or who were gathered as Tychicus read the letter. The people mentioned are indeed ordinary people just like you and I are ordinary people.

They are individuals who have come to faith in Christ Jesus, some of them eagerly engaged in ministries of all kinds, all of them needing to hear what Paul has written in these pages.

And there are people with their own life situations, their own anxieties, and their own dreams, and their own fears, and their own joys. They also have their own disappointments and surprises and the concluding words should remind us that our names could have well been included at the end of this letter if we had been there when the letter was first written.

So now that we've studied all of the verses, let's consider what the book of Colossians has taught us as a whole. We need to always remind ourselves that we are complete in Jesus Christ and we should beware of any teaching that claims to give us something more than what we already have in Christ.

All of God's fullness is in Christ and Christ has perfectly equipped us for the life that God wants us to live. Go all the way back to Colossians 1-2 and remember what Paul said there.

[27:03] He said to the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae, grace to you and peace from God our Father. So he started out by saying, grace to you and peace from God our Father.

And remember, we just read that he ended Colossians by saying, grace be with you. Paul ended where he began. In a sense, the entire letter argues for the principle of grace, that God supplies his salvation freely, that he requires nothing but a trust in the work of his son Jesus, and that his grace sustains the Christians' lives.

If God's grace is with them, Christians need nothing else. Colossians also gives us a glimpse at Jesus' true identity. Listen to Colossians 1-15-19 for some review of that.

Speaking of Christ, Paul wrote, He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities.

All things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church.

[28:24] He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

It's interesting as we review that section how many times Paul mentions all in there. He wants to make sure that Christ is all we need and that everybody knows that. So here are some questions to think about.

Can Christ really change lives? Can he give joy, peace, and happiness? And does knowing Christ give meaning and purpose to life? Well, we've seen Colossians answer all three of those questions. Colossians 1.22 says this about Christ. He is now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him.

And then in Colossians 2.6 and 7 we see this Therefore, as you have 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.

[29:37] In Colossians 3.3 we saw this For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. And then verse 4 says, When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

So Colossians tells us not only about this life, it tells us about the life to come. Colossians is all about the proper place. False teachers were attempting to remove Jesus Christ from his proper place of absolute supremacy.

Paul tells believers that the proper place for their ambitions is heaven above and not on earth. we should remember something else about Colossians. That's the importance of prayer.

If you think about it, prayer has a prominent place throughout Colossians. The letter begins with two prayers. We saw that in verses 3-8 of chapter 1 and then also in verses 9-14.

And then it closes with three references to prayer in chapter 4. 4-2, 4-12, and 4-18 all have references to prayer. Sandwiched between the references in the first and fourth chapter are our responsibilities.

[30:49] And our responsibilities are to know the truth and avoid error, to live out our new life by developing character and deepening relationships, and those are the main things.

In other words, we are to be like Christ. So if ordinary people like you and I are to have any hope of fulfilling these compelling responsibilities, then prayer needs to play a big part in that.

Here's a quote from A.C. Dixon, and I included it in your handout. He said, When we rely on organization, we get what organization can do.

When we rely on education, we get what education can do. When we rely on eloquence, we get what eloquence can do, and so on. I am not disposed to undervalue any of these things in their proper place, but when we rely on prayer, we get what God can do.

Think about that last sentence again. When we rely on prayer, we get what God can do. Colossians, including tonight's passage especially, also should remind us that God uses ordinary people to do his work.

[31:59] Here's a quote from Max Anders. He said, our world may be obsessed with celebrities, but God most often builds his kingdom through the faithful obedience of ordinary people.

Have you fallen into the celebrity trap? Are you convinced God can't use you? The truth is, he can. All it takes is availability, reliance on his enabling power, and faithfulness in the ordinary grind of life. Get involved, dig in, get your hands dirty, and then keep it up. Most of us will never be big names, but the only big name that really matters is Jesus.

So if you have doubts about whether you're adequate to represent God, remember what God has already accomplished in the life of each believer. Colossians 2, verses 13 and 14 have these words to every person who is in Christ.

And here are Colossians 2, verses 13 and 14. And you who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made a life together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses by canceling the record of death that stood against us with its legal demands.

[33:12] This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.