

Watch What the Church Was Doing

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Preacher: Jason Webb

[0:00] Colossians chapter 4 and tonight we come to the end of this epistle. Colossians 4 and we'll begin reading verse 7 and read to the end of the chapter.

And fellow servant in the Lord. I'm sending him to you for the express purpose that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts.

He's coming with Onesimus, our faithful and dear brother who is one of you. They will tell you everything that is happening here. My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greeting as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. You have received instructions about him. If he comes to you, welcome him.

Jesus, who is called Justice, also sends greetings. These are the only Jews among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God and they have proved a comfort to me.

Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He's always wrestling in prayer for you that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.

[1:33] I vouch for him that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis. Our dear friend Luke, the doctor, and Demas send greetings.

Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea and to Nympha and the church in her house. After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea.

Tell Archippus, see to it that you complete the work you have received in the Lord. I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand.

Remember my chains. Grace be with you. Well, Ecclesiastes says that the end of a matter is better than the beginning.

And it's good to start something, but it's better to have the patience to finish it. Well, you've been patient as we've taken the last 18 months to go through this book.

[2:43] And I hope it hasn't been too hard for you. But today we are going to conclude it. And for me there is something sad in it because I can't really say that I've done justice to the Christ of Colossians.

And it seems that we've only scratched the surface of how glorious Jesus Christ is. He is the image of the invisible God.

So he is as glorious as God himself. He's the firstborn over all creation. And for by him all things were created, things in heaven and on earth.

You owe your existence and your ongoing life to him. He is the head of the body, the firstborn from among the dead, that in everything he might have the supremacy. Everything.

He might have the supremacy. That is his glory. That in all things, in heaven above and on earth below, that he is the most important of all. And by the Spirit we know that there's more than what we've seen, more than what we've understood.

[3:55] And so it is sad that such a great Christ has such a weak messenger and such dull hearers like ourselves that have such a hard time seeing his glory.

But just as we sang, one day we are going to make a great leap forward. And we are going to be ushered into something entirely different. Faith will give way to sight.

And we will know just as we are known. And that is our hope. And that is what we earnestly long for. And that is what we are trying to wait patiently for that day.

The blessed returning of our Lord Jesus Christ. But while we wait, we have a mission. We have a war to fight. We have work to do.

And so that's what we're looking at in Colossians 4, 7-18. What we see just in this passage that Pastor John read for you is the church at war.

[4:56] Is the church at work? It's God not telling us what to do. But instead what he's doing is he's pulling back the curtain of history. And we are going back 20 centuries into the past.

And we are getting to see what the early church did. Not what they were told to do or anything like that. But what they did.

We see the early church in action. And so a good vantage point or a good way to think about this is we are this fly on the wall. And here are all these characters.

Tychicus and Aristarchus and Epaphras and Mark and Nympha and Archippus and Paul and all the rest. None of them know that we are watching.

We weren't even born yet. But now here we are. We are getting to watch them. And so God pulls back the curtain. He says, now watch what they're doing.

[5:54] Watch how they're carrying out what I've told them to do. And so sometimes we learn by instruction. By someone saying, now this is what you need to do. This is how you do that.

But a lot of times we learn best by not maybe instruction so much as an example. Someone saying, now this is how you do that. And then they show us.

And so that's what we're going to finish up with tonight. The church in Colossae. The church at work in that first century.

And so we have two big points tonight. First is we're going to see what we can see. We just want to look at what's here. And then the second point is just five lessons from what we see.

So first, let's see what we can see. And let's, you've read this. And as you read this, what do you see? Well, you see all sorts of people doing all sorts of things.

[6:55] That's the church. All kinds of people doing all kinds of things. Tychicus is Paul's messenger and he's a minister. He has an official position in the church.

He's a mature Christian. Paul trusts him. Paul has worked with him. And now he is Paul's messenger. And he's going to give the news about what, everything that's happened to Paul. Paul and going along with Tychicus is Onesimus. And these two characters are contrasted. Onesimus is not a minister.

