

## Saying Goodbye! Colossians 4:7-18

Tease: Saying goodbye is often difficult and often just reflects personal emotions. However, for the Apostle Paul saying goodbye at the end of his letters to the various churches was a time to continue his teaching while at the same time saying goodbye. Join us this Sunday as Pastor Rich explores the conclusion to the book of Colossians. 9 am Sunday School, 10 am Worship Service. We look forward to seeing you.

## Saying Goodbye! Colossians 4:7-18

We have made it to the conclusion of the book of Colossians. Our text this morning is full of closing remarks and personal notes. Let me set the stage for these remarks this morning.

Paul was in prison in Rome. He anticipated his execution or his release at any time. He was in the Capital of the Empire surrounded by guard but with access to his supporters and people of the city. Paul was writing to a church he had not been to and did not directly start. The Apostle Paul had given some specific instructions to the church in Colossae in an effort to deal with false doctrine and those spreading it.

This morning we have the conclusion to the letter to the people of the church. However, we should not discount the conclusion as though it does not have anything of merit for us. We must always remember that every part of Scripture has been written

by God and is valuable to us for several things. It is our job to discover what those things are. So, let's dig into the text this morning and explore the Apostle Paul's conclusion to the Epistle to the Colossians.

*Colossians 4:7–8 (ESV)*

*7Tychicus will tell you all about my activities. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord.*

*8I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts,*

Tychicus is believed to have been a Pastor of the church in Colossae and a fellow servant with the Apostle Paul. We know from Acts 20:4 that Tychicus was from the Province of Asia. Remember that the province of Asia is not in the far east but is part of Modern Turkey. Tychicus was part of Paul's team and had been sent previously to Ephesus and now to Colossae. We do not have any letters between Paul and Tychicus, but we have to think there were many. Tychicus is believed to have been carrying the letter from Paul back to the Colossians.

You are becoming more familiar with the process of developing principles from the text, so I hope you are looking at this verse and seeing some principles here. Notice that Paul tells the people that Tychicus will tell them of Paul's activities. Think of the larger context of this chapter. Paul was sending Tychicus

back to them with information about his activities so that they could pray more specifically for him. So they could be involved on a more personal basis with Paul's ministry. Paul desired their prayer on his behalf. Not for his own comfort but so that he would be able to see people coming to know the Lord, even in prison. We should also see in verse 8 that Paul was concerned for the emotional and spiritual hearts of the people of Colossae. Paul was outward focused and not inward focused. He was concerned for the people.

*Colossians 4:9 (ESV)*

*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.*

Onesimus was a runaway slave that we are introduced to in the book of Philemon. It is believed that Paul led Onesimus to the Lord while Onesimus was on the run as a runaway slave. Onesimus was a slave to Philemon, to whom Paul wrote the letter contained in the New Testament, bearing that same name. It is believed that Philemon was a member of the church in Colossae. In Phrygia, a very large number of slaves resided, including runaway slaves. Many scholars believe that while in Phrygia Paul led Onesimus to the Lord and then sent Onesimus back to Philemon. I think that the situation with Onesimus and Philemon may have been part of the reason for Paul's previous instructions concerning slaves and masters. Early church reports

also report that Onesimus was given his freedom by Philemon and later became a leader in Ephesus and possibly other churches as well.

Paul was sending Onesimus back to Colossae with Tychicus to provide encouragement to the people of Colossae and help them with leadership in the church.

Both of these men were bringing reports about Paul's ministry activities, and I would suppose personal information about Paul himself. This was an important mission for these men as it provided encouragement to the church. It also provided information to the church so they knew how to pray and how they could be involved in the ministry of Paul. You know we do the same thing today. We get reports from our missionaries, so we know how to pray and how to support.

*Colossians 4:10–11 (ESV)*

*10Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, welcome him),*

*11and 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.*

We are introduced to some new characters in the life of Paul. Aristarchus, who was a fellow prisoner with Paul. Aristarchus was from Thessolinika and accompanied Paul on his third missionary journey. He was not with Paul when he was arrested in Jerusalem but somehow now was in the same prison, maybe even the same cell as Paul. We have no record why he was arrested, but it would be safe to assume he was arrested for preaching the gospel.

