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Sermon Notes

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Fellow Workers for God's Kingdom

Colossians 4:7-18

As you enter the World Showcase section of the Epcot Center in Orlando Florida, the centermost pavilion is called "The American Experience"... a tribute to what made America great. Inside there are 12 life-sized statues, called the "Spirits of America": among them are

Innovation, Compassion, Discovery . Freedom,

But there are two that should catch the eye of any Biblically minded Christian:
Individualism and **Self-Reliance**

The standard American hero and myth is that of the "rugged individualist"...

- Like the trailblazer and hunter Daniel Boone, who spent much of his adult life alone, exploring the Western frontier. He said "I have never been lost, but I will admit to being confused for several weeks."
- Like the mountain man Jim Bridger, who was the first white man to see the Great Salt Lake; trapper, trader, guide, merchant, Indian interpreter and army officer; could make it on his own for months and even years at a time in the high country
- Like the homesteaders who settled in the Nebraska prairie miles from any other settler and faced the dangers of Indian attacks, wild beasts, prairie fires, sickness and drought alone
- Like the cattle ranchers of Texas who spent days on end riding the fences alone, recovering strays and repairing barbed wire

American individualism is woven into the fabric of our national culture... personal freedom... wide vistas... open spaces... solitary trials faced alone, conquered alone, enjoyed alone

Ralph Waldo Emerson was the original champion of individualism in America, having spent considerable time living alone out by Walden Pond

In a famous Phi Beta Kappa address in 1837, he shared what he'd learned about life:

"I learned that no man in God's wide earth is either willing or able to help any other man." Help comes from our own bosom alone.

Emerson wrote a famous essay entitled "Self-Reliance" celebrating this very theme. He carried it to its logical extreme, rejecting any effort to help or be helped by other people:

Then again, do not tell me, as a good man did today, of my obligation to put all poor men in good situations. Are they my poor? I tell thee thou foolish philanthropist that I grudge the dollar, the dime, the cent, I give to such men as do not belong to me and to whom I do not belong.

Nothing could be farther from the New Testament than this!!

The Apostle Paul knew very well that he could not save himself from his sins... he needed Christ

And he also knew very well that he had an obligation to share the gospel of salvation in Christ with as many people as he could

AND he knew very well that he could not finish his Christian journey ALONE—either internally in personal growth as a Christian, or externally in spreading the gospel...

He was NO rugged individualist... He was a rugged Christian, seeking both to help and to be helped

And nothing shows this more personally than the lists of friends and co-laborers in the gospel he inevitably greets at the end of his letters

Final sermon in Colossians!!

Context:

Paul wrote this letter to a church he's never visited before, a church he did not plant

Colossae was a city in Asia Minor, what is currently Turkey

With nearby Laodicea and Hierapolis, it was part of a triad of cities in the Lycus Valley, about 100 miles east of Ephesus, built on the Lycus River

The population was predominantly Gentile, but there was a sizeable Jewish community as well. Thus the church at Colossae had to face doctrinal challenges from both Jewish legalism and Gentile pagan philosophy

The church itself was planted by Epaphras, and in Colossians 2:1, Paul makes it plain he'd never seen them before

But by the time he was writing, the church was already in a battle for its doctrinal life. A serious heresy had arisen in the region, and Epaphras went to Paul to tell him of the danger to the church. It had not yet been infected by this heresy, but trouble was coming

Certainly, the old pagan way of life was tempting enough... and so also was the threat of Jewish asceticism and legalism. But even bigger was the threat of a mixture of Greek philosophy with Christianity, a mix that later came to be called Gnosticism

Physical world was evil... all sin came from the physical side of things

Christ not truly human... and His work on the cross not truly sufficient

Mixed in with this mess was Jewish legalism... the requirement to keep special religious laws, dietary laws, and religious festivals.

Paul's primary hope for rescuing the Colossian church is RIGHT DOCTRINE... about God, about Christ, about the gospel, about the Christian life

And hence he wrote this glorious epistle

Paul's parallel hope for rescuing the Colossian church is FAITH-FILLED PRAYER

Summary:

Colossians 1: The Supremacy of Christ and the Mystery of the Gospel of Christ

Colossians 1:15-17 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Colossians 1:27 the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Colossians 2: Fullness in Christ vs. The Inadequacy of Man-Made Religion

Fullness in Christ

Colossians 2:9-10 For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, ¹⁰ and you have been given fullness in Christ

- Fully Circumcised Spiritually
- Fully Alive
- Fully Forgiven

Colossians 2:13 When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins

- Fully Free from the Law (in its power to condemn us to hell)
- Fully Triumphant over Satan

Colossians 2... Inadequacy of Man-Made Religion

- Philosophy: Man-Centered Thinking
- Legalism: Man-Centered Religious Effort
- Mysticism: Man-Centered Religious Experience
- Asceticism: Man-Centered Religious Discipline

Colossians 3:1-17 Elements of a Truly Happy, Fruitful New Life

- A Heavenly Mindset Based on our New Position in Christ

Colossians 3:1-2 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.