He's a, he's a servant. He's a faithful and dear brother, but he's a brand new Christian. He hasn't been in the faith for very long. So he's not a minister or a fellow servant or anything like that. Not yet. But tradition tells us that later on he became a pastor. I don't, we don't know if that's true or not, but either way, that's not where he is now.

[7:53] He's a baby Christian. And he has this hard thing to do. He has to go back to Philemon. And they've got to work their differences out, their problems out.

And then we see Aristarchus. And he's a prisoner, just like Paul. A fellow prisoner. And there's Mark. And you remember Mark and Paul and Barnabas, they went out together on the first missionary trip.

But Mark lost, got discouraged and dropped out. It was a hard thing. And eventually Paul and Barnabas, the original missionary pair, get into a conflict over Mark.

And they have to split. Well, that was a while ago. But here's something to encourage you. Mark is now back in the game. He's back at it.

He's grown a little bit. And now Paul can say he's useful. He's good. You've received instructions. Paul says, welcome him. And then there is Jesus, who is called Justice.

[8:58] You don't know him, but he says hello. And then those three men, Aristarchus, Mark, and Justice, are the only Jews that were with Paul in this work.

They're the only Jews among Paul's workers. They're Paul's kin. They're from Paul's background, part of Paul's family. And he says, they were such a comfort to me. They are such a comfort to me. Paul was not so different from us. Can you imagine? It's difficult going into different cultures all the time, different backgrounds.

And yet, when these three men were around, it was like a taste from home. And it was something comforting just about them being there and working with him. It helped him to see people like him at the work.

There's Epaphras. He's a Gentile. Maybe he's from Colossae. Maybe he's from Asia Minor, from that area in Turkey. But he's a Gentile. The most important thing about him, he's a prayer warrior.

[10:02] He's fighting. He wrestles in prayer. And we could have a whole sermon about wrestling in prayer and how Epaphras is such a good example for us. He's a prayer warrior.

Luke is a doctor and a good friend. And there's Demas. And Demas hasn't turned away. Not yet. Not yet. But from our position, we know something about Demas that no one knew at the time. Time was ticking. And Demas was going to leave. He's going to hear the world's siren song, and it's going to get to him. Poor Demas is doomed.

From what we can tell. And he doesn't know it. And then we have the brothers in Laodicea. And we have Nympha and the church that meets in her house.

Her house, she must have been a pretty wealthy lady. Her house was big enough that she could have a meeting for the church. And that's where the church, or at least a good part of the church in Laodicea, met.

[11:07] So for the first three or four centuries, and this is good for us to remember, for the first three or four centuries, there was no building like this. The church didn't own any property like this.

Big or small. They met in houses. And whatever happens, brothers and sisters, if we lose this building, it's not the end of the world.

And it's not the end of Grace Fellowship. The church was doing quite well for three or four centuries, had the most explosive growth ever, when there was no buildings like this. And so if we ever have to move out of this building, we can be sad, but we don't need to be discouraged.

Then there's Archippus. He's probably the pastor in Colossae. God gave him a work to do, and Paul says, Now you complete it. Keep going. Finish it out. It's better to end something than just to begin it.

So what did we see here? Well, we saw men, and we saw a woman. We saw mature Christians, and we saw a baby Christian.

[12:14] We saw Jews, and we saw Gentiles. They aren't the same. They have different backgrounds, different stories. They've had different paths. They've had different bumps in the road.

But now they are all in this together. They're working together in this one project of building the church. And so just listen to some of the things of what they are doing. And you get a sample. You get a feel of what it was like to be in the church. What is it like to be a church? It's not a one-dimensional thing. Just as you go through this passage, you get a sense of everything that's going on.

You have serving, reporting, welcoming, working, comforting, wrestling, praying, greeting, hosting, reading, pastoring, completing, writing, remembering, and suffering.

Different people had something different on their plate, and they were doing it. They had different tasks, and they were at work. So what is all that?