The next character we see is Mark who Paul identifies as the cousin of Barnabas. Early in Paul's ministry, he partnered with Barnabus. It was actually Barnabus that got Paul involved in the first mission trip. Barnabus brought along his young cousin Mark, also known as John Mark on their mission trip. But before long Mark abandoned them and went home. When Barnabus wanted to take him on another trip, a fight occurred between Paul and Barnabus and they separated. Two mission teams were the result. Years later Paul relied on Mark for assistance and support during his ministry. Very little is known about Barnabus after the fight with Paul. Paul commends Mark as a fellow worker as he speaks of him in the letter to Philemon.

Apparently, Paul had already spoken to the church in Colossae concerning Mark. We do not have this document or communication. We do not know the content, but the Colossians did, and Paul reminded them of that communication as Mark may be coming to them.

Even though Paul remained confined in a Roman prison Paul's associates were sent to continue the role the Apostle Paul had in the early church. Even while in prison Paul still led the congregations, particularly those in Asia Minor. Paul was always focused on serving the Lord and completing his mission, even while confined in prison.

Jesus who is called justice is another character Paul introduces us to. Jesus was a very common name in Israel at the time, so it is not unusual to see someone named Jesus. Justus appears to be a surname and not a nickname. Above this, we know nothing else about this co-worker of Paul.

Paul tells us these are the only Jews involved in the ministry with him. This Pharisee, son of a Pharisee, now was associated with a mostly gentile group of missionaries, planting mostly Gentile churches. I can only imagine that Paul had never dreamt of such a life or activity. God had dramatically transformed Paul and his life, and I believe the life of these men to be involved in such a dramatic mission. Only a sovereign God could orchestrate a Pharisee who appeared to be on the fast track to significant leadership within Judaism to be such a force for a mostly Gentile organism. This verse should reinforce within us the power of God to make us and shape us into His slaves accomplishing His will. A Sovereign God who could take a Pharisee and make a gentile church planter is the same God who created the world and provided for us a way of salvation.

*Colossians 4:12–13 (ESV)*

*12Epaphras, 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.*

*13For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis.*

Paul sends greeting from another one of their number involved in the ministry. Epaphras was a member of the church in Colossae and most likely the founder of the church and was part of Paul's ministry team. Paul says that Epaphras is a fighter who was fighting the good fight of serving God on behalf of the Colossians.

Epaphras had brought to Paul the situation in Colossae to which Paul wrote the letter to Colossians. It appears that Epaphras was not in a hurry to get back to Colossae and had not been back since he left to bring news to Paul. The reason for this may be he was spending time with Paul as the letter to the Colossians is written. Or it may be that Epaphras was spending time learning directly from Paul. I would have to think that given the chance to spend time with the Apostle Paul we all would want to spend some time learning and fellowship with him.

Paul also tells the church that Epaphras was continuing in prayer for the church. Paul wanted them to know that Epaphras was not on a junket but was busy fighting in the spiritual battle which

included in praying for the church. This reveals a level of commitment to the Lord and the church he had planted. Epaphras was working with all of his might to be the leader that God wanted him to be for the church in Colossae. From this we can see that Paul was loyal to God and the ministry. We also see that he was loyal to his team as well. I think this is one of the hallmarks of a good leader, his care, and concern for the team he leads. I believe this was something that Paul learned from Jesus after his salvation while Paul communed with Jesus in the Arabian Wilderness.

In verse 13 Paul gives us some new information concerning the ministry of Epaphras. The cities he mentions in verse 13 are cities in the Lycus valley of now modern Turkey. Laodicea and Hierapolis are larger cities in the region, and many believe that all three churches were part of the same church. Epaphras may have been the leader of all three churches. One church in three cities. Whatever the situation, Epaphras felt responsible for all three of them. Paul here bears witness to that concern and care for the people of all three churches. I understand the concern for the people of the congregation. Later in church doctrine, it became a well-established doctrine, and the author of the book of Hebrews writes:

*Hebrews 13:17 (ESV)*

*17Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will*

*have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.*

This brings some weight to the office of pastor. A weight that the Lord reminds me of frequently. I feel every failure and struggle primarily because of the example set by Epaphras and the doctrine expressed in Hebrews. I also feel a sense of pride when you all succeed in ministry. When you invite someone new, when you lead someone to Christ. When you go out of your way to care for others. When you understand a complex part of scripture. Not pride in my work but pride in being part of what God is doing here and in you. So I understand Epaphras fighting for his people.

