

Sharing New Life

Series: Jesus ...Changes Everything (Colossians)

Brad Bailey – June 18, 2023

Intro –

Today... we are concluding our series drawing from the Biblical Book of Colossians.

We will engage just a few verses from the **final chapter of this book.**

But to appreciate the big picture...let me **remind us of how this letter began.**

Colossians 1:1-2, 6 (NLT)

This letter is from **Paul**, chosen by the will of God to be an **apostle of Christ Jesus**, and from our brother Timothy. ²We are writing to God's holy people in the city of Colosse, who are faithful brothers and sisters in Christ.

May God our Father give you **grace** and **peace**.

...⁶ This same Good News that came to you is **going out all over the world**. It is **bearing fruit everywhere by changing lives**, just as it **changed your lives** from the day you first heard and understood the truth about God's wonderful grace.

With these words... Paul introduces himself... **an apostle of Christ Jesus.**'

Paul has been called to go spread the news of the risen Christ.

He is an **apostle of Christ**...the one **who proved more powerful** than all the false powers of this world... **more than hate and violence** and more than the **self righteous** can ever provide.

It's hard not to see how **God had so uniquely reached out to take a hold of Paul**... for unlike the other disciples of Jesus... **Roman citizen**...and a **rising star** among the **religious leaders**.

Paul was the one **God chose to send into the wider world**... particularly the Roman ruled world that had come to rule over a vast portion of the known world. Rome had **extended it's reign into Asia**... it what is now **modern day Turkey**...and the major city of **Ephesus was now it's major center**.

Paul had **gone to Ephesus**...where he had mentored a man named Epaphras (Ep-af-RAS)...who had **gone to Colossae** and shared about Christ...and from which this local **gathering of lives had begun**.

Here's a fun unplanned personal connection... I got to visit Ephesus.

(Family trip... stayed over a couple days in Turkey... and spent a day touring the old city... highly excavated.)

I promise only a few quick pics...

1. A walk down what was the **central shopping street**

2. The restored front of the **old library**

3. A **statue of the pagan goddess** ...Diana. During New Testament times, Ephesus was famous throughout the known world for its magnificent temple built in honor of the pagan Roman goddess Diana... known to the Ephesians as Artemis

4. **Here is the great Theater of Ephesus**, which was the largest public arena in the city. the semicircular Roman theater held 25,000 seats and was one of the largest in the ancient world.

We read about it in the New Testament. In the Biblical Book of Acts... a silversmith creates a riot against Paul. He tells his fellow creators of idols ...

“Men, YOU well know that from this business we have our prosperity. Also, YOU behold and hear how not only in Eph'e-sus but in nearly all the [district of] Asia this Paul has persuaded a considerable crowd and turned them to another opinion, saying that

the ones that are made by hands are not gods. ... this occupation of ours will come into disrepute.
(Acts 19:25-27)

Paul – spoke the freedom of Christ into those who feared they must appease the false gods of this world.

And Paul ...was a **citizen of the Roman empire**...he knew of the type of power... and the **way of peace**. The famous **pax Romana**... which refers to the **peace of Rome**... was the **great peace** that the empire offered... a peace that would provide for those who would serve the emperor and the empire. Those too weak were left to die...and those deemed a threat by way of any other loyalty...would be made an example of. It was a peace based solely on accepting that the state... the powers that rule... are supreme...and your value and rights are only given by them.

Paul – spoke the freedom of Christ into those for whom the powers of this world declared held their value and worth.

And Paul was a **member of the Pharisees**...the **ruling religious leaders**...he knew that the very laws of God... **apart from God... only leave us guilty...condemned.**

He is **not the apostle of a new religion**...but of **that which fulfilled** what no religion can settle.

Paul – spoke the freedom of Christ into those who feared they would fail at the religious laws or moral laws.

The powers that reign in this world... cannot provide the ultimate peace...and grace...that we need.

Greets them with a blessing of grace and peace. (vs.2 - 'May God our Father give you grace and peace.')

