



Sunday, May 3, 2020

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

(Transcription from the Morning Service that was Streamed Live)

Sermon: “Closing Words of Colossians” Scripture: Colossians 4, verses 10-18 (King James Version)

Today, we’re going to finish a series of sermons—a continuum of the last two years. I’ve been preaching a series called the “G E Power Company Study”—Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians. Today is the last sermon on Colossians; it’s amazing we’ve gotten to this point after two years—79 sermons! This is sermon 19 of the Colossians walk. I’m so thankful you’ve joined me and shared as we studied four great letters from the missionary Paul.

As I said early on in this study, Paul is absolutely an amazing man. I believe he is one of the most intelligent people who ever walked the face of the earth. He grew up a Jew; he was committed to God and to godly things. But when Jesus Christ came into the world, Paul as a Jew (Saul at that point), hated the ministry of Jesus. In my mind, it’s highly likely Saul saw Jesus die on the cross and in a way in his heart celebrated His death because he wanted Jesus out of the scene. He did not like or appreciate the ministry of Jesus. When the church was founded, the ministry arm of Jesus, Paul hated the church so much he strove to kill it and to persecute Christians who were following the way of Jesus Christ. But then Jesus met Paul (Saul) on the way to Damascus. In the coming days that man who was committed to destroying the church was saved and became a child of God. He surrendered his life to Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior, and his life turned a hundred and eighty degrees. He completely changed directions—when he once hated the Savior and His church, he now loved the Lord Jesus Christ as his Savior. At that moment and change in salvation, his life changed into supporting the church, founding the church, loving the church, and preaching the love of Jesus Christ across the Roman Empire. It’s amazing when Jesus moved into Paul’s heart he became a completely different individual. He actually fulfilled some of the words he wrote in 2 Corinthians, Chapter 5, verse 17. He became a new man, a new creation in Jesus Christ. Everything in his past was completely gone and forgiven, so he was established in the love of Christ and established to be a son of God in the ministry of Christ. He didn’t just turn over a new leaf, he became a new man. Instead of destroying the church, his life was now dedicated to building the church and establishing congregations; traveling all over the Roman Empire and preaching the love of Christ; seeing people saved; taking those pockets of Christians in new areas where perhaps the name of Jesus had never been heard. He took those brand new Christians and established churches all over Rome as he traveled. He became the world’s greatest missionary. There was no land too far he wouldn’t go to; there was no man so lost he wouldn’t witness to. He believed the love of Christ was for every single person. We believe that truth as well—there’s no person in this world who is below or too sinful for the salvation of Jesus the Christ. We need to preach that, teach that, live that, and witness that. We are responsible, as the children of God, as we walk out in the world to carry that good news.

Paul's zeal for Christ led him to be a preacher all over the Roman Empire but it did not necessarily mean he was a popular person. In fact as a preacher, he was arrested, beaten almost to the edge of his life, and was imprisoned. As we see this letter to the church at Colosse, Paul is nearing the end of his life. He is sitting in confinement in a prison cell in Rome. The reason he's in confinement was because he was arrested as a preacher of the gospel. The leadership and government of the Roman Empire believed they could pull Paul off the streets and could silence the gospel. But they did anything but silence the gospel! From that prison cell, Paul wrote words of encouragement to churches and individuals. Those letters have come across the ages by God's blessing and God's grace. These are God's inspired words through Paul and have led millions to Christ and have led the church in so many ways to serve and to love the Savior year after year. But in prison Paul wrote these letters, and God has spoken to millions of people through them.

Today as we study Colossians Chapter 4, we're reading verses 10-18. Paul is sending greetings from men who are with him to the church at Colosse. That's typical of Paul to send greetings to the people around him to the destination where the letter is going to go. If you remember, Colosse is about a thousand miles from Rome. A man named Tychicus was going to carry that letter from the prison cell to the church at Colosse. Paul is surrounded by some supporters and sends Colossians greetings from those around him in this prison cell.

