

Colossians - Encourage Your Hearts

by Mariano Di Gangi

The sermon explores the themes of personal news, greetings, and ministry in Colossians 4, emphasizing the importance of relationships and the power of God's grace.

Duration: 28:49

Scripture: Acts 12:25, Acts 13:13, Acts 13:48-49, Acts 15:37-39, Romans 16:1-16, Romans 16:21-23, Colossians 4:16

Topics: "Encouragement"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on the seemingly anticlimactic conclusion of the letters to the Romans and Colossians, which consist of a long list of names. He acknowledges that it may appear trivial compared to the profound truths discussed earlier in the letters. However, he suggests that when we consider the context and background of these individuals, the significance of their inclusion becomes clearer. Specifically, he focuses on the story of John Mark, a young man who initially joined Paul and Barnabas on a missionary journey but eventually faced challenges and disappointments. The speaker highlights the importance of understanding the struggles and growth of individuals like John Mark in the broader narrative of the Gospel.

Transcript

It's probably apocryphal, but the story goes that a literary critic was once handed a copy of the Greater Toronto Telephone Book. And after going through it, he said, there isn't much of a plot to this book, but what a tremendous cast of characters. That's the feeling that some people get when they read the conclusion to Romans 16 or Colossians 4. A whole string of names.

Isn't this passage of scripture anticlimactic? After all that the Apostle has been telling us in the first three chapters, lifting us to a tremendous level, dealing with great doctrines of the faith, isn't it a letdown to have a listing of names almost at random, without any set pattern, with no plot? He's been writing to us about redemption from the power of darkness into the kingdom of God. He's been telling us that Christ is the one who's to have preeminence, the Christ of creation, the Christ of redemption, the Christ who is the Christ of the resurrection, the Christ who is the head of the church. He's been speaking about reconciliation between a holy God and sinful men through the blood of Christ's cross.

He's been telling us that the Christian life requires a high standard of morality and maturity. He's been reminding us of what we ought to be like if we are really numbered among God's elect. He's been speaking about interpersonal relationships in the family.

He's been reminding Christians of their duty to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world and to pray for the missionaries of the gospel. And now we come to this rather anticlimactic reeling off of names. Doesn't it sound trivial after the tremendous truths that have been the heart and soul of this short letter? I don't think so.

And I trust that the reason for my saying that will become clear to you as we make our way through these names and these seemingly random and trivial comments of the apostle. The first thing that we should notice here is that Paul deals with personal news. He is sending Tychicus and Onesimus to the Colossian Christians so that they may be brought up to date on what has been happening to Paul in a Roman prison far away.

Now who were these men anyway? Tychicus is described as a dear brother, and that would be sufficient to take the rest of the sermon if one wanted to do that. A dear brother. Not a mere functionary in an organization, but a brother in the Christian family, adopted by the grace of God, reborn by the Holy Spirit, subject to the discipline of the same Father, sharing together in one heavenly inheritance, incorruptible and undefiled.

Tychicus, our beloved brother. God forbid that we should ever forget that a congregation, even though it has officers and boards and committees and transacts business, is meant to be a family of brothers and sisters. Tychicus, our brother and faithful minister.

He is a minister who is faithful. He is dependable. He has taken his vows of ordination and he has been true to them, not treacherous.

God grant that that might be the case with everyone who has ever been ordained to the ministry of the Word and sacraments. A dear brother, a faithful minister, a servant in the Lord. He was a man who realizes that once he becomes a Christian, he renounces all rights to himself and he becomes a servant under the mastery and the majesty of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Tychicus is part of a network, a network through which news travels from one Christian community to another. He is the one who's going to bring the Colossian letter to that group of Christians in the Lycus River Valley of Asia Minor. And he's going to tell them what has been happening to Paul in his imprisonment, that because of his imprisonment, the gospel has not been stalled, but the gospel is making steady gains and that the troops that are assigned to be the guards for the apostle have heard the message and that many of them have accepted it.