- Bitter Warfare against Sin Based on our New Position in Christ

Colossians 3:5 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature

- Walking together with Other Christians in your “New Self”

Colossians 3:11-12 Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. ¹² Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

- A Heart Saturated with Christ

Peace of Christ ruling
Word of Christ dwelling richly
Name of Christ motivating completely

Colossians 3:18-4:7 The New Life in Christ lived out in key arenas

- The Arena of Marriage: Husbands and wives living in Christlikeness with each other, a stable foundation for the church and for society: wives submitting to husbands, husbands loving their wives
- The Arena of Parenting: children obeying parents in the Lord, parents training their children with loving wisdom

- The Arena of Labor: slaves working diligently as if serving Christ, masters treating their slaves as they have been treated by their own master Christ
- The Arena of Conversation: fervent prayer, of lives lived carefully before the watching world, of conversation seasoned with salt

Now, Paul concludes his letter with a series of personal greetings

While this is common in Paul's letters, the one in Colossians is unusually long and rich

I. No One Can Do It Alone

This amounts to a "group photo" of his friends and co-laborers in the ministry

At FBC, we have group pictures of many of our mission teams year after year

This is Paul's group photo

A. Rugged Individualism Impossible in the Kingdom

1. Moses couldn't lead Israel alone, so God gave him 70 elders to help him govern
2. Jesus chose twelve apostles and they TOGETHER built the church in that first generation
3. Even the great Apostle Paul didn't plant churches alone
4. You are part of a vast Body of Christ, and you are assembled here to rely on each other and to encourage each other and remind each other, "I can't do it without you!!"

No one is omni-competent!!

Ministry is MEANT TO BE HUMBLING

Above all, we must feel acutely our need for Christ

John 15:5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

Secondly, we must feel our need for each other

1 Corinthians 12:21-22 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!"²² On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable

5. Also these brief notes give a sense of what the great Apostle Paul felt about his collaborators
6. How much more precious will Christ's praise, specifically fitted for your service to Him, be for you on Judgment Day... what praise will He write for your service to Him?

II. Some Lessons from Paul's Laborers

A. The Faithful Servant: Tychicus

Colossians 4:7-8 Tychicus will tell you all the news about me. He is a dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. ⁸ I am sending him to you for the express purpose that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts.

1. Very faithful servant of the body of Christ
2. Paul mentioned him five times in his letters or in the book of Acts
3. Traveled with Paul from Ephesus throughout Macedonia in Acts 20
4. Paul gives him high praise here as a "faithful minister (servant) in the Lord"

B. The Forgiven Sinner: Onesimus

Colossians 4:9 Onesimus, our faithful and dear brother, who is one of you.

1. The focal point of Paul's letter to Philemon
2. Escaped slave whom Paul meets in Rome and leads to Christ
3. Moving story of forgiveness and redemption... read about it in Philemon
4. "One of you" = from Colosse
5. The letters Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon all written and sent at the same time to about the same place

C. The Fellow Sufferer: Aristarchus

Colossians 4:10 My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings

1. A fellow Jew who had been willing to be rejected by his own people, and perhaps face imprisonment with Paul
2. "Fellow prisoner" = "one caught with a spear" or a fellow captive in a battle

D. The Future Surprise: Mark

Colossians 4:10 Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. (You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him.)

1. Mark has the longest and most fascinating history of any that Paul mentions here
2. Mark traveled with Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey, but abandoned them midway through and went back home
3. On the second missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas had such a sharp dispute about Mark that they parted company
4. In the end, Barnabas, the “Son of Encouragement” who was always ready to put an arm around someone who was down and out was right: this young man should be forgiven and given a second chance... his future was bright
5. In 2 Timothy, Paul called Mark “useful for my ministry”
6. In the end, he had a very bright future: he was useful to the church for the rest of its history by writing the Gospel of Mark

E. The Fearless Stalwart: Justus

Colossians 4:11 Jesus, who is called Justus, 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.