Last week we studied two of those ten people around Paul—Tychicus and Onesimus. Today, we'll look at the next eight of those men with him in confinement. Let's start now with verse 10: "Aristarchus my fellow prisoner saluteth you and Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas (touching whom ye received commandments: if he come unto you, receive him;) and Jesus, which is called Justus, who are of the circumcision. These only are my fellow workers unto the kingdom of God which have been a comfort unto me. Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you and them that are in Laodicea and them in Hierapolis. Luke the beloved physician, and Demas, greet you. Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea and Nymphas, and the church which is in his house. And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans: and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea. And say to Archippus, take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord that thou fulfil it. The salutation by the hand of me Paul. Remember my bonds. Grace be with you. Amen." As we see by the close of this letter, Paul sent greetings from these ten men over to Colossian Christians over a thousand miles away. These men with Paul supported and encouraged him while in prison; that's one of the great points of his imprisonment that though he was held captive in the City of Rome, he was allowed to have visitors—one of the graces of God in his life.

We're going to get a "thumbnail sketch" of these eight individuals who came to Paul and visit with him in this Roman jail. Colossians 4:10 mentions Aristarchus; he was a great believer and constant traveling companion with Paul. Aristarchus is also mentioned in Acts 19:29 as being with Paul in Ephesus; Paul was not in a great situation there. In that particular visit in that Ephesian city, Paul was preaching and a riot arose and he almost lost his life. They had to clear out of that territory; Aristarchus was with him during that riot. In Acts 27 scripture says Aristarchus sailed with Paul to Rome—this is the time when Paul's ship wrecked and almost sunk. In fact, the ship did sink but there was no loss of

life. Aristarchus was with Paul during some hard times such as this and stuck with him. Then here in Colossians Paul calls him a fellow prisoner. Perhaps Aristarchus was arrested because he was preaching the gospel or perhaps he came and volunteered to be a prisoner so he could be with Paul and bring him encouragement and support. Aristarchus is a name we don't think of very often; it may be a brand new name for you. Yet, his name is sprinkled throughout the Bible as a great man of God and a great supporter of Paul. He stayed with him when the going got the roughest, and he never retreated—he was always by Paul's side as a true brother and friend.

The next man we meet is Marcus—John Mark—a very important personality in the Bible who ultimately wrote the gospel of Mark. He is a Jewish believer and lived in Jerusalem. Acts 12:12 tells us his mother had an open house for believers. So people of Jesus Christ came to John Mark's mother's home and worshipped Jesus. It's interesting because churches weren't built until the third century, so home is where all worship took place just as it is today. John Mark has an interesting history with Paul. When Paul and Barnabas embarked on their first missionary journey (read Acts 13), Marcus is with them. It's debatable that he's either a nephew or cousin to Barnabas. Somewhere around Pamphylia, the going gets difficult for the mission team. Not much is happening and people aren't being saved. According to Scripture John Mark retreats from the group and goes back home to Mama in Jerusalem. He goes AWOL from the mission team working through that first missionary journey. Sometime later, Paul and Barnabas completed their first missionary journey and the second one now stands before them. Good old Barnabas the supporter, encourager, and man of God says let's take John Mark with us; let's give him another chance. In Acts 15:38 Paul says ain't no way I'm taking that quitter with us on any more mission trips! (This isn't a translation you'll find in your Bible; that is central Virginia translation by Mike Fitzgerald!) The contingent was so sharp between Paul and Barnabas that they divided ways. Barnabas insisted taking John Mark with him, and Paul said I'm not going with you so they went separately. The good news is the gospel also traveled in two separate ways—twice as much got done that came from a contention over this young man, Marcus. Evidently on that trip with Barnabas, John Mark did extremely well—he finished the trip and Paul forgave him. Paul began to commend him as a minister, brother, and servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. John Mark is a good witness to each of us. Our God is the God of second chances; He's the God of forgiveness. When we fail, our God wants to pick us up, dust us off, give us strength, and reset us on the course and say go forward. One failure does not make us quit, but rather, praise God He is the God of second, third, and fourth chances as He forgives us and allows us to go forth in ministry. Some time or other, all of us will need a second chance. So John Mark speaks to me because God has given me more than one second chance in ministry over the years, and I'm thankful for this witness of the Bible.