So that now in Caesar's household, you have saints. And Paul says, I want you to hear that from Tychicus with your own ears and from his own lips, so that you might not be depressed or discouraged about me in a dungeon, but might realize that these things have fallen out for the progress of the gospel. And your own hearts will be encouraged by this good news.

Another news bearer to go along with Tychicus is Onesimus. And what a dramatic story there lies behind that simple reference. You see, Onesimus had been a slave.

He got sick and tired of being a slave and decided that he would make off with some of his master's goods. And so he became a fugitive as well as a thief. And he went and sought to lose himself amidst the masses of the imperial capital at Rome.

He was a needle in a haystack, but the mighty magnet of the gospel drew him out. And Onesimus, who tried to lose himself in Rome, was found by the seeking love of Jesus Christ through the witness of the apostle Paul. And now this thief wants to set things straight with his master.

And this runaway wants to return and enter into a new relationship with Philemon, because now he too belongs to the family. He too is a Christian and must no longer be regarded as a menial servant, but as a dear brother in Christ. Personal news brought by Tychicus and Onesimus to bring the Colossians up to date on what was happening to Paul hundreds of miles away in his imprisonment.

Personal news. The next section here tells us about fraternal greetings, verses 10 through 15. And here you have a whole string of names, some of which are entirely new to us.

Take, for example, Aristarchus. He came from the Macedonian seaport city of Thessalonica. He was one of those who experienced pressure and persecution for having become a Christian.

He took his place alongside of the apostle Paul when in the idolatrous city where cult and occult were common in the city of Ephesus, a riot broke out and almost lynched the servants of the Lord Jesus. Aristarchus was involved in that riot as a victim. He also followed Paul to Rome and shared in his imprisonment for the sake of the gospel.

There's a sense in which you might say that both Paul and Aristarchus were prisoners of Caesar. But you've got to look beyond that, and you've got to recognize that these men were really free because they were captives to Jesus Christ. Real freedom doesn't consist in kicking over the traces.

That's a prescription for chaos and anarchy. Real freedom comes when we are captive to Jesus Christ and surrender everything we've got to him. It wasn't the power structure of his day that sat in judgment upon him that was free.

It was Martin Luther who was truly liberated when he said that his conscience was captive to the word of God. Blessed the captivity of those who are bound by the word of the Lord and are subject to him alone. Aristarchus was one of these.

And he sends greetings. John Mark is another of these, and he sends greetings. And what a story there is behind that one.

If we put the data of scripture together, the puzzle begins to fit and we see the pattern. John Mark was a very young man, came from a rather wealthy home, was pampered and tied to his mother's apron strings. And yet one day the call of the mission field came home to him and he decided that he would go with his cousin Barnabas and with Uncle Paul.

And so he goes on this missionary journey and his enthusiasm will carry him only thus far. And then he begins to discover that the way of the missionary, like that of the transgressor, is hard, but for altogether different reasons. Then he began to realize that he was exposed to the fury of idolatrous mobs.

Then he saw that he had to get along on a sanctified shoestring to make ends meet. Then he saw that people were not that responsive to the gospel and he was thoroughly disappointed. And then he saw that his relative Barnabas was beginning to play second fiddle and top billing was going to the Apostle Paul.

And that was enough. He couldn't have it anymore. He had had it up to here.

And he quit. And scripture leaves it that way in Acts 13. But then you come to Acts 15 where Barnabas and Paul have a discussion about going on another missionary journey.

And Barnabas says, let's take John Mark with us. And Paul says, not on your life. He quit once.

He's going to quit again. As soon as the sun comes out, that flower is going to wilt. And Barnabas says, I realize that we need to maintain standards.

I realize that we need to have discipline. I realize that we cannot tolerate desertion. It weakens the whole team.