[13:19] All these different people doing all these sorts of different things. Well, it's the church being the church. It's the church at war. It's the church at work. And that is what God has called us to do.

And that is the breadth and the sorts of activities that God has called Grace Fellowship to embrace and to do. And so is the church just what this thing going on right here where the pastor is preaching and the people are listening?

Well, that's not all that it is. I mean, certainly this is a part of it. But there's so much more. See, the church is not that one-dimensional reality. It's dynamic. It's active.

It has people doing different things at different times in different ways. So Christ is in her. Christ is in us. And he produces different things in each one of us.

And there's so much life and there's so much growth that we don't look all the same. And that's what is so beautiful about the church. It's a bush that doesn't grow just roses.

[14:24] It grows daffodils and tulips and every other kind of flower. Christ is so powerfully at work in us that he takes up all kinds of different people and he puts them together and he gives them all kinds of different things to do.

Different things to major in. Well, I saw, maybe you saw this story on the internet or somewhere else. I saw this just a strange story this week of a man who's made this tree or he's put together this tree.

It's one tree, but he, through grafting, grafting all these different trees and branches together, he has this tree bearing 40 different kinds of fruit.

So it's all one tree, but now there's peaches and plums and almonds and cherries and 36 other kinds of fruit.

That's the church. Jesus is that tree. And he has so much life. And we're all different. We've been cut off from different branches and grafted in from different places.

[15:35] And yet here we are, producing different fruit. And it's a beautiful thing. It's a fruitful thing. It's a glory to Jesus Christ that we don't look like robots doing all the same exact thing.

We're individuals who Christ has empowered. So that's the church we've been grafted in. And Jesus is so alive that he makes us bear all kinds of different fruit. And so just before we even get to the lessons, we can learn this lesson.

Don't miss your part. Don't miss your part. Don't miss the role that you've been given. And don't be discouraged. And don't be afraid that you can't serve like someone else does or can.

We, the church, and Jesus himself doesn't need you to serve like everyone else does. We, the church, need you to serve like Christ has made you and how Christ has graced you.

And it's different for each one of us. But don't miss your part. Don't miss your role. Well, that's the first lesson. We've seen something of what was going on. All kinds of people doing all sorts of things.

[16:45] Now here's the second point. Five lessons about that. Five things that we can learn and take away and do because of this. And here they are.

Number one is this. You should live your Christian life with others. Now you're here. So you've at least understood that. But maybe you need to take it to a step further.

You need to live, you should live your Christian life with others. All of these people were in this together. So here's Paul. He's in prison. He's in the middle of a very hard, what could be very discouraging situation.

But did you notice? He's not alone. He's not alone. He's not alone physically. He's not alone spiritually. He has all these people with him in this together.

He's not feeling the walls of the prison closing in on him. And he's feeling all so lonely and cut off from everyone. Because they're all there. And he's aware of them. And they're a part of his life. And so he had friends who loved him.

[17:50] And who shared with him. Who shared life with him. Friends like Luke. Our dear friend Luke. The doctor.

Now Luke was going to be an author someday. And maybe he was already starting to do the work. He's already starting to do the homework and the interviews. But he's probably not there yet.

Now what he is. Is a friend. And a friend for Paul. In a bad place. And so how good it is to have a friend.

And how good it is to be a friend. I think we probably do some of our best church work. In just being friends with each other. In sharing with one another.

In loving with one another. In loving on one another. And so it's not just teaching and serving. And the public things that we do. Or the formal things. All of those things are great.

[18:49] But so is being a friend. So is being a good Christian friend. And that's certainly a lesson we see here. It's really important to have friends.

You know Paul. It was such a comfort for him to have Aristarchus. And Justice. And Mark. They were helpful to him. And so we need that.

We need each other. We need to be living this Christian life. Not just between me and God. Or me and God and my Bible. But we live it with all of these people.

We need that. And your brothers and sisters here need that. So commit to that. Would you do that? Commit to that friendship.