In Colossians 4:11, Paul mentions greetings from Jesus Justus who is a Jewish believer; this is not a reference to Jesus the Christ. Jesus is a very common Jewish name; its Hebrew counterpart name is Joshua but Justus is connected with Jesus Justus. Justus is a Roman or Gentile name; we don't know anything about Jesus Justus other than his name appears here as a supporter of Saint Paul. He's faithful in serving God by being faithful in serving Paul. I would think if we lived in the days of two thousand years ago when the word was being written wouldn't it be an honor to serve well and have your name arrive in Scripture. Though we know nothing about Jesus Justus right now, we will meet him one day. He's a great servant of God as he's listed here in this passage.

Moving on to verses 12-13, we see the name Epaphras. “Epaphras, who is one of you (so he’s writing to the church at Colosse and tells them here’s Epaphras with me), a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you and them that are in Laodicea and them in Hierapolis.” This is an interesting point of Scripture; Epaphras was a member of the church at Colosse. It’s highly likely that not only was he a member, he was the pastor and perhaps the founder of the church. Remember Paul had never traveled there. Someone had to found the church and it’s very likely it was Epaphras who was saved by Paul’s ministry, traveled there, and established the Colosse church. He’s with Paul in prison as we meet him. Paul had led him to the Lord and he’s gone back to his home area in Colosse, Laodicea, and Hierapolis. Those are three cities in a triad—twenty miles apart from each other. So Epaphras goes back to this triad. Paul is known as a foreign missionary traveling all over the Roman Empire; there’s nowhere he wouldn’t go and be as a pioneer in various territories with various people. On the other hand, Epaphras was a home missionary. He was saved by the grace of God through the ministry of Paul, but he went home. He founded the Colosse church and had some connection in Laodicea and Hierapolis. So where Paul took the ministry all over the Empire, Epaphras took ministry to his home people, his family, and the circle of people he knew over the years. Epaphras loved the church and Paul says here he has a great passion and zeal for the ministry of the church. It was Epaphras’ heart to take the ministry to his home and his people; that led his life. He and Paul were a little bit different in that Paul was called to the world and Epaphras was called to his home. They were brothers in service with separate callings on their lives. Paul recognized that and believed that about his brother Epaphras.

In Colossians 4:14 Paul sends greetings from “Luke, the beloved physician. We’ve come to love this man—Luke was very respected in his profession. I want you to take note of this: The name Luke stands alone in the list of all the authors of the sixty-six books of the Bible. Why is that? Because Luke, writing the gospel of Luke and the history of the church in the Book of Acts in the New Testament, is the only Gentile writer within the entire scope of the Bible. All the other writers are of Jewish heritage. Luke alone was the one Gentile who had a contribution to the very word of God. I think this is significant, and we need to remember it. Luke remained with Paul to the very end of Paul’s life. Again, a fact that is very significant—2 Timothy is the last letter we have written by Paul in our New Testament. In verse 11, Paul says “Only Luke is with me.” So before he dies as a martyr of the faith, Paul says only Luke has remained here with me. Luke, the beloved physician, is also a beloved brother of Paul—the last one to be with him at the end of his life.

Notice this: another interesting character in the Bible in verse 14—Paul simply says Demas greets you. Demas is the one sad story in this line of men with Paul in this Roman prison. He’s mentioned here as simply giving a greeting; nothing more is mentioned about his life. But—he’s mentioned two other times in Scripture. The second is in Philemon, verse 24, where Paul calls him by the positive name of “fellow laborer.” So Demas has a good name with Paul in this particular phase of life; Colossians and Philemon are written about the same time. Tychicus carries both of those letters over to Colosse where Philemon is a member. In these two instances, Paul says Demas sends greetings and is a fellow laborer. But remember at the very end of Paul’s career, the last letter he writes is 2 Timothy. In Chapter 4 verse 10 Paul