*Colossians 4:14 (ESV)*

*14 Luke the beloved physician greets you, as does Demas.*

Paul then moves on to Dr. Luke. Dr. Luke was Paul's physician and accompanied him on several mission travels. Dr. Luke was with Paul in Rome but does not appear to be in prison himself. However, being Paul's doctor was not the primary role Luke played on the mission team. Luke was also a valuable member of the ministry team reaching out to those they confront in cities the traveled to. It may be that Dr. Luke offered clinic services and while treating people presenting the gospel to them. Much

like my friend Mike Taylor does in Haiti and Africa with Three Strands.

Demas is another fellow worker of Paul's. Paul adds nothing concerning Demas but he does speak of him also with the others in Philemon 24. Many scholars believe that Demas was one of Paul's scribes and may have been the scribe that wrote the letter to the Colossians. This might also explain why nothing is added to the mention of Demas.

*Colossians 4:15 (ESV)*

*15 Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house.*

Paul also asks the Colossians to greet the church in Laodicea. He also sends greetings to Nympha and the church in her house. This may have been the church in Heliopolis or possibly a church somewhere else. While these greetings are personal in nature, it does reflect the focus of the Apostle Paul on others and ministry. Paul recognized his position in the early church and that when he spoke people listened. He wanted to make sure that he was always focused on ministry and the hearts of the people involved in ministry and ministered to.

*Colossians 4:16 (ESV)*

*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.*

We recently have gone through the process of canonization of the books of the Bible. One of the things that led to books being added is their value to other churches. Here we see that Paul encouraged the sharing of this letter to the Laodicians and that the Colossians read the letter he sent or was sending to the Laodiceans. I do not think that Paul thought he was writing scripture at this point, but he recognized the importance of what he wrote to both churches and saw that it would be valuable for both churches to read them. We do not have the letter to the Laodicians and as a result we are confined to only reading the Colossian letter.

*Colossians 4:17 (ESV)*

*17 And say to Archippus, "See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord."*

Archippus was a member of the family of Philemon, and we see here that Paul was encouraging him to pursue ministry. It may be that Archippus was appointed to take over the church in Colossae when Epaphras left to go to Rome. In Philemon 2 Paul calls Archippus a fellow soldier. Many scholars in the writings of Paul argue that Epaphras had appointed Archippus to lead the three churches and Paul was here placing his stamp of authority on the appointment. Paul was seeking to encourage Archippus in ministry and service. He was always focused on ministry and the development of ministers.

## *Colossians 4:18 (ESV)*

*18I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand.*

*Remember my chains. Grace be with you.*

We come to final verse of the letter to the Colossians. It is widely believed that Paul had trouble with his eyes and most often used a scribe to take dictation. But it was common for Paul to write in his own hand the final greeting. Not just sign it, but write the entire greeting. I think that he is here referring to the entire conclusion from verse 7 on to verse 18. Paul wanted to reinforce to the people his care and concern for them. The effort to write these closing remarks himself reflects his thoughts of them and his care for the ministry. He loved them and was very concerned for them.

He concludes with a final prayer request that they remember his situation, chained and in prison. As we have seen Paul was more concerned about his ministry rather than himself. I do not think this request differs from that. The context would seem to indicate that he was focused on ministry and his ministry was somewhat hampered by being in chains.

## Conclusion

So what have we learned from the book of Colossians? I think we have seen that the Apostle Paul was writing to a church he did not start to deal with issues brought to his attention by Pastor Epaphras concerning false teachers. Some of the false teachers

were Judaizers, the precursor to the Gnostics who would eventually be a large compromising force against the early church. Paul addressed those issues with the churches he planted or had some authority with.

The primary issue that Paul was dealing with was the Preeminence of Jesus. He reminded the Colossians that Jesus is God and is the reason we have salvation. Jesus is the creator sustainer of the universe, but He also has a personal relationship with each of us. Colossians is a great book that reinforces the deity of Jesus and the work Jesus did in creation and salvation. Paul sets the record straight for us in how we are to live as followers of Jesus, always remembering that we are slaves of Jesus and responsible to be obedient to Him.

My prayer is that you have grown through our study of the book of Colossians. Next week, Lord Willing we will move on to the book of 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians as we continue through the Epistles of Paul.

Let's Pray!

