

Become a Christ-Centered Christian: Preaching from Colossians

ANSWER TO GOD EVERY DAY

This series of 21 messages has been an effort in exposition for John and me. We have taken the text of Paul's Letter to the Colossians verse by verse and, often, word by word, seeking to understand and explain what Paul was saying and what the Holy Spirit is speaking to us through this letter.

I. GET THE PICTURE

A. BIG PICTURE (great theological truth):

1. Here we are, stranded on this small planet in a universe so vast that we cannot find the edges. In fact, the universe appears to be expanding faster than the speed of light. Therefore, every second we are falling further and further behind in getting a glimpse of its edges.

- a. We struggle to understand how the universe could come to be.
- b. We struggle to understand our own place in this vast creation.
- c. We struggle with both our failure and shortcomings, and our perpetual self-centeredness.
- d. We wonder if there is deliverance from our guilt and shame.

We wonder if there is a God who made it all and knows us personally and cares about what is happening to us.

2. God took the initiative to reveal himself to us. ***We are going to look at FIVE OT passages in the upcoming Christmas messages that describe, CHRISTMAS FOR EVERY LONGING HEART. Pick up a brochure at the back this morning, and plan to bring your family and friends to these worship events.

a. Abraham experienced the intervention of God in his life, an event of comfort and companionship that surprised him. God, he felt, was seeking his friendship. He entered into a relationship of promise with the God who came to him. This covenant of love received greater definition in subsequent encounters with God by Moses and the Hebrew prophets.

b. God culminated this work of revelation and rescue through his incarnation in Jesus of Nazareth, Paul declares. These are words Paul wrote near the beginning of this letter: 13 For he (Creator God) has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. 15 The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. 17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. 19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

This is the **SUMMATION: CHRIST IS THE CENTER** of all things and should be the **CENTER** of your thinking, your behavior, your life purpose, and the organizing principle of who you are and what you do. Become a Christ-centered Christian. Nothing in this letter makes sense until you adopt this Big Picture as your own story—the longing, the rescue, the forgiveness, the adoption into God's family through Jesus. We do not follow: the law of the jungle—kill or be killed, survival of the fittest “eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow you die” It's not “grab for all the gusto” or “the one who dies with the most toys wins.” We are not running our lives even by this maxim, “leave the world better than you found it” or simply “do the most good.”

OUR CENTER IS CHRIST HIMSELF.

B. SMALL PICTURE: The church in Colossae gathering for the very first reading of this letter. I think they are sitting in concentric half-circles in front of the reader. The reader is strong-voiced. He wants everyone to hear clearly what he says. He knows Aramaic, perhaps, and maybe other languages, but he is reading a letter written in Greek (as in most of Europe even today, multi-lingual). Colossae is in the province of Asia where Greek is the common language of the people. The letter is written on papyrus, probably from Egypt. The ink is handmade from soot and other common household materials.

The church has been listening to the letter, and it is almost over. The reader now reads these words: "Complete the Work," Col. 4:12-18: 12 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. 14 Our dear friend Luke, the doctor, and Demas send greetings. 15 Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house. (everyone getting into the picture—saying hello) 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.

1. Get the **SMALL PICTURE**: Tell Archippus: "See to it..." (blepo, βλέπω)

2. The **FIRST INSTRUCTION HERE**: Tell Archippus.

a. Paul is pulling other people into this communication. He has a strategy.

b. We do not know for sure who he intends to "tell Arch."

Maybe it's everyone in Colossae. Maybe it's everyone in Laodicea, for they also will read this letter. And some believe that Arch was the pastor in Laodicea, on an emergency assignment.

c. Maybe he means anyone who reads this letter, or everyone in the churches everywhere.

d. Really, I feel responsible myself about carrying forward this instruction. Maybe there is an Archippus in my life for whom I am to be the encourager. Not only am I to complete the work that God has called me to do. But I am also to encourage everyone around me to do the same.

3. Paul follows with "See to it..."

a. The verb blepo is the heart of this charge to Arch.

b. Completing the work is just that important. The verb "fulfill" is at the end of this instruction, in an emphatic position—GET THIS DONE!

II. GET THE POINT

A. Complete the work. Paul is talking to Archippus through everyone who reads this letter: "Archippus, 'See to it that you complete the work which you have received in the Lord.'"