But on the other hand, Paul, don't you feel that by being encouraging and winsome and getting alongside of this young, raw recruit and in helping him to see what this really takes, that the early promise might be realized at a later date? Paul says, you be loving and gracious. I'm determined to maintain standards. Who is to say that one was right and the other one was absolutely wrong? They were both right.

And in the course of the years, the Lord used the high standards of Paul and the gracious encouragement of Barnabas to mature young John Mark so that now he takes his place alongside of Paul as an accepted and acceptable missionary candidate. And then you've got Jesus Justice, and Jesus there might stand for Joshua. And Jesus Justice, about whom we know nothing else, alongside of Mark and alongside of Aristarchus, is with the apostle for the furtherance of the kingdom of God.

And the apostle describes these three men with a most unusual Greek term. And in order for me to explain that term, I'm going to take you with me on a trip to west-central Mexico. My first visit to any mission field, to be with some Wycliffe Bible translators in west-central Mexico, working among the Tarascan Indians.

And before I left home, I was told to bring some medications with me. And one particular medication was called Paragoric, which was to relieve pain and discomfort. Do you know what the apostle Paul says here? Aristarchus, John Mark, Jesus Justice, they work with me for the kingdom of God, and they are for me as a Paragoric.

They relieve my distress. They ease my pain. They bring me comfort in the work that is most difficult.

How we need to be a Paragoric to one another, easing the pain, relieving the discomfort, and bringing encouragement to all who are servants of Jesus Christ. A passing reference to Epiphra. He is the man who first brought the gospel to the people of Colossae.

But he wasn't satisfied just to break the ground and cast the seed. He watered it with his tears, and he agonized for these people in his prayers of intercession. Too often we pray on other Christians when we should be praying for other Christians.

Intercession, grappling with God, agonizing and struggling, no perfunctory prayer involved here. He wanted to see Christians stand firm, unmoved by the immoral trends of their day. He wanted to see them steadfast, not swept away by every wind of doctrine.

And so he preached to them and he prayed for them. Luke, the beloved physician, also sends greetings. And what an indispensable member of the team he was.

I doubt that the Apostle Paul, with all his great gifts, would have been half as effective as he really was had it not been for Luke. Have you ever realized that Luke contributed more to the New Testament in terms of

its size than any other individual? 24 chapters of the gospel, 28 chapters of the book of Acts, 52 chapters of the New Testament come from the gifted pen of a physician who also happened to be a painstakingly accurate historian. Archaeologists, with their digging around, have confirmed in the manuscripts and the remains that they have unearthed the accuracy of Luke as an historian.

And it was as an historian that he chronicled the spread of the gospel. And it was as a physician that he kept a weak and sickly Paul fit enough to spread the gospel throughout the Roman Empire. An indispensable member of the team, physician and historian.

Demas. Is he the same Demas mentioned in 2nd Timothy 4, who later on parted company with the left the church because he was fascinated by the glitzy allure of the world? We can't be sure. And then you have that interesting character known as Nympha or Nymphos, depending on where the accent is put.

It's one of those names which can go from men or women like Sydney or Evelyn Evelyn. We don't know whether this was a church that met in her house or a church that met in his house, but we do know that it was a house church. Where two or three are gathered together in my name, says Jesus, there am I in the midst.

And in that home, there was a church. There was a gathering of men and women who met for Bible study, prayer, and mutual encouragement that did not militate against the larger congregation at Colossi, but it was a necessity to personalize the gospel on a small cell group basis as well. Personal news, fraternal greetings, one thing more, final comments.

And what are Paul's final comments? We find these in verses 16, 17, and 18. His final comments have to do with letters to be read. He says, the letter that I am sending you must be read in the full assembly.

Just as you must read the letter that will be coming to you from Laodicea. Paul, as an apostle, has authority and the matters of faith and doctrine and morality that he has written about must be shared with the whole congregation. Let the scripture be read.

Turn the message loose. Let the power of the word of God transform the lives of men and women in Colossi. Turn the word loose.

