



Sunday, April 26, 2020

Clifford Baptist Church, Amherst, Virginia
Rev. Dr. Michael R. Fitzgerald, Senior Pastor

(Transcription from the Morning Service that was Streamed Live)

Sermon: “Marked by Faithfulness”

Scripture: Colossians 4, verses 7-9 (King James Version)

Good morning Clifford Baptist Church. It is good to have you with us in worship today. Pastor Tom, I’m getting a little spoiled being able to start preaching by quarter after eleven; don’t get use to that! In the midst of changing circumstances, some things never change. My hands are still cold with nerves today because I know we’re having a great congregation to join us. I fully realize I’m nothing more than an earthen vessel handling the beautiful and perfect Word of God. So today, we’re thankful we have this Word of God in our hands and we want it to be in our hearts and in our minds. We study it and ask God to bless us and speak to us through it.

We say welcome—to those who are visiting from Amherst or Nelson Counties, within the State of Virginia, across our United States and even in foreign countries. We’re grateful as we gather in the strong name of Jesus. I think about when Peter wrote to the church—we see his letters in the New Testament, 1st and 2nd Peter, that the church was under awful circumstances in that day. They were called the “Diaspora” because they were spread out across the world. In a certain sense, we’re the “Diaspora” right now. Our sanctuary is empty, our congregation—as far reaching as it may be—is spread out all over the place. Yet we are still the church and are still linked together by the Holy Spirit. We still have that connection that we’re brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ so as Carrie sang this morning, you are not alone! We are together in the study of the Word and together as the church. If you have a need, the church wants to stand by you. Please let us know what your need is, and we’ll respond to it as quickly as we possibly can. I realized this morning that there are so many joining us by media connection; thank you for being by your screen and being part of Clifford Church’s worship. We also know there are so many who do not have that media connection, and I want to say to those watching today to spread the word to those who cannot watch because they don’t have the connection. Yvonne Falls has been so kind and so gracious to provide a typed transcript of every one of these sermons during this time. If you know of someone who needs a full transcript of the sermon that they might read it, please let us know. They can just call the office, and we’ll mail to them. We want everyone to be part of the worship and part of the study of God. Thank you, Yvonne. Let’s spread that word to those who don’t have that media connection.

Today, we’re going to continue in the Book of Colossians. We’re approaching the end of a series of sermons of four letters of Paul. We’ve called this the “GE Power Company Study”—Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians. We’ve walked through these four books of the Bible that the missionary Paul wrote to four different churches in different geographical locations of the world. Three of these letters were written from a prison cell in Rome. Each church was

unique; each had its own particular need and its positive points and negative points. It's amazing to me how these letters, written over 2,000 years ago to address a church in an ancient day with its own needs and problems, now speak to us in this modern day. This is God's Word; it never changes, never loses its impact, and never loses its strength. Today we know this Word is going to speak to us as well. If there's one guiding truth from these ancient letters we need to hear it is this: Always stay true to the Word of God. Always stand on the foundation of God's truth because in this truth is absolute truth. In this Word of God are absolute moral standards we need to meet and live by. This is the truth of God; it never changes throughout all eternity. Jesus promises that not a "jot" or a "tittle" will pass away from this Word; it will stand forever. Human thought can never, ever take the place of the Word of God. We know human thought, in so many ways, plays in to all we think about and do in our culture, society, and world but it can never take the place of the standard of the Word of God. This Bible is the rock of truth we stand on day by day, and it shall never change. It is sufficient for yesterday, it is sufficient for today, and it will be sufficient for all our tomorrows. That is the basic truth of the Word of God we need to stand on.

In the Book of Colossians, Chapters 1 and 2, we've studied Paul emphasizing the great theological truths and doctrines of the faith. We've studied about the life of Jesus, the life of the church, and how we're to live together as the church body as the arm of Christ reaching out into the world. In Chapters 3 and 4, we studied how we put that truth to practical use—how we put the "feet" on the truth of God, how we act it out, live it out, and how we pray so we can be the church the Lord Jesus put us on this earth to be.