1. One time in the letter Paul writes to a solitary individual, addressing him by name, and giving him a specific word just for him. The man is Archippus and the instruction is this: See to it that you complete the work you have received in the Lord.

2. He reinforces this point in two ways.

a. First, he conveys it through anyone who reads this letter and knows Archippus. I think that Archippus may have heard from several individuals this instruction and challenge from the Apostle Paul. Everyone who read the letter must have said to him, "Archippus, Paul wanted us to tell you to complete the work." Archippus may have gotten more encouragement on this point than he wanted.

b. Second, the instruction to Arch is very terse, very simple. Paul wants Archippus to complete the work that he started. What work is he talking about? Is Archippus writing a book or painting a picture? Is he building furniture or a church facility? Is he evangelizing some unreached friends?

3. We do not know the nature of that work. We have not been told. I don't know that the first readers of this letter knew what the work was. Perhaps only Paul and Archippus knew what that work was. The same may be true with you this morning. We are depending on the Holy Spirit speaking to your heart about the work that you began that remains unfinished.

B. Complete the work The Apostle Paul gives this charge in various ways repeatedly in his writings. He is concerned that people finish what they start in the Lord.

I suspect that Paul was experiencing then what many Christian ministers experience in the present day—disappointment at the dropout rate in the work of the Lord. So many people seem to hang in there as long as it is convenient or as long as it suits them. Then they go on to other things. Paul laments this development over and over again. He experiences the pain of unfulfilled promises, unfinished projects, and unsatisfying partings. He also experienced the pain of desertion. Demas, mentioned here favorably, eventually left Paul, “having loved this present world” (2 Timothy 4:10).

Galatians 5:7-8: You were running a good race. Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth? 8 That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you.

3. “The way of Jesus is always local and ordinary”; Eugene Peterson (The Message).

v17. JESUS talked about the rewards of faithful service. Paul repeated that promise, talking about crowns and stars for faithful believers.

The BOOK OF HEBREWS highlights determination and perseverance as an essential dimension of FAITH. "He who comes to God must believe that he IS, and that he REWARDS those who diligently seek him."

A. Paul calls it a work "in the Lord," a work that was being done "in the Lord"—

1. In the Lord's presence. When Archippus received this work, he had a sense of God's presence with him, a tremendous knowledge that he was walking with God. He was absolutely convinced that God had given him this work to do.

2. In the Lord's power. This was not a work that Archippus could do on his own. It was a work that required the presence and power of the Lord. So he was a companion with God in this work that Paul speaks of.

3. Think now of the work that you took up when you were operating "in the Lord." It was a work that reminded you that God was with you. You felt that you were a fellow worker with God himself in this work. And it was a work that you knew God was doing through you—that he was empowering you to accomplish. This work "in the Lord" is of utmost importance to each of us. And we must fulfill it. We do not age out of this work committed to us. We age into it.

B. Received in the Lord—v17. Received rather than invented. This work that Archippus was involved in was something he received from the Lord. He was passive in the receiving. It was not something he initiated. It was something God initiated in him

1. God has given you an assignment. Do you know what it is? You received it "in the Lord." It came from God and you know it. The work you received would bring God glory. It would exalt the Savior.

2. You received the baton. Did you complete the course? Paul writes, "Behold, I show you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye...Therefore, be ye steadfast, always abounding IN THE WORK OF THE LORD, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." It was not evil things that were competing for the time and talent and resources of Archippus. It was LESSER THINGS. You can give your life to lesser things—all of it—and never complete the work to which you were called IN THE LORD. Remembering chains. The chains rattled as Paul took up the pen to write the concluding words of this letter himself. They were a constant reminder of his purpose—Christ! Passion for Christ was the fire that burned in his bones—the driving force of Paul's life. Poem "If"?

Questions

1. Do you feel that you might be the understood subject of "Tell Archippus...?" If not, who is?
2. What does this mean when you say "See to it that you..."
3. Is there some work, maybe a lot of work, that never really gets done? (house cleaning, washing clothes and dishes, etc.).
4. Some tasks are more like projects that can be unfinished or finished. What does it mean to "complete the work"?
5. What kind of work would be "in the Lord"?
6. Share an assignment that you believe you received "in the Lord."
7. How does "remember my chains" here at the end of the letter influence your understanding of "complete the work"?