Let it transform the lives of men and women in Toronto today. Read the letter, mark its emphases, underline them in your heart, treasure them in your soul, and practice them in your daily living. Letters to be read.

Now we have the letter to the Colossians. We don't happen to have the letter that came from the Laodiceans. Suppose it got lost.

Well, suppose it did. Laodicea was in an earthquake zone and they had an earthquake about the year 60 to 61 AD and the manuscript might have gone. Well, we don't have to tremble for our soul's salvation.

For in the 66 books of the Bible that we do possess, as our Westminster Confession of Faith plainly and accurately puts it, God has given us sufficient revelation to know what we ought to believe and how we ought to live. Even if we didn't have 65 books of the Bible and we only had the Gospel of John, we are assured at the windup of the 20th chapter of that book of the Bible that these things are written so that on the basis of what is here, you might come to the conviction that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that believing you might have life in his name. We have been given sufficient biblical revelation so that we

are left without excuse if we do not believe and behave as God wills.

Letters to be read and ministry to be resumed. Paul sends a message to the church at Colossae in order that it might communicate to a man by the name of Archippus. He has been given an assignment, but he has not yet registered an achievement.

His early enthusiasm seems to have waned. Perhaps he's become distracted and disordered in his priorities. It can very well be that he was discouraged at the slow progress of his project.

Whatever the reason, Archippus is told that he has a ministry to resume. Having set our hand to the plow, we must go straight ahead with that furrow because no man having put his hand to the plow and turning back is worthy of the kingdom. A ministry to be resumed and a signature to be recorded.

Paul worked with a string of secretaries to keep up his vast correspondence as well as write those parts which we find in the New Testament scriptures. And after his secretary had penned the letter, Paul asked for the quill himself. And whether by quill or by stylus, he affixed his own apostolic autograph.

This is authentically my own. He did that at the close of the Galatian letter. He did it again at the end of 1 Corinthians.

He did it again at the close of 2 Thessalonians. A signature to record that we might know that this comes from God through his servant, the apostle. There are chains to remember.

Remember my chain, says Paul. Why does he say that? Is he out to get self-pity? Is he out to get their pity? Why does he mention his chains? For at least two reasons. First, to remind them that he has earned the right to be heard.

This man is no phony. He has paid the price of discipleship and his clanking chains show the extent to which he was willing to go for the cause of Christ. He has won the right to be heard.

And second, if I am serving Christ despite my chains, what are you doing? You are without chains. You take your freedoms for granted. And one thing more.

There are not only letters to be read and a ministry to be resumed, and a signature to be recorded, but a blessing to be received. This letter started with the word grace and it concludes with the word grace. And that is what the Colossians needed to hear.

And that's what you and I still need to hear. This is a blessing that God offers and a benediction that I trust we will all receive here and now. Grace.

A gospel hymn that I learned many years ago puts it like this. Marvelous grace of our loving Lord. Grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt.

Yonder on Calvary's mount outpoured. There where the blood of the Lamb was spilt. Sin and despair like the sea waves cold.

Threaten the soul with infinite loss. Grace that is greater, yet grace untold points to the refuge, the mighty cross. Dark is the stain that we cannot hide.

What can avail to wash it away? Look, there is flowing a crimson tide. Whiter than snow you may be today.
Grace.

Grace. God's grace. Grace that will pardon and cleanse within.

Grace. Grace. God's grace.

Grace that is greater than all our sin. Grace that is greater than all our sin. Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the revelation that you have given to us in Jesus Christ. Through whom your grace is freely offered to us today. In your presence, we would confess our failures.

In your sight, we would acknowledge our sins. Wash us and make us clean by the blood of Jesus Christ. Still our troubled conscience.

Grant us the peace that belongs to the pardoned. And then help us to put our hand in yours and walk with you step by step. Until at the last, saved by grace, we behold you face to face.

In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/26/SID26714.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/mariano-di-gangi/colossians-encourage-your-hearts/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net