This morning we're arriving at the close of Paul's letter at Colosse. We'll study three simple verses: 7, 8, 9. As I began this sermon for today, I thought I'd be able to finish Colossians but quickly realized there's too much in these verses to cover in one sermon. So next Sunday will be the very last sermon in Colossians and the last one in our "GE Power Company" study. By next Sunday, there will have been nineteen sermons to get through this Book of Colossians. Would you like to guess how many sermons you've been with me through the "GE Power Company" series? Next Sunday, when completed, it will be seventy-nine sermons! That's amazing! I started the series on April 22, 2018. So we're a little over two years walking through four books of the Bible which have taught us the great truths of God.

As Paul closes this letter to the Colossians, he refers to many people who are with him in the city of Rome while he's in prison. It's typical in the way Paul closes his letters is to send greetings from those around him to those whom the letter is going. In the final verses of Colossians he mentions ten people; I thought I could cover those ten but it's not to be. So today we're going to study two people with Paul in his confinement in Rome. Because their association with him is so close, their relationship has been so long, and their life stories are so long I've chosen to cover just these two individuals today and we'll finish with the next eight next Sunday.

The first of two men we'll study today is in Colossians Chapter 4, verses 7-8: "All my state shall Tychicus declare unto you who is a beloved brother and a faithful minister and fellowservant in the Lord: Whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that he might know your estate and comfort your hearts." So one of the people with Paul in the great city

of Rome while he's in prison is a man named Tychicus. This man had a long relationship with Paul and had become a trusted friend and brother. The great old missionary had used him in many different situations. We can piece together their bond as brothers in Christ because Tychicus is mentioned five times in scripture. The first time we see his name is in Acts Chapter 20 verse 4. Paul is on his third and final missionary journey and is traveling through Asia Minor which today would be the country of Turkey. In his travels, and remember Paul is a "died in the wool" Jew, he meets this Gentile man who is probably much younger. Paul leads him to the Lord Jesus Christ as his Savior. According to Acts Chapter 20 verse 4 as Paul continues his ministry and goes on into further parts of the world, one of the men who now travels with him is this new convert to the faith—Tychicus. We also come to see this young man become very trusted in Paul's ministry; he was dispatched to be Paul's representative in different mission locations. If Paul could not go to a certain area, he would send Tychicus in his place to be the Lord's representative.

In Ephesians Chapter 6 verse 21, Paul sends Tychicus to the church at Ephesus and calls him "a beloved brother and a faithful minister." He tells the church Tychicus is "coming in my place to comfort your hearts and to let you know the Lord Jesus Christ is lifting you up and will carry you through the ministry you are having in Ephesus." In 2 Timothy 4 verse 12—Paul is writing this letter to his son in the ministry whose name is Timothy and says "I am going to send Tychicus to you, Timothy." At this point in time, Timothy is the pastor of the church in Ephesus. I believe the pastoring situation in that huge city with many attractions to the satanic world was causing him a lot of stress; I think he was suffering as a pastor there. So Paul says "I'm sending Tychicus my brother and a fellow minister to you to help you, support you, and encourage you. I'm going to dispatch him in your stressful situation so you might have a brother in the Lord Jesus Christ to stand with you and help you."

There's another letter of Paul to Titus and in Chapter 3 verse 12 he tells him as a pastor on the island of Crete I may be sending Tychicus to you that he will encourage you, support you, and help you on your mission field. Scripture says he may do that; we don't know if Tychicus actually made that trip because Paul says I might be sending him. He was willing to send him because he trusted this young Gentile convert so much. So Tychicus traveled in missions with Paul; he would send him out as a representative of the faith and love of Jesus Christ and as a representative of Paul himself throughout the Roman Empire.