Commit to that living together with each other. Like I said. Maybe you need to take it a step further. But press in. Press forward into friendship with others.

[19:51] Friendship isn't always easy. But it's good. Jesus himself. Has 72 disciples. And then he had 12 disciples that were even closer than those 72.

And you know he had those three disciples that were the closest. And then there was John who could lean back against his chest. And ask him a question that everyone else was a bit afraid to ask.

So how sweet it was to have a friend. And how sweet it is to be a Christian friend to someone. And so let's work on that. Let's remember that. Your Christian life was meant to be lived with others.

That's what we see going on here. It's a shared life. Satan loves to take Christians off by themselves. Did you know that? He loves to take Christians off by themselves.

And corner them. And say no one loves you. No one cares about you. No one understands you. He's a liar. And he's a bully.

[20 : 57] Resist him. And he will flee from you. So don't listen to him. And let him take you off. And whisper his lies into your ears. You aren't alone. But we do need to stick together.

We need to make sure that people aren't getting caught up with that. The second lesson is that. The first lesson is the Christian life is meant to be lived with other Christians. The second lesson is that we should do our missionary work with others.

We should do our missionary work with others. You see a lot of coming and going and visiting and sharing and reporting and all this stuff going on in this little section.

Now Paul was a great missionary. He's the one that he's the example. He's the one that we say this is what Paul did. This is how you do it. He was a great missionary. He could go into new territory. He could cover a lot of ground. He could plan a lot of churches. He knew exactly what to do. But you know what? He was never alone in that work. Never alone in that work.

[21 : 58] He always had Barnabas with him. Or he had Silas with him. Or he had Silas and Timothy with him. Or he had any number of these people with him. I can only think of one time when he was alone.

It was in totally alone on the mission field. It was in Athens. Basically what happened is he was driven out of Berea and he goes down to Athens.

And just listen to how Acts put it though. So here he is all by himself in Athens. But listen to how Acts puts it. After he left Berea, he left instructions for Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible.

And now while he was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. And you remember what happened.

He goes and he preaches. But he went to Athens and he spent time there. But what was he primarily doing? He was primarily waiting for his friends to catch up with him.

[23 : 02] Because he couldn't go on alone without them. He needed them. Athens wasn't the norm. Athens was the place to wait for others to catch up. And so it seems that Paul's thought was always, I need to be with people.

I need to be with people when I'm doing my missionary work. I can't be alone. And so if he's not with someone, he was waiting for someone. And I think that is a lesson that we as a group, as the wider church, are beginning to learn.

There's been far too much in the last century or two where people have been sent out and sort of by themselves. And then there's very little contact with the home church or with other people out there. They're just sort of out there by themselves with limited support from anyone else. And it probably has a lot to do with sort of this, our American individualism, our American, you know, pioneer spirit. But the Bible's picture and method of doing missions, whether we're doing them in our neighborhood or doing them in our city or doing them far away, is not the American pioneer, the mountain man trudging off on the mountain to conquer the territory all by himself.

[24 : 17] Instead, it's a whole team of people working together, coming together, fulfilling certain roles that are changing and growing. And so there's a lesson in there for us.

There's a lesson about how we should think about missions. And there's a lesson there about how we should think about church planning. And there's a lesson there about how we should think of ourselves as a church, as we send out people or as we are going ourselves.

So, you know, we aren't so much a launching pad that sends one rocket up and then we shut down the launching pad and everyone goes home.

And that rocket just sails off into space all by itself. Instead, we're the launching pad that keeps sending people, different people, different rockets up to the space station to supply it, to give the astronauts rest, to bring supplies, to send help.

So our work isn't done. And we can't think that we are really doing it like we should if it's just one person all there by himself. So it might cost more.

[25 : 25] It might be inefficient. But, you know, God knows that no Christian is very good when they're all by themselves. And he knows he doesn't mean for anyone to do it alone.

And so the church on mission is still the church, still a group of people. And so that's the second lesson. There's a lesson here about how we should think about missions because that's what we see Paul doing.