1. Not much at all known about this man
2. But, he was a Jew who was willing to be persecuted and de-synagogued for his faith in Christ
3. Therefore he was a steadfast source of encouragement to Paul

F. The Fierce Struggler: Epaphras

Colossians 4:12-13 Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured. ¹³ I vouch for him that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis.

1. One of the best brief descriptions of a faithful prayer warrior in the Bible
2. The Greek word “agon” as in “agonizing in prayer” is used
 - a. Like a sporting contest, like wrestling

- b. True, faithful, fervent prayer is agonizing hard work
 - c. Satan constantly opposed the man and woman of prayer
 - d. Look at Daniel, who had to fast and pray twenty-one days while the angelic messenger fought his way past the “Prince of Persia” in Daniel 10
 - e. Epaphras was that kind of a prayer warrior
 - f. MAY HIS TRIBE INCREASE!!
 - g. May we be this for each other
3. Focus in prayer: just like Paul: FULL MATURITY IN THE FAITH
4. O. Hallesby: “Prayer as work
- a. Notice Paul’s emphasis on the hard work of prayer done by Epaphras
 - b. This kind of spiritual prayer ministry is labor, nothing less
 - c. Prime example: David Brainerd

Illus. David Brainerd... passionate prayer warrior... The title of John Piper’s excellent biographical summary of his life came from Brainerd’s own prayer

“O That I may never loiter on my heavenly journey!!”

He was a man who WRESTLED IN PRAYER like Epaphras

Lived only 29 years and died of tuberculosis in 1747... a contemporary of Jonathan Edwards, whose daughter Jerusha nursed him in his final days and then died of the same illness

Brainerd: An incredible example of passion poured out full strength in prayer...

Brainerd’s personal struggles he also poured out into the pages of he diary, which Edwards had published after his death and which have never gone out of print

Brainerd’s diary has been a powerful inspiration to countless choice servants of God:

- John Wesley : "Let every preacher read carefully over the 'Life of Brainerd' ""?
- Said of Henry Martyn: "perusing the life of David Brainerd, his soul was filled with a holy emulation of that extraordinary man; and after deep consideration and fervent prayer, he was at length fixed in a resolution to imitate his example"?
- William Carey regarded Edwards' *Life of Brainerd* as a sacred text

- Robert Morrison and Robert McCheyne of Scotland, John Mills of America, Frederick Schwartz of Germany and David Livingstone of England and Andrew Murray of South Africa and Jim Elliot of modern America all looked upon Brainerd with a kind of awe and drew power from him

WHY Such lasting power from so brief a life? 29 years old when he died, only four years spent in mission service?

WHY? Incredible focus to his life of service to the Lord, and incredible passion poured out in prayer

"Oh that I might be a flaming fire in the service of the Lord. Here I am, Lord, send me; send me to the ends of the earth.... send me from all that is called earthly comfort; send me to death itself if it be but in Thy service to promote Thy Kingdom."

Brainerd overcame amazing obstacles through prayer:

He overcame almost constant sickness... coughing up blood

He overcame relentlessly recurring depression... moodiness and a bleak disposition

He overcame loneliness... isolated in the wilderness

He overcame immense external hardships... poor food, exposure to the elements, extreme cold, inadequate shelter

He overcame a personal lack of love for the Indians he was seeking to reach with the gospel

HOW? By wrestling, wrestling, wrestling in prayer!!!

He wrestled for personal holiness (the internal journey)

"When I really enjoy God, I feel my desires of him the more insatiable, and my thirstings after holiness the more unquenchable; ... Oh, for holiness! Oh, for more of God in my soul! Oh, this pleasing pain! It makes my soul press after God ... Oh, that I might not loiter on my heavenly journey

This is a fulfillment of Colossians 4:5 and Ephesians 5:16

Ephesians 5:16 ...redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

He wrestled for the conversion of the Indians

Once, visiting in a home with friends, he got alone to pray: **"I continued wrestling with God in prayer for my dear little flock here; and more especially for the Indians elsewhere; as well as for dear friends in one place and another; till it was bed time and I feared I should hinder the family, etc. But oh, with what reluctance did I find myself obliged to consume time in sleep!"**

We read of him spending whole days in prayer, and sometimes setting aside six times in the day to pray, and sometimes seeking out a family or friend to pray with. He prayed for his own sanctification. He prayed for the conversion and purity of his Indians. He prayed for the advancement of the kingdom of Christ around the world and especially in America. Sometimes the spirit of prayer would hold him so deeply that he could scarcely stop.

Wednesday, April 21 ...and God again enabled me to wrestle for numbers of souls, and had much fervency in the sweet duty of intercession...

