

More Than Filler

Colossians 4:7-18

Tychicus will tell you all about my activities. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts, and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you of everything that has taken place here.

Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, welcome him), and Jesus who is called Justus. These are the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me.

Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God. For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis.

Luke the beloved physician greets you, as does Demas. Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house. And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea. And say to Archippus, “See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord.”

I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.

Prayer

Let's be honest with one another. Have you ever asked this question: “are there filler verses in the Bible?” Perhaps it's only me, but sometimes I', reading along and I think: how can this passage possibly be a double edged sword? These verses can't even divide perforated paper, much less my soul and my spirit. Anyone else?

Since we're being candid, Paul ends several of his epistles this way. Think of Romans: deep theology, strong application, a passionate call to take the gospel beyond our borders and then? He flops down 16 verses of “say hi to brother Bob”. Fortunately, he recovers in the last 11 verses, but man are verses 1-16 real needed?

So, here's our challenge today. We have 12 verses that can easily look like filler. In fact as I was reading some of your were probably thinking “this should be quick”. But I want you to know since I was assigned this passage pack in February, I have been praying that God's purposes for these verses might become evident to us.

Before we dive in, I do have a confession to make. When the sermon schedule was established to cover Dan's sabbatical, the only Sunday I could preach was the last one. Admittedly I was a little envious of Ryan, Steve and Eric because they got the powerhouse

passages while I was left sweeping the floor after the party. But my calendar was what it was.

Then COVID happened and everything shifted 3 months. I expected the sermon schedule to be reshuffled but that was not the case. Ryan, Steve and Eric still got the heart of Paul's letter and I got the chips at the bottom of the bag. And now I don't have a calendar to use a crutch.

Thankfully, the Spirit has used this envy party of mine to reveal some things to me. First I am prone to wander. Envy, lust, greed, pride, they are all like weeds in a garden. I didn't plant them and I don't want them but they keep coming. Second, Jesus' grace is more than enough. Over and over again as I read, as I pray, as I hear my brother preach, Jesus says "I my grace is sufficient. I have come to seek and to save the lost. As the Father has loved me so I have loved you. And It is finished" And third, I have been reminded that all scripture (not some) is breathed out by God. And that the word of God will accomplish the task which God has intended for it.

Before I dive into the text for today, I think a quick review is in order. As many of you know our overarching theme for this series has been gospel hope. Early on we learn the Colossian church was faced twin struggles. On one side were the super spiritual folks who were saying faith in Jesus is good, but true hope comes by adding various things to your faith. On the other side people were saying strip away anything that is earthly and get rid of everything that might be connected to this sinful world. But as we've walked through this book, God has reminded us that our hope is not in doing more and more or cutting down to less and less. Our only hope, our gospel hope is in Jesus Christ alone.

We also learned that our gospel hope, our hope anchored in Jesus alone is both a future and a present hope. It is a future hope, because Jesus has take on every sin of yours, every sin of mine and has nailed them to the cross. Because of this he has reconciled us with our Father and facilitated our adoption into the family of God. And, it is a present hope because In Christ we have been born again. The men or women we used to be no longer exist. We are now free to live in obedience to God through the union we have with Jesus right now, today. This impact our marriages, our families, our jobs, our churches, our neighborhoods, our politics, our spending, and our scrolling. Everything in our life Jesus claims as his own.

And that brings us to today. If you were Paul, how would you wrap up this short but weighty little letter? What eloquent doxology would you tag on the end? My guess is you would end it the way Paul does. But on closer inspection, the Spirit has given us some gems that really drive home the real purpose this letter and the real practical implications of our faith in Christ.

As I've read through this passage, I think there are four elements Paul wants us to see from five different groups of people. Now, those good at math, you may think 4 points might take more time than we've got left. Very true. So I will simply touch on 3 of these implications and wrap up our time with the fifth.

Point #1 - It is important to tell the story of what Christ has done. Paul highlights two men Tychicus and Onesimus, who were with him in Rome. As Paul is writing to the Colossians, much of this is theoretical. What difference does faith in Christ make in the day to day?

Tychicus and Onesimus are firsthand observers of the changes occurring peoples lives.

So here's question #1: Are we gossiping the gospel? If Colossians is about gospel hope, how is that hope being manifested in our lives? These men are not laying down great theological treatises. They are simply encouraging hearts by showing all that Jesus is doing. Will you join me in being more intentional about sharing the reason for the hope that is in us?

Point #2 - It is important to support and welcome those who are workers for the kingdom of God. Aristarchus, Mark and Justus were all fellow workers of Paul. And as they bring comfort to Paul and do the work of kingdom, they themselves need encouragement and support.