Today in Colossians 4, verses 7 and 8, we see Tychicus in another place. He had gone to Ephesus, he may have gone to the island of Crete, and had been all over the Roman Empire but in this passage he's now in Rome. He's by Paul's side in a prison cell. It seems he had gone so many places to represent Jesus and Paul, his mentor, and is now off the mission field with his "father" in the faith—the one who led him to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. He's with Paul to support him in this very difficult situation. I want you to see what Paul says about him. Look at verses 7-8 again now that we have some background on Tychicus: "All my state shall Tychicus declare unto you who is a beloved brother and a faithful minister and fellowservant in the Lord: Whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that he might know your estate and comfort your hearts." Remember this is a letter to the Colossian church so Paul is already saying I'm going to send Tychicus to you in Colosse. But he's in Rome by Paul's side, and as Paul thinks about him as a fellow

minister, notice what he says about this young Gentile man. He was faithful to the old Jewish missionary Paul who had traveled for Jesus Christ. They were of different nations, backgrounds, and skin color but Paul says this Tychicus is “my beloved brother. He is my faithful minister; he is my fellowservant.” Paul stresses how close the two of them are as brothers in the Lord Jesus Christ, despite their vast differences, and he’s with him in the faith. We share the Savior; the Holy Spirit of God lives in our hearts and joins us together as brothers in Christ. They were different in their past but Jesus had brought them together in Christ.

Let me ask you: What precious thing did Paul entrust to Tychicus in this visit? He seals this great letter to the church at Colosse and puts it in the capable hands of Tychicus and tells him to hand deliver it to the congregation in the city of Colosse. Obviously, Tychicus did just that. He transported this letter we’re reading today some one thousand miles from Rome eastward to Colosse. It was a hard trip; he had to get out of Rome and then cross the Adriatic Sea. He then crosses the continent of Europe, across the Mediterranean Sea, and comes to Asia Minor and travels east until he gets to the church at Colosse—a thousand mile total trip. In this letter Paul writes when my friend Tychicus delivers this letter to you, church at Colosse, he’ll tell you all about me. He’ll catch you up on all I’ve been going through and he’s going to comfort your hearts in your church through the Lord Jesus Christ working through him as a minister. Paul loved and trusted this young Gentile man, so different from him—but bound together in the faith of the living Lord Jesus Christ.

As we get to verse 9, standing alongside Tychicus is another brother of Paul. He’s one of the key people in Paul’s shortest letter in the New Testament—Philemon. Look at Colossians Chapter 4, verse 9: “With Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They shall make known unto you all things which are done here.” It’s obvious when Paul says “they”—Tychicus and Onesimus are going to make known everything that’s done here in Rome. When Tychicus takes this letter to Colosse, he’s going to have a partner with him. Onesimus is going to travel with him because Paul is assuming here they’re going to arrive together.

Onesimus—a young man; I hope he rings a bell for you. He’s an interesting person and is the key person in a letter Paul addresses to a man named Philemon. Onesimus was a slave in the household of Philemon. Philemon was a Christian brother and believer and member of the church in Colosse. Onesimus was a run-away slave which carries the death penalty. When that slave is found, he could easily die because he departed his master’s service. He ran away from the one who owned him so it was punishable by death when the slave was found. Somehow since Onesimus had run away from Philemon, he ran into Paul. Paul led this run-away slave to the Lord Jesus Christ as his Savior. Not only did Paul write a letter to the Colossian church, he also writes a letter to one member of that church—Philemon. He writes to say I’m sending Onesimus back to you, and I want you to forgive him. I want you to have him home and throw out the punishment that may have crossed your mind. Basically, Paul is saying to Philemon I’m sending back a very, very different man. Certainly he ran away from you and had no faithfulness in you but he was unsaved. He was unreliable and did not have Christ in his heart when he left. But now since he has met me and I have led him to Jesus as his Savior, Christ lives in his heart and his life has made a 180 degree change. Now he will be a faithful servant. As he comes back

to you with Christ in him, he's a different man. He has a different reason for living; his purpose is different. He is faithful to the Lord and because he's faithful to the Lord he will be faithful to you as well. He's become my brother in the Lord Jesus Christ here in Rome. Philemon, he's coming back to you—not so much as your slave but as your brother. You are to take him back because you can trust him now.

