

COLOSSIANS – CONCLUSION

The final chapter of this compelling little book seems at first sight to be just some personal notes about Paul's friends after the weighty issues of the first three chapters. Nothing could be further from the truth. The people Paul refers to are there to illustrate the principles he has been teaching. Paul never wasted words.

The first verse belongs in chapter three where Paul has been talking about what enjoying our riches in Christ looks like in practice in different groups of people – husbands and wives, fathers and children, and then slaves who are to look past their master on earth to their Master in heaven and serve Him. Earthly bosses may be difficult, unreasonable and inconsistent but the Boss in heaven is everything we would want a boss to be. Now he deals with the other half of the work relationship, the master himself. If the master remembers that he also has a Master in heaven whom he is to serve, he will treat his slave as he would want to be treated.(4:1) Gradually as he continues to mature in Christ and so to enjoy his spiritual riches it will occur to him that his slave is just a fellow slave of the same Master and so they are brothers.(Philemon 15-17)

Paul began this letter with prayer for the Colossians,(1:3,9) in which he longed for them to discover how rich they were. Now he concludes by urging them to pray for him. He wants their prayer relationship with God to be as his is, wholehearted, alert to God and the dangers He will warn us about, and thankful. He wants them to pray that he will have open doors of opportunity to teach the mystery, Christ in you.(4:2-4) At the same time he realises that if they desire this for him, they will let God do the same in them and that this will affect everything they do,(4:5) and say(4:6). He wants them to be as excited about grace, the riches of Christ, as he is. He knows that this is the only message that can preserve a society from going rotten, as salt was used to do with food in Paul's day.

Two of Paul's spiritually rich friends are carrying the letter to the Colossians, Tychicus and Onesimus. Tychicus was from Asia, of which the main city was Ephesus.(Acts 20:4) He was probably therefore one of Paul's Bible school students from his two years there.(Acts 19:9,10) He also carried a letter to Ephesus(Eph.6:21) and Laodicea.(4:16) Paul valued him not just as someone who could deliver a letter without losing it but as a fellow worker who could well encourage the Colossians to read the message and apply it. He would later be sent yet again to Ephesus for the same reason.(II Tim.4:12) Onesimus had his own very special reason for making this journey. He had a letter for his boss, Philemon, from whom he had run away only to meet first Philemon's friend, Paul, in Rome, and then the Lord Jesus as his Saviour and Master in heaven.(4:7-9)

Aristarchus is in trouble again! He is Paul's fellow prisoner. He was from Thessalonica (20:4) and had been caught up in the rioting in Ephesus and nearly become a victim in Paul's place.(19:29) He had sailed on the same ill-fated ship which took Paul to Rome.(Acts27:2) The next of Paul's friends in Rome is a real surprise. John Mark was the young man who had wanted to be a missionary but had dropped out when the going got tough.(Acts 13:13) His cousin, Barnabas, had persisted with him when Paul gave up,(Acts 15:37-38) and Barnabas' encouragement had obviously worked because here he is now as one of Paul's valued co-

workers.(4:10). Paul was later to say how highly he regarded him,(II Tim.4:11) so presumably he had grasped the message of Colossians and learned that though he was a failure, Christ in him could do it. Eventually he was to write one of the gospels. What a transformation!

Jesus Justus had a lovely nickname, 'the Just'. You could count on him to be absolutely fair.(4:11) He too had learned how rich he was. Epaphras we have already met as the missionary to Colossae.(1:7) Here we discover that Colossae was his home town but that he was so excited about his riches in Christ that he had gone to the neighbouring towns too. He was still committed to the growth in Christ of his own people, and listening to God for further instructions as to how to help.(4:12,13)

Luke, Paul's long time travelling companion, was still there.(4:14; II Tim.4:11) His occupation as a physician gives us insight into the careful medical details of his two books, his gospel and Acts. Demas is there for the moment but later would desert Paul.(4:14; II Tim.4:10) Perhaps he was robbed of his confidence in his riches in Christ?

Paul's final greetings give us a few quick glimpses into lives. Nympha let her home be the meeting place of a Christian fellowship. If we are rich in Christ we will welcome all those whom God sends into our homes. The Laodiceans are for the moment enjoying all that they have in Christ but a later generation would have forgotten.(Rev.3:14-22) Perhaps this generation failed to teach the next one?(4:15,16)

Archippus receives a personal reminder to get on with whatever the Lord had told him to do, to use his spiritual riches wisely.(4:17)

Paul says goodbye. He is in prison so he cannot come but his letter can travel in his place. Never, he says for the last time, forget the grace of God, how rich you are in Christ!(4:18)