says “Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world...” Isn’t that a sad end to a ministry? At first, he’s with Paul in prison and later on Paul says he’s forsaken me. This is right at the end of Paul’s life. It is highly likely Demas never came back. He left him, and it broke Paul’s heart. He was very hurt about this broken relationship with this brother because he left him in order to go back to the comfort of the world. This speaks to you and me. Sometimes our faith brings us in hardship—this pandemic is just a minor hardship. It displaces our lives and makes us do things in a different way but it’s not a great persecution. In no sense of the word are we to depart the faith just because we’re going through a little hardship. That’s what Demas did—it breaks God’s heart when we depart from our faith and go back to the world in some way that we’re to do ministry there. We need to be falling before the Lord this day and say how can You continue to use me. I don’t want to leave the faith; I don’t want to go back to the comfort of the world. I want to be strong and true and move forward in how You want to carry me as a man or woman taking the gospel of Jesus Christ in the world. That’s part of our rededication today—no matter what insecurity or inconvenience may come—we’ll be faithful to carry the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Moving on in verse 15 Paul sends his greetings to the church at Laodicea, a sister city to the church at Colosse. In the King James Version, he greets a man whose name is Nymphas who led a church in his house. Remember again, home is where the churches met because church buildings had not yet been constructed. In the King James and New King James Versions, it’s the masculine name Nymphas. In other translations such as the Revised Standard, New International, Holman Christian Standard, and American Christian Standard the name is “Nympha” which is a feminine name and the church gathers in her home. Depending on the translation and the translator, it’s either a man or woman. Does it matter? Not really. Because all of us are called to be ministers of the gospel—male and female alike are called to the service of the risen Lord. Praise God for those who facilitate worship. Maybe you have a group meeting in your home, teaching a group in a Sunday School class, or leading a mission endeavor of the church—in some way you’re leading the people of God. Praise God for those of you, men and women, who open your home to the gospel, who teach and lead, who give your life to the service of Jesus Christ and invest all your talents, time, and financial giving so the gospel will continue to go forward. Men and women alike are needed in the Kingdom of God in His work. Do that part in the ministry, whoever you are and however God gives you talent.

Look at the end of this letter, Chapter 4 verse 16, Paul says read this letter aloud at the church in Colosse and send it to your neighboring church at Laodicea and read it there. Then he makes another comment at the end of verse 16 “read the epistle from Laodicea.” He’s referring to a letter we do not have. For whatever reason, God did not see fit to put it in His Holy Word.

Look at verse 17; this is an interesting verse in itself. “And say to Archippus, take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord that thou fulfil it.” Paul is sending direction to Archippus that you have talent in the way you serve the Lord. I’m sending you word that you’re to fulfill that ministry—you’re to use the talent God has given you. Don’t let it sit idle; don’t push it on the side burner. Right now, pull that talent up, pull that ministry up and you be active in

what God wants you to do. Fulfill the ministry God has given to you. We need to continue to encourage that kind of word in the people of God. Every one of us as a believer and child of God has a call to some sort of ministry. Your call is different than my call; all of us have different blends of talent. But every one of us is constructed by God; we're hard-wired by Him when we know Jesus as our Lord and Savior to be his minister.

My word to you today is the same word Paul sent to Archippus—whatever your ministry is, you are called, commissioned, and directed to fulfill your calling. Whatever God calls you to do make it an active fulfillment—don't push it to the side, don't say it will wait until later. Do it today! Begin today! Rededicate your life fulfilling the ministry that Jesus Christ has hard-wired you to do. That's true for me as well, as He has recalled me to that.

Look at verse 18, the last verse of the day and the last verse of this letter. "The salutation by the hand of me Paul. Remember my bonds. Grace be with you. Amen." It was very customary for Paul to dictate his letter to a secretary, and the secretary would write it down. The fancy word for secretary of that day was "emanuensis." Paul dictates that letter to the secretary; then he takes the pen in his hand to authenticate it and prove the last sentence is actually coming from him. That's his trademark to prove the letter is real and to say remember me—remember me in your prayers. Here's one of the greatest Christians who ever lived, one of the most independent, strong willed and strong minded men asking his brothers and sisters to remember him in prayer. Remember me for strength, remember me that God will keep me strong and continue in the task however long He gives me. Paul's days are drawing down; he knows that—he's going to die as a martyr there in Rome. But he asks the church to pray for him, that the Lord will continue to use him, that they remember him in his bondage. He says God's grace be with you—brothers and sisters together—that God will continue to bless you and guide you.