Now, the third lesson is this. Cross church pollination is good. Cross church pollination is good. And you can see that in verses 15 and 16.

So now he's not talking about what's going on with him. He's talking about their situation. And now he tells them some, gives them some valuable instructions in verse 15 and 16. Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea and to Nympha and the church in her house.

So remember, Laodicea is down the road. They're not in Colossae. It's down the road. The church in her house. And after this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans.

[26 : 34] And that you, in turn, read the letter from Laodicea. It's very possible that the church to Laodicea is what we call the book of Ephesians. Because the book of Ephesians is probably a circular letter that went around to a whole bunch of different churches.

But you see what's going on here. Paul assumes that they know about the people in Laodicea. And they assume there's contact going on here.

And what he says is now, you give them your letter and they'll give you their letter and everyone will be well off for it. The churches weren't isolated units that only kept to themselves.

That were only concerned about themselves. No, they were like flowers and the bees that are flying around and buzzing around. Passing information, sending people, helping each other. And as you know, flowers need the bees going from one flower to another.

And that's the same thing with the church. Or with the churches. If Colossae neglected Laodicea, they would be poorer for it. And if Laodicea neglected Colossae, they would be poorer for it.

[27 : 43] They needed each other. And so when we pray for each other, and when we do pulpit swaps, and so we have another person come in and preach for us and we go and preach for them.

Or we have these things that we're doing like the CTA where we're getting together and we're working together with other churches or for other churches.

We aren't doing that just because we're doing it because it's good for them. And it's good for us. That cross-pollination is good. It's good to have fellowship with each other, to share and to help each other.

And just to say, that's why us leaving ARBCA is not the end of the process by which we're going to keep living with other churches. It's not the end of a relationship with other churches.

It might look different. It might not be exactly the same, but the goal is going to be the same. We're still going to be praying and serving and loving and helping and receiving those things ourselves from other churches.

[28 : 48] We just can't keep to ourselves. It's not good for us. And it's not good for them. It doesn't line up with what the apostolic church was doing. And so we're going to keep pressing forward in that area.

Just like Christians need each other, just like missionaries need other Christians, so churches need each other. And so that's our third lesson. Cross-church pollination is good.

Here's the lesson number four and five. Number four is that Jesus Christ really is doing something new. He is really doing something new, and you can see it in this passage.

If you have eyes to see this passage, it shows us something that's very different from whatever was going on in the world at that time and at the world of our time.

You have Jews, Gentiles, men, women, mature, immature, different stratus of socioeconomic, some very well off, some not well off at all.

[29 : 54] But they are all together working on the school. They are all moving together. They're united. So do you remember all the way back in Genesis 11? That was another time when all these people were united in a goal.

They were going to build a tower. They were going to build a tower that reaches all the way up to heaven. Now, what was that? We're going to build this tower, and it's going to be for our name and our glory and our security so we're not spread across the whole world.

And so it was for their fame, their security, their salvation. It was like a public works salvation project. This is how these people were going to finally bring in heaven on earth.

They're going to do this. And none of it was by faith. All of it was with a raised fist to God saying, we're not believing you. We're not trusting you. We're not obeying you. We're going to do it our way. And God said, this has to stop. And he confused them. And he broke them apart into nations. And what happened after that is there's no more united nations.

[30:59] It's conflict. It's strife. It's people pursuing their own ends. And so that's what we see in the world. It's Jews versus Gentiles. Men versus women. Old versus young. Poor versus rich.

Everyone working on their own projects. Everyone working for themselves. And to this day, the conflict and the wars rage interpersonally, within families, within countries. The war rages on. But 2,000 years ago, Jesus came. And that was the beginning of something totally different. It was the breaking of a new day for humanity.

And so now, what do you see here? It's not, they're not fighting. They're not arguing with each other. It's not fighting, but peace.

And there's not pride, but there are people who are serving. Epaphras is wrestling with the Lord for you. There's the fellow servants.