I believe Paul put that little letter addressed to Philemon, also in the care of Tychicus. When he gave him that letter to transport a thousand miles to the church at Colosse, he also gave him one letter to give to a church member, Philemon. In the presence of Onesimus you give Philemon this letter to speak for me. I believe Tychicus carried both letters and Paul says “Tychicus, if you fail to deliver this letter of Christian reference for Onesimus into the hands of Philemon it is highly likely this young man will die because he's a run-away slave and there's no way to tell Philemon he's faithful now. He may face the death penalty if you lose this letter so be faithful and deliver it to the Colossian church together.”

As I think about these two men, Tychicus and Onesimus, there's one word common to both that Paul uses in his letter. Again, look at Colossians 4, verse 7: “All my state shall Tychicus declare unto you who is a beloved brother and a faithful minister...” Now go to verse 9: “With Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother...” The word I want you to focus on with me today is **faithful**. These two men were faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ because the Holy Spirit of God lived in them. They could also be trusted with faithfulness in the jobs they had—the faithfulness of Tychicus to get those letters to their destination; the faithfulness of Onesimus to be faithful to his master when he returned.

This word Paul uses is one we need to hear. First and foremost, Tychicus and Onesimus had professed faith in Jesus as their Lord and Savior. This is the centerpiece of the sermon—don't miss it! Faith in Jesus Christ always translates to faithfulness in our earthly commitments. If you profess faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, you will be faithful to the people and to the commitments in your life because Jesus lives in your hearts. Don't miss this very important point—faith translates to faithfulness. It's exactly what carries this Scripture today—that Tychicus and Onesimus were men of faith and were portrayed as men of faithfulness to their earthly task. Tychicus was faithful to Paul as a brother; he was faithful as he traveled wherever Paul sent him; he was faithful to deliver these letters to the church at Colosse and the slave owner, Philemon. Think about it—if Tychicus had lost these letters during that long journey, perhaps in the water off a ship, they would not have arrived in our Bible. If he had lost these letters, they wouldn't have touched the millions of people who have come to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior by reading them. Tychicus had an amazing job of faithfulness to deliver these letters inspired by the very God of the universe as Paul wrote down the word of God. Tychicus had to be faithful as “God's mail man!” It's amazing when you think how important this one man was faithful in his task to deliver these two letters which are now in our New Testament. Onesimus speaks to me. Paul told Philemon to receive back his run-away slave and forgive him because he's a different man. Jesus lives in his heart by faith and because of that, I'm sending you back a changed man because he's a man of faith and now comes back with faithfulness to his God.

Ladies and gentlemen, here's the crux of the sermon: If you and I know Jesus in faith, we also need to be known by being people of faithfulness. We will be faithful to our spouse, faithful to our family, faithful to raise our children in

Jesus Christ. We will be faithful to our earthly responsibilities and commitments, faithful to our church and our Lord in the ways He calls us to service in Him. Every single one of us as a believer has at least one talent the Lord wants to empower and enact and that is to take the gospel out of the sanctuary into the world. Every one of us as a man or woman of faith needs to be **faithful** with our talents—whatever they are and that we give them back to Him so that others might come to know the gospel of the living Lord. The truest outward sign of faith in Jesus Christ is a life lived in faithfulness to Him. That's our charge—that should be our character; our trademark as a man or woman of God, to be faithful to all our commitments in life. It's the primary mark of our walk in the Lord Jesus Christ. It's to be our walk and earthly commitment as we live in faithfulness to Him.