At the end of this letter, I believe it's a testimony to the lesser-known people of the Bible. These ten names—names we don't come across every day and hardly ever think about like Aristarchus and Archippus. Though they're not major players in the Bible or "stars" in Scripture, their ministry was vitally important. Paul lets the church know that they're so vital to his ministry and brothers and sisters in Christ are needed in the church and in the gospel to the world of Jesus Christ. The world needs the "big names"—the Pauls, Peters, Moses, Davids, Martin Luthers, the Billy Grahams. Those names stand out as huge ministries. Friends, the Lord's work needs you and me; it cannot reside only in the stars and the large names but rather every one of us is so important to the work of God. Whether you consider your contributions to the faith large or small, no matter what you feel about your ministry, or how insignificant you might think you are, believe me you're not insignificant in the gospel of Jesus Christ. However God calls you to take that ministry to the world, He wants you to be effective in that. There's no insignificance in the eyes of God. Every act is important, every gift of a cup of cold water, every outreach, every telephone call—whatever it is, is so important to His ministry. I want you to remember one day by the Bible's word—this is not from me or something I imagined—one day every one of us is going to look our Savior in the face. Every one of us is going to have a personal moment of reckoning with Him. I believe the moment we meet Him as a believer in the Lord Jesus, the moment we meet Him as His son or daughter, He's going to remind us of our ministry. I believe He's going to remind us of some of the most insignificant things we ever

did that made a difference in someone's life—perhaps those things we don't even remember: a smile we gave someone which communicated the love of Jesus Christ which led them to a deeper walk with Him. Something as insignificant as that will be remembered by the Savior because He used you, He used me to make a mark on someone's life. As you recall, He remembered a widow who was faithful with two pennies at the temple. She never knew He saw her; she never knew on this earth that Jesus called attention to His disciples to watch her—she's going to be faithful with two pennies.

In the same way, you and I might do things every day that we think nobody's ever going to notice or see this. Oh yes, indeed!—Jesus will see and remember. I believe one day Jesus will recount even the most insignificant thing we did to lead someone to His love. He will remember your smallest act of kindness, your smallest act of love, your smallest step in sharing the gospel with someone else. Believer, no matter who you are or you feel your life is big or insignificant in this world, you're important to Jesus. You're important to the ministry of the church, important in leading a lost world to the Savior. Don't allow your ministry to lie idle. Don't push it to the side or on a back burner; fulfill your ministry now because every one of us is so important to the ministry of Christ in the world. Be faithful, believer.

I pray today you and I will rededicate our lives that we will be who God wants us to be. Years ago there was a man in this church, Haywood Wheeler. When I asked him what I needed to change to be pastor here, he said you just be who you are. That's exactly what I want to say to you—as a believer in the Lord Jesus, you be who you are. Use the talents He's given you and you lead the world to Jesus with me. Let's walk out together in rededication that we're going to do our ministry in a way that honor and pleases the Savior.

Today if you've never come to Jesus as your Lord and Savior will you say “Lord Jesus, I am a sinner, I believe You died on the cross for me and rose from the grave for me. I want to ask You to be my Lord and my Savior.” It's an act He'll never forget; a commitment He'll never forget. This moment you become His son or daughter wherever you are. Most times, I'll invite to come down the aisles and meet us at the altar. I can't do that today but I can say meet Jesus at the altar of your heart. If you give your life to Him, He'll give eternal life to you. He'll do the exact same thing for you as He did for me so many years ago when I gave my heart to Him. God bless you and God bless us as we worship together and give Him our lives.

Let Us Pray: Our Father, our God, thank you for these moments we come before You thinking about some of the lesser-known people of the Bible and yet whose ministry was so vitally important. Bless us today as we surrender to You our ministries, our lives, our church and no matter what the day might bring in the middle of a pandemic that we'll still be a church. Help us to serve You, and bless that one who needs Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior as he or she simply says “Yes” to the Lord today. Thank you that you meet us just as we are and where we are. In Jesus' name, Amen.