

Text: Colossians 4:7-18

Theme: Farewell, faithful friends.

Sermon delivered by Reverend Dele Agbelusi at Evening Worship on 18/09/2011 at 6.00pm.

It is not very difficult to understand a person's traits and character if you take time to read through their writings. By reading through Paul's letters, especially the present section, we can see at once that Paul had a great affinity with people. He was a true people - person. He did not just remember names; he cared deeply for those whom he counted as his friends. Paul was greatly loved because he loved greatly. This final section of his letter is rich in personal messages and greetings and only his letter to the Romans can be compared to it.

(Verses 7-9) He begins the farewell section with Tychicus and Onesimus.

Tychicus, a beloved brother: Apparently, the Colossian Christians didn't know who Tychicus was. He would carry this letter to them (will tell you all the news about me). Apparently Epaphras, who brought the news from Colosse to Paul in Rome (Colossians 1:7), would not return to Colosse soon; so Paul sent Tychicus instead.

Tychicus is mentioned in Acts 20:4 as one of the men who came with Paul from the Roman province of Asia to Jerusalem, to carry the offering of those believers to the needy Christians of Jerusalem and Judea. The reference to Tychicus is almost word for word identical with Ephesians 6:21-22. He was evidently the bearer of the letter to the Ephesians as well as this one. The most significant thing about him was that he was a 'faithful minister'. He had a call and was faithful to that call, and that gave him drive and direction. But he did not allow this single-mindedness to prevent him being a dear brother and a fellow-servant. Some Christian workers are faithful servants but not very 'dear' and not good 'fellow - servants' either. This is particularly true of the strong, devoted, driven types. They are extremely busy and absorbed in fulfilling their mission, but no one would ever refer to them as 'dear'. And they are so taken up with their own ministry that they cannot work with others. Tychicus was a well - rounded person, faithful in his ministry, a dear brother and a fellow-worker.

He is with Onesimus, our faithful and dear brother! Onesimus was a runaway slave who had almost certainly robbed his master, then escaped and came into contact with Paul in Rome. There, Onesimus became a Christian and a dedicated helper to Paul. He is the subject of the letter to Philemon in which Paul urged the slave owner to welcome Onesimus back as a brother in the Lord because he had been so helpful to the apostle. Paul *could have* written about Onesimus, "the escaped slave who I am sending back to his master." Instead, he called him "a faithful and beloved brother", and let the Colossian Christians know that Onesimus was now "one of you".

(Verses 10-11) Greetings from three of Paul's faithful Jewish friends.

Paul adds four more names to his greetings list in this section. **Aristarchus, Mark, Justus and Epaphras.**

Aristarchus: He was a Macedonian from Thessalonica (Acts 20:4). He was Paul's travel companion, and was with the apostle when the Ephesian mob seized Paul (Acts 19:29). He was also with Paul when he set sail for Rome under his Roman imprisonment (Acts 27:2).

Here Paul calls him “my fellow prisoner”, so he was obviously with Paul in prison, probably on a voluntary basis. From his record, it seems that Aristarchus had an interesting habit of being *with* Paul in hard times.

Mark is also mentioned: Remember him? Paul and Barnabas had a violent quarrel over Mark, and Paul appeared to have little confidence in the young man who seemed ready to run at the first hint of trouble (see Acts 15:36-40). Now about 12 years later, the wound has been healed and Mark is clearly one of Paul’s fellow workers. Elsewhere he is described by Paul as “helpful to me in my ministry” (2 Tim. 4:11). Paul says, “...if he comes to you, welcome him”. The grace of God working in Paul meant that time changed him and softened him towards others that had previously offended him. It is from this reference alone that we learn that Mark was Barnabas’ cousin – a piece of information which throws light on the special consideration which Barnabas gives to Mark in the narrative of Acts. It seems that the Colossian Christians knew who Barnabas was hence Paul identified Mark in terms of his relationships with Barnabas; either this was through his reputation, or through further missionary journeys that were not recorded in the Book of Acts. It reminds us that the Book of Acts is an *incomplete* record of the history of the early church.

Jesus who is called Justus: Of this man, we know nothing except his name. He is numbered among these four men, who comforted Paul in his Roman custody preceding his trial before Caesar. It is worth noting that at that time, Paul had only three fellow workers with a Jewish heritage. Yet these three did a great work.

Paul was in Roman custody because of a Jewish riot on the Temple Mount over the mere mention of God’s offer of grace to the Gentiles (Acts 22:21-22).

(Verses 12-13) Greetings from Epaphras.

We met Epaphras earlier in our study. There, Paul told us several things about him; now he adds, “He is always wrestling in prayer for you”. The Greek suggests heavy toil to the extent of pain. The foundations of this man’s character were set deep in the soil of prayer. Prayer is hard work, and Epaphras worked diligently at it, especially knowing the danger of the false teaching in Colosse. So, Epaphras prayed that the Colossian Christians would “stand perfect and complete in the will of God”. This is a wonderful prayer to pray for anyone.

