

Partners in Crime

Colossians 4:7-18

Sermon Outline

^{ESV} **Colossians 4:7-18** Tychicus will tell you all about my activities. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. ⁸ I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts, ⁹ 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.

¹⁰ 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), ¹¹ and Jesus who is called Justus. 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. ¹² 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. ¹³ For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis. ¹⁴ Luke the beloved physician greets you, as does Demas. ¹⁵ Give my greetings to the brothers ¹ at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ And say to Archippus, "See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord."

¹⁸ I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.

The structure of the letter to Colossians

1. Believing in Christ's Pre-eminence (chap. 1)
 - His Pre-eminence in our Experience (1:3-14)
 - His Pre-eminence in Creation (1:15-17)
 - His Pre-eminence in Redemption and the Church (1:18-23)
 - His Pre-eminence in Paul's Ministry (1:24-29)

2. Defending Christ's Pre-eminence (chap. 2)
 - His Pre-eminence vs. Empty Philosophy (2:1-8)
 - His Pre-eminence vs. Judaistic Ritualism (2:9-17)
 - His Pre-eminence vs. Man-Made Rules (2:18-23)
 - Made up stuff about Mysticism and Asceticism

[Remember the difference between *indicatives* and *imperatives*?]

3. Living Out Christ's Pre-eminence (chap. 3-4)
 - His Pre-eminence in Your New Identity (3:1-10)
 - His Pre-eminence in the Church's Unity (3:11-17)
 - His Pre-eminence in Your Home and Work (3:18-4:1)
 - husbands/wives ; children/parent; slaves/masters
 - His Pre-eminence in Proclamation (4:2-6)
 - His Pre-eminence in Service and Relationships (4:7-18)

Seven Themes in our text:

1. Sharing Praise Reports (7-9)

Tychicus

- Beloved brother
- Faithful minister – probably not minister like pastor; just one who ministers
- Fellow servant

Onesimus

- Runaway slave talked about in Philemon
- “Faithful and beloved brother” (9)
- He is “one of you” (9) – he’s a Christian. You have to receive him back!

They are Being Sent to Colossae

- To carry the letters – Ephesians, Col, and Philemon
- To inform the Colossians about Paul, his welfare, and what’s been happening.
- To “encourage your hearts” (8) –to Paul, but I’m sure in other ways too.

Important that the Colossians are informed of what’s happening to Paul

- Paul wants them to pray intelligently; to pray for specifics.
- They have an interest in the progress of the gospel
- There is a mystical communion between Christians, because of Christ. They have care/concern for Paul himself even though they’ve never met.

What should we learn from this?

- Sharing praise and prayer is vital to our fellowship and partnership in the gospel.
- Paul went to great lengths to provide a praise report and prayer requests. We should work at this more.
- This works both ways
 - We should be eager to hear from each other (some tend toward this and not the other)
 - We should seek to serve others with reporting praise and requesting prayer (some tend toward this)
- All glory goes to God when it’s good; all dependence must be on him when it’s bad.
- But he has given us each other in part for burden bearing (Gal 6:1 – “bear one another’s burdens...”)

Some may need to back off--continual for-every-little-need-or-want requests, while others need to be more willing to share their burdens. (condensed paraphrase)

- Also, pray for our missionaries – and pray in informed ways.

2. Welcoming Comforters (10-11)

Aristarchus – mentioned a few times in Acts; here he’s a “fellow prisoner”

Mark – broken relationship (Acts 13:13; 15:36-40); restored (2 Tim 4:11)

Justus – mentioned in other places as with Paul.

“these are the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers” (11) = only ones of Jewish nationality.

These three have been a comfort to Paul

- Paul needs comfort and comforters
- We all do
- We’re not told how they comforted him

3. Struggling in Prayer and Service (12-13)

Epaphras – from the Colossian church.

He is an *evangelist* (that’s most likely how the gospel got to Colossae – see 1:7)

He is a *messenger*

He is a *laborer* – *“he’s worked hard for you”*

He is a *pray-er*

He “wrestles” in prayer for the Colossians

A great prayer – *“that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God”*

That’s really an abbreviation of what Paul prayed for the Colossians in 1:3-14.

Remember some things we learned from the priorities of Paul’s prayers?

What should we learn from this?

- Pray like Epaphras
- Labor like Epaphras
- Honor and pray for “Epaphrases” around us

4. Sharing Simple Greetings (14-15)

Luke – Possibly Paul’s physician? Author of Luke/Acts.

Demas – relationship broken later (2 Tim 4:9-10) ref. Third soil (Mark 4:18-19)

Nympha – “and the church in her house”

- Not just a house church without pastors--He’s writing to the whole Colossian church. But there are subsets of fellowship and partnership within the church. (ref. CGs at DSC).