Lord's Day, April 25. This morning I spent about two hours in secret duties and was enabled more than ordinarily to agonize for immortal souls. Though it was early in the morning and the sun scarcely shined at all, yet my body was quite wet with sweat...

Saturday, December 15. Spent much time in prayer in the woods and seemed raised above the things of this world...

July 21, 1744, on hearing that the Indians were planning to hold an idolatrous feast and dance the next day, he spent a day and night in prayer. He writes: "This morning about nine I withdrew to the woods for prayer. I was in such anguish that when I rose from my knees I felt extremely weak and overcome, and the sweat ran down my face and body ... I cared not where or how I lived, or what hardships I went through, so that I could but gain souls for Christ. I continued in this frame all the evening and night."

Thus empowered, he went forth to meet the Indians the next morning, convinced that God was with him in this contest just as He was with Elijah on Mount Carmel; and, wonder of wonders, instead of promptly scalping him when he called upon them to stop their dance, they actually desisted and listened to the missionary preach, both morning and afternoon.

Made strong by prayer and the awareness of the divine companionship, Brainerd dragged his tortured body through the forests from village to village, preaching with such tenderness and conviction that the stony-hearted Indians were frequently melted to tears.

O that God would work in our hearts this same kind of WRESTLING in prayer for personal holiness and for the souls of lost sinners

Make us like Brainerd!

Make us like Epaphras!!

Make us like Paul!!!

Make us like Christ... who constantly lives to intercede for us

Colossians 4:14 Our dear friend Luke, the doctor... greets you”

1. Not a Jew (we learn that from verse 11)
2. He was a doctor, perhaps the first of the missions specialists, who used his special talents as a blessing to Paul and to the whole church
3. Of course, his most lasting ministry legacy was his two volume history of Jesus Christ and the Acts of the Apostles... Luke-Acts, carefully researched, written based on eyewitness accounts, in highly cultured Greek
4. Here was a foreign man, a Gentile, whom God used mightily to write two key books of the Bible

H. The Future Scandal: Demas

2 Timothy 4:9-10 Do your best to come to me quickly, ¹⁰ for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica.

1. Amazing... Luke and Demas mentioned literally side by side
2. One of them a genuine believer, one of them not
3. Wheat and tares grow together and we can't tell them apart
4. Demas, a future scandal, future heartbreak
 - a. We should not minimize the personal pain that Demas's defection must have caused Paul

Demas, because he loved this present world DESERTED ME and has gone to Thessalonica

- b. What pain must have been behind these words
- c. What could have been so valuable in Thessalonica that warranted throwing away his soul?

Matthew 16:26 "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"

And we should not imagine that the great apostle Paul was some kind of ministry machine who never felt personally the loss of a single person from the Gospel faith:

2 Corinthians 11:28-29 Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. ²⁹ Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?

For this very reason Paul constantly wrestled in prayer for the preservation of the faith of the churches he planted and the people he led to faith in Christ

5. Missionaries and pastors frequently have the heartbreak of promising young converts who walk away because of worldliness... Paul was no different

III. Final Applications

Colossians 4:15-18 Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ Tell Archippus: "See to it that you complete the work you have received in the Lord." ¹⁸ I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.

A. Read My Letters

1. The letter to the church of Laodicea is a bit of a mystery
2. Much debate; probably the cyclical letter of Ephesians
3. This injunction to read the letters to other churches also gives the sense of the UNIFIED BODY OF CHRIST... many local churches, one Body of Christ, all of us built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus as the chief cornerstone
4. The church at Laodicea would have done better in the future to read and to obey Paul's letters!! They were the lukewarm church that Christ threatened to spew from His mouth in Revelation:

Revelation 3:15-17 I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! ¹⁶ So, because you are lukewarm-- neither hot nor cold-- I am about to spit you out of my mouth. ¹⁷ You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.

B. Complete Your Ministry

1. Application from Archippus:
2. God has entrusted you with a ministry
3. It is ETERNALLY SIGNIFICANT

"See to it that you complete the work you have received from the Lord!!

4. It's not so much how you start as it is how you finish!!

Acts 20:24 However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me-- the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.

2 Timothy 4:7-8 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸ Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day-- and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

C. Suffering: Remember my chains

1. No advance in the Kingdom comes without some suffering
2. Especially, though, remember your brothers and sisters in the world who are physically suffering... in China, in Muslim countries, in India, in Darfur and wherever the persecution is the hottest

D. Grace Be With You

We won't survive a day in the Christian life without this!!