[31:56] There's the people offering hospitality. There's the people that are offering their service and their life for the other people. And for God. And so fractured humanity is actually starting to work together again because of Jesus Christ.

And so into this sin-sick, tired, weary world, Jesus came and he put something new. And this is what we see here in this passage. It's starting to work itself out.

So now they're not working for themselves, but for him. And they're not working for themselves, but for each other. And if you're lost, you know, here's where love happens.

If you're broken and sad, there is something new. You won't find anything like this out there. Where different people of all sorts of different backgrounds say no to themselves and say yes to each other.

And they put love on the very front burner. So here is where Jesus is doing something new. And when you come to Jesus, you get brought into the family.

[33:13] You get brought into the kingdom. And you start taking part in this. And it's a breath of fresh air. You were made for this. You were made for this kind of life.

So don't miss it. Now, finally, our last lesson. Jesus saved every one of these except for one. Jesus saved every one of these except for one.

All of these people, Archippus and Onesimus and Nympha and Luke and all the rest, they were all lost at one point.

Luke was an unbeliever. So was Onesimus. So was Archippus. So was Paul and Tychicus and Luke and Nympha and all the rest. All of them lost.

They had all sinned and had fallen short of the glory of God. They had rebelled, each one of them. Each one of them were at one time slaves to sin.

[34:20] They were without God. And they were without hope in this world. And none of them deserve salvation. We're seeing them now that Jesus has got a hold of them.

But that's not what they were beforehand. None of them deserve salvation. And none of them were just wonderful peaches of a person that you just, they got along so well with each other and got along so well with God.

Each of them had gone their own way. But Jesus saved them all. Different backgrounds.

Different genders. Different places. They each turned from their sin. They had bowed the knee to Jesus. Their stories were different. But all their paths had this one thing in common.

At one point, they came to Jesus and gave their lives to him and trusted in him for their salvation. Out of their sin, they came to Christ.

[35:21] And Christ, the Christ of Colossians, became the most important thing in their life. Christ came in and took over the throne of their hearts.

And he dethroned self. And so right in the middle of their broken lives, Jesus landed and he saved them. He rescued them.

Now all of them were forgiven. All of them but one. Salvation was all around Demas.

Salvation was all around him. Something new was going on all around Demas. And he was willing to walk some of the way. I think that's what we can read.

In 2 Timothy, it says that Demas has gone to Thessalonica because he loved the world. He's left. He's abandoned me because he loved the world. And Thessalonica was probably where he was from.

[36:23] He's gone home. He's quit. Demas was willing to walk some of the way. But in the end, he never let go of what he really wanted.

He never let go of his desires. Demas was part of the church. And Demas was lost. Salvation was there.

But he loved this world. What about you? Are you making your calling and election sure? By pressing on with Jesus? By growing in Jesus? Or are you satisfied with being in church? Being with him? Walking some of the way? Don't be a Demas.

Don't be fooled. Don't go halfway. And don't settle for getting into the church but not getting to Jesus Christ. Demas was able to get into the church.

[37 : 26] But apparently, he never got to Christ. Salvation is right there. Salvation is right there. Jesus is there for the taking.

So don't miss him. Why miss him? And why wait when salvation can happen today? Let's pray. Heavenly Father, I do pray that you would please open the eyes of any blinded heart here.

And save. Glorify your free grace by saving sinners here tonight. Help us to take to heart these things that we've heard and seen in this last portion of Colossians.

That we would be better friends to each other. That we would know how to do missions. That we would keep our eyes and our hands open to other churches.

That we would enjoy being in this new humanity that Jesus Christ is doing. And we would be thankful and enjoy it and work for it and work on it.

[38 : 43] And live for you. And live for one another. We do want to love each other. Please help us. Please bring one and all to the foot of the cross.

Where we can see what our sins have done for our Savior. And what our Savior has done for us. And so humble us. And help us to walk before you.

In faith. And in reverence. It's in Jesus name I do pray. Amen. Amen. Amen.