My prayer today, my brothers and sisters in Christ wherever you are, and for myself is that we will recommit our faith to the Lord Jesus Christ and recommit to Him our faithfulness to be our walk, our trademark, our character as we live out our faith that we will live in faithfulness to all our earthly commitments. I pray you'll rededicate your life with me to not only be a man or woman of faith but to be one who lives out that faith in faithfulness.

Today if you're listening and have never come to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, He wants to have that same relationship of faith with you. He went to a cross and shed His blood; He laid down His life so you could be forgiven, so I could be forgiven, so the few of us in this sanctuary today could be forgiven, so that all of you listening today could be forgiven of your sin. We all sin and fall short of the glory of God. If you've never come to Him, He went to the cross to take your punishment for your sin and my sin. When He died, He assumed all the punishment upon Himself so you and I could be forgiven. On the third day when He rose from the grave, He rose to promise us that we'll have eternal life with Him. We need to say yes to Him, to say Lord I believe that in faith and trust that yes, Lord, You gave Your life as the resurrected Lord that I might have forgiveness and life everlasting. I trust that, I believe that, I have faith in that. Yes, Father, I place my faith in You this day.

I'm not asking if you go to church, I'm not asking if you're a Biblical scholar, I'm not asking how moral you are right now, I'm not asking how good a person you are right now. I'm asking do you know Jesus in faith? If you truly say I don't know Him, this moment your eternity, your life, your purpose will change when you say Yes to Him. When you put your faith in Him, He will immediately say "You be faithful to Me, you live for Me, you walk the walk that I set for you and you will come to know My word and you will live a life of commitment to your family, spouse, work place. In all your earthly commitments, you will live in faithfulness to Me. I'm going to change your life and it will always be for the better." I heard a pastor say one time, and I can't disagree—"I never met anyone who put their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and say I regret I did that." Never have I heard that. Today if you put your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ you will never regret that decision; you'll be grateful you did. I call you to the altar today to give your heart, your life, your future to Him and say Lord I believe. I trust You and have faith in You and want to live in faithfulness to You from this moment forward. Give your heart to Him.

As we gather together, you can't literally come to the altar but I'm asking you to go to the altar of your heart and say Lord I renew my commitment in faith to You and renew my commitment of faithfulness to You. I will live for You, represent You, witness for You, in all of my earthly commitments. I want to be a man or woman of great faithfulness to You because of the faith I have in You. Today if you've never come to Him, He's waiting. He's faithful to receive you as a son or daughter; He will never turn you away.

Let's pray together: Our Father and God as we come before You today, we thank You for these two men of the Bible—Tychicus and Onesimus. We thank You for the word Paul uses that stands out in these three verses we studied—faithful. Lord, you transform our lives in faith. We're not the same person when we come to the Lord Jesus in faith. Father, we don't just turn over a new leaf but the Bible teaches us that we become a whole new creation! We're a creation of faith that wants to follow you in faithfulness in all our commitments. So for my brothers and sisters today, including me, I renew my bond of faith in You. I believe You, I trust You, and I thank You for eternal life. I thank You for your forgiveness and believe with all my heart I'm forgiven for all eternity. Lord, because I know of that faith in Christ, I know You want me to follow You in faithfulness in all my earthly commitments. I recommit my life to follow You in faithfulness. I pray that for all my brothers and sisters as we join together in worship today. Father, if there's one person and I believe there's more than one, who needs Jesus as Lord and Savior I pray they will bow at the altar of their heart and say "Lord, I'm a sinner and I need You as my Savior. I have faith and trust and I believe that Jesus died on the cross and rose from the grave that I might be forgiven and have eternal life. Lord today I put my faith, my trust, and my life in Your hands. I promise I will follow You in faithfulness day by day. I want to walk the walk of Jesus in this world." Bless that one Lord today who said Yes to Jesus in faith and has made a commitment to walk with You in faithfulness. Bless us we pray. Thank you for the gathering church as we worship You. In the precious name of Jesus, Amen.