What should we learn from this?

- Share simple greetings
- Pray for and work toward perseverance

5. Reading All the Letters (16)

A [missing] letter to the Laodiceans? --Probably the letter to the Ephesians.

Exchange letters was a common NT practice. *Now we have them all together.*

We must give ourselves to read the Word

- Corporately
- Privately

6. Fulfilling the Ministry (17)

Personalized--Archipus in v 17 is told “*fulfill your ministry*”

7. Remembering the Cost (18)

“my chains” --suffering and struggles.

Discussion 1: Review

- *What is the central theme/text of this letter?* [Col 1:15-20 -- read it and relate all that you’ve learned to it. Verse 18 is the best single verse summary...]

- *Gem Hunting*

Ryan mentioned this text is more than just acknowledgements like you’d find in a book (“who reads those?”), and then claimed there are some real gems in this closing section. Search the text and review the sermon to see what it says about these topics:

- *Thankfulness* [We’ve discussed the importance, now note Paul’s at work/demonstrated]
- *Mutual burden-bearing* [see also 4:2-3]

- *The wonderful gift we have in the Bible* [How awesome just to get each other's letters just to hear them read... we have them all together, and our very own copies... multiple...]
- *The fellowship we share in the Christ*
[Acknowledging / promoting it. We call it "the communion of the saints" – a mystical bond. The fellowship of the gospel-mission is part of that...]
- *The sharing of ministry* [Paul is a great example here of celebrating others' part in the kingdom. Many of these names aren't famous in the history of the church. They were nobodies, in a sense. It doesn't matter. They're good men; they've faithfully served the cause; they've encouraged Paul, etc.]
- *The personalization of ministry* [Archipus in v 17 is told "*fulfill your ministry*". Do you think this promotes "me against the world" or taking ownership of the corporate [Great Co-] mission? For (public/vocational) preachers only? ...]
- *The importance of the mission* [The need for a willingness to suffer for the gospel. Discussed more in next section...]
- *The need to persevere in the Christian life* [Pray that more stories would end like Mark's and fewer like Demas']
- *Jesus is building his church* – transcending our circumstances
[Paul is so optimistic, seemingly so encouraged, in Col 4 (and almost everywhere). ... isn't rose-colored glasses Pollyanna outlook. Jesus is doing wonderful things *not just in spite* of the suffering and heartache, but often *through it*.

Discussion 2: Application--Mission

Remember Paul's "chains" for a moment.

- ***Why is Paul so willing to suffer for the sake of the gospel?***
[And why are we often so reluctant to even inconvenience ourselves for it?
Leaders--lead out in confession and repentance.]
- ***In what ways are you on mission individually? Corporately? How can you bear one another's burdens on mission?***
[Prayer is important and the easy answer-- Are we sufficiently convicted of our lack of prayer? What else can we do? Is the mission "personal" to you?]

Discussion 3: Application--Community

- *Are you too unwilling to share your burdens? Are you too willing to do so? How does the base sin of pride fit in to each error?*

[Unwilling--self-sufficient, don't want anyone to know I don't have it all under control... Too willing--possibly a demonstration of false-humility or an affinity for being the center of attention (every little thing is a crisis...) *This doesn't mean there aren't people with a lot of real burdens that need to be shared--having a lot of prayer requests does not mean you are guilty of the latter error.*]

Discussion 4: Application--Worship

- *Are you ready to listen (or read) the New Testament over the next 90 days?*

[Get a feel of whether folks are intending to take part. If not, why not? What do you mean by that? ... discern pride and lead out in repentance where necessary.]

- *Praying the Scriptures -Psalm 19*

Take the time to pray Psalm 19 together.

[Leader--you or have a volunteer or multiple volunteers doing a few verses each read Psalm 19 as a prayer to God. It is good to change the grammar to address it to God rather than just about God. e.g. "The heavens declare the glory of God" can become "The heavens declare your glory [oh God]" ... "his handiwork" becomes "your handiwork." Verse 7 "The Law of..." becomes "Your Law ...", (v 12 "his" is not God... v 13 "your servant" can become "us" ...]

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2. Welcoming Comforters (10-11)
3. Struggling in Prayer and Service (12-13)
4. Sharing Simple Greetings (14-15)
5. Reading All the Letters (16)
6. Fulfilling the Ministry (17)
7. Remembering the Cost (18)

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- *The wonderful gift we have in the Bible*

- *The fellowship we share in the Christ*
- *The sharing of ministry*
- *The personalization of ministry*
- *The importance of the mission*
- *The need to persevere in the Christian life*
- *Jesus is building his church - (Paul's optimism)*

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- *Why is Paul so willing to suffer for the sake of the gospel?*
- *In what ways are you on mission individually? Corporately? How can you bear one another's burdens on mission?*

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