Paul called Epaphras a “servant of Christ Jesus”, using a phrase that he often applied to himself, but never to anyone else, except here and in Philippians 1:1 where he speaks of himself and Timothy together as *servants* of Christ Jesus. There is no doubt in my mind that the secret of Epaphras’ spiritual success lay in his prayer life. He was great in soul because he prayed much, and because he prayed with the unselfishness which marked all he did. Earnest and persistent prayer was the secret of his sanctity. The secret is available to us all.

(Verse 14) Greetings from Luke and Demas.

Paul ends his greetings with the names of Luke and Demas. Luke often accompanied Paul on his travels and was with him in Rome during his imprisonment. Demas was also a companion of Paul, but sadly later deserted him because of his love for this world (see 2 Tim. 4:10).

In referring to Luke, Paul called him a dear friend. The authorised version says: “Luke the beloved physician”. This is the one passage that informs us that Luke, the human author of the

Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts, was a physician. We also see that his works are written with a more scientific, analytical mindset (Luke 1:1-4) and have much detail that a physician would be interested in (Luke 4:38, 5:12-15, and 8:43).

(Verse 15) Greeting to Nymphas and the Laodiceans.

Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and Nympha and the church in her house. “Much ink has been spilt over the question whether the individual here mentioned is a woman (Nympha) or a man (Nymphas). Both forms are found in the manuscript tradition, and certainty seems impossible on this (fortunately not very significant) point.” (N.T. Wright).

Having no buildings of their own, the Early Church met as “house churches.” Because few houses were large, there were usually several “house churches” in a city, with a pastor or elder over each one, as we can see from such verses as Romans 16:5, 1 Corinthians 16:19, Philemon 2 and Acts 12:12. We must remember that there was no such thing as a special Church building until the third century.

(Verse 16) Instructions for spreading the message in this letter.

Paul requested that his letter be read in the Laodicean church as well, and the Colossians in turn were to read the letter from Laodicea. When Paul and other apostles wrote letters to churches, the letters were simply publicly read in the congregations. It was a way for the apostles to teach the Church even when they could not personally be there.

Apparently, Paul wrote a letter to the Laodiceans that we do not have. We should not assume from this that our treasure of inspiration is incomplete. The Holy Spirit has chosen to preserve those letters that are inspired for the church in a universal sense.

It is W. Barclay’s opinion that it may be that this “missing” Laodicean letter was actually the letter to the Ephesians. He says: “It is well-nigh certain that *Ephesians* was not written to the Church at Ephesus but was an encyclical letter meant to circulate among the Churches of Asia. It may be that this encyclical had reached Laodicea and was now on the way to Colosse.”

(Verse 17) A special word to Archippus.

Though it is dangerous to read between the lines, one cannot help feeling that there is a slight suggestion in these words that Archippus was a man who did not find it easy to follow through on things. Even Paul’s description of him as a ‘fellow - soldier’ in Philemon 2 does not prevent the insinuation that here, he was drawing attention to a matter that Archippus needed to work on. Paul wanted Archippus to be encouraged and strengthened, but he did not make this appeal to Archippus directly. He asked that it come to Archippus *through* the Colossians (or the Laodiceans).

“Presumably he would be present when the letter was read, either in the Colossian church or, later, when it had been sent to Laodicea. This was perhaps calculated to impress him the more with the solemnity of his responsibility to carry out his service.” (Bruce). Therefore, it was *more fitting* for the Colossians (or Laodiceans) to say this to Archippus than for Paul himself to say it to him. He needed to hear this from the people around him: “Fulfill your

ministry.” When the Colossians spoke up, then Archippus knew his ministry was *wanted*. “Many an *Archippus* is sluggish, because the *Colossians* are silent.” (Dyke)

Was Archippus the kind of man who allowed himself to be so absorbed by the marginal that he had little drive for the central issues of his life? Paul’s words – “See to it that you complete the work you have received in the Lord” – strike home to every one of us I am sure. The words of the apostle convey no censure, but are rather intended to stir him up to further diligence, and to encourage him in the work, seeing he had so much false doctrine and so many false teachers to contend with.” (Clarke) The temptation to do the easier things and not to follow through on issues plagues us all.

(Verse 18) Conclusion.

As was the custom in that day, Paul generally dictated his letters, and personally signed a postscript with his “own hand”. “Remember my chains”: There is much emotion, sorrow, and strength in this simple phrase. Paul not only knew the confinement and loneliness of the prisoner; he also had the uncertainty of not knowing if his case before Caesar’s court would end with his execution. The chain clanked afresh as Paul took the pen to sign the salutation. He was not likely to forget it himself. However, although the chains have gone, his words have not. They leap across the centuries and come home to our hearts with as much force as they did to those to whom they were directly addressed.

“Paul’s references to his sufferings are not pleas for sympathy; they are his claims to authority, the guarantees of his right to speak.” (W. Barclay)

So ends an important letter, one written with the desire to prevent believers being drawn away from the truth of the gospel, and one in which Paul has encouraged us to see Christ as all-sufficient and all-supreme. Christ is ‘all, and is in all’ (3:11). Paul’s conclusion is the only one possible for the apostle of grace, confronting a heresy emphasizing elaborate hidden mysteries and righteousness through works. We can only go forward safely in the Christian life if we depend on the **grace of God with which we came to know the Him and by which we can make a success with our walk with Him.**