So here's question #2: Which workers for the kingdom of God are you actively supporting through prayer and other means. Along with this, how are we individually and as a church being an encouragement to those the Spirit has called into full-time ministry?

Point #3 - Church is not a building and church is not a once a week semi optional gathering. Church should be people living life together, sharing there highs and lows and challenging one another to fulfill their ministry. Luke, Demas, Nympha and Archippus are all living out gospel hope in the context of a local church.

So here's question #3: What is your view of the church? I know we all know the Sunday School answer that the church isn't the building but its the people. But do we really live that way? What if we viewed our homes as an extension of the church? What if we viewed the men and women we call brother and sister as if they really were our brothers and our sisters?

Now point #4: Look with me again at verses 12-13 "Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God. For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis."

Here Paul makes a simple but profound statement that has challenged me over the past few weeks. Epaphras struggles in prayer on behalf of the Colossians. What does this mean? One clue is in the original language. The word struggle has the same root as agonize and would have also been used for the effort necessary to win a race or accomplish a difficult task. In fact Paul uses this same word to describe his own approach to ministry in Colossians 1:29 "For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me."

Another clue is what Epaphras is praying for. Rather than the usually stuff that you or I might pray for, Epaphras is praying that the Colossian Christians would grow in their maturity in Christ and that they would have a deep assurance. Is also asking that these things be anchored in the will of God. If you are anything like me you know praying this way is hard and 5 minutes can seem like an hour. But I don't think that's why Paul characterizes this type of prayer as struggle.

Consider this for a moment: Think of the entire Colossians sermon series. What jumps out to you? Is it the centrality of gospel hope? Is its Paul's desire that believers would be filled with the knowledge of God's will? Is it the preeminence of Christ? Is it Jesus death blow to our sin

and guilt and shame? Is it our adoption into the family of God? Is it the word of Christ dwelling in us?

Whatever your high point of this letter may be, my question to you is the same: how do you get from where you are to the Spirit is calling to be? I will give you a hint, its not passively watching Netflix. Instead the first, most crucial step is wrestling, struggling, straining in prayer. And not just prayer for ourselves and our family. Prayer for brothers and sisters in Christ. Prayer that they might grow in their love for Jesus. Prayer for our lost neighbors and co-workers. Prayer for the abortionist, prayer for the atheist, prayer for believers who are suffering and dying for their faith.

Here at LEFC, we are on the verge of our year of prayer. While we will be rolling out the details over the coming weeks, one thing is clear: God loves our prayers and they are precious to him. Eloquent or simple, long or short. Well thought out or spur of the moment, each and every prayer of each and every believer is a sweet smelling incense before his throne.

So what to we do with this? How is God pressing us even in this moment? In one sense, I can only answer that question for myself. You see while the Spirit is tugging at each of us, he may be tugging me in a different way that he is tugging you.

That said, there are some general truths we should all consider. The first is the most crucial and without it this entire sermon collapses on itself. Prayer, telling of God's work, supporting and encouraging those who are working in the kingdom, indeed everything Eric and Ryan preached about over the pass 4 weeks rests on this one thing: you must be born again.

In a church life LEFC, it is easy to assume we are all believers and we have each stoped striving to save ourselves. But I've been around long enough to know that's not necessarily true. Some one in this room, someone listening online, some one watching right now, may know a ton about Jesus, but not really know him. Not trust him heart and soul. Perhaps like Corinthians you have Jesus plus your good works, or your "right" political view or your church attendance. Maybe you have Jesus and your sacrificial giving, or your refusal to use social media, or associate with the "wrong" crowd.

I say all of that to say this with 100% confidence: friend, Jesus is calling you today to trust him alone. Jesus' hand is stretched out to you as it was to Peter who sank so quickly in the storm. I plead and pray even now, cling to Jesus with all that you have.

And for those of us who have walked with Jesus, 2 weeks, 2 years or 2 decades, I would say this: take every verse seriously. God may be calling you to wrestle in prayer. He may be calling you to be the encourager lifting up your brothers and your sisters whose eyes have fallen off their risen savior. He may be pressing you to be the one to go, across the street, across the building, across the country or across the world. How will you know? How will I know? We each need to seriously ask our Father to show us his will.

One last thing and then were done. Paul ends with this statement: Grace be with you. While this is not the flowery doxology of Romans 16, it is the common way he closes most of his

letters. God's grace is the fuel of our faith. Jesus has absorbed the just wrath of the Father so we can receive the blessings and benefits of sons and daughters of the King. Today, we are here by grace, tomorrow we will wake up and go to work by grace and one day we will close our eyes and open them to see Jesus face to face by grace.

May the grace of Christ be with you.

Prayer