These are precisely **what neither Rome nor the religious establishment had brought** to the lives they ruled.

Grace - freedom that is bestowed from beyond ourselves

Peace – true restoration of relationship... not simply personal inner feelings but true peace between all (shalom)

We do well to stop...and realize these are what God has to bless us with...and to receive these... grace...and peace. And to realize that these are what we are to share with others.

And he **explains in verse 6...**

“This same Good News that came to you is going out all over the world. It is bearing fruit everywhere by changing lives.”

This change is for all people... from every culture. It is the hope that can liberate every soul.
It's spread of changing lives was just beginning. For the **Roman Empire would fall...** and **countless others rise and fall...** while **this movement changed lives now on every continent and every country.**

And then he speaks of **what is ultimately at hand... jumping to verses 13-16**

Colossians 1:13-15

¹³For he has **rescued us from the kingdom of darkness** and **transferred us into the Kingdom of his dear Son,** ¹⁴who **purchased our freedom** and forgave our sins.

¹⁵ Christ is the visible image of the invisible God.

He existed before anything was created and is **supreme over all creation**,

What brings change?

It is the **power of being rescued from a kingdom of darkness**. This world is ruled in darkness. Darkness represents **that which is outside of God**...outside of the source of everlasting life and love.

In such darkness...**we cannot see who we really are**... and we live in a world in which **every vain claim to power and authority will rule over us**.

But through the death and resurrection of Christ... **God has rescued us**.

When Jesus gave his life as a sacrifice... he **bore the consequence** of **our separation** from God...and **acceptance of his sacrifice for us** becomes a means by which we can be reconciled to God. **And when he rose from death**... he **declared that God still rules over created life**.

Jesus brought nothing less than **that which offers liberation**... a **release to all who have been held captive** by the powers that rule this world.

Paul has spoken of the grand drama... and now he **closes his general call to that of how this is manifest in relationship to the larger world**... the larger community of lives who do not yet know of this new life. Here **we hear something of the great drama and mission of life**.

These are the **words of one who knew he may be at the end of his earthly life**... so what he says is reflects a desire to convey what matters most. He wants to help every life discover and develop what matters most.

Colossians 4:2-6

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. ³ **And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains.** ⁴ **Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.** ⁵ **Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.** ⁶ **Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.**

In these final words... we hear the call to join in the **great mission of sharing life with others**... **sharing the freedom that Christ brings**.

Here Paul sets our minds towards the mission that animates his life... and it is that of **making the mystery of this new life known**.

Fitting that we do so on the celebration of Father's Day.

An element of the very nature of a father... is that which comes from the capacity to create life.

And to the degree that one serves that role well... it's a role we honor.

There is something deep in what that role represents in us.

As we gather around Jesus...we are taken to a higher view.

The role of creating new life is indeed sacred... but it is not the ultimate source of life... but rather reflects something of God.

God who creates...and breathes his essence... and restores that by His Spirit.

The ultimate life comes from God...and we can all share on spreading that to others.

Paul has no savior complex... he has gotten over any sense that he is the hero of the story... and we need to get over that too. He sees his life not as an answer to what others needs... but as a bridge... a bridge to hope.

- Important... because **any assumption** that those who claim to receive this life of Christ **are superior** will deflate everyone... because **we know it's just not true.**
- If you are hear today... perhaps just exploring... I'm sorry for the way you may be made to feel like you are not as good or smart as those who claim to know Christ.
- Paul held no such pretense... referring to himself as the 'chief of sinners' ...one who was simply met in God's timing and plan.
- **God did something** to get a hold of him... **but also brought people to help him understand** what God was doing.

> **It's his relational emphasis that is important to hear.** While programs can serve the personal nature of relationship... there is no substitute for the relational spreading of this new life.

We become a relational bridge in the grand drama that we are living in... a bridge which can manifest and make clear the mysteries of Christ.

If we want to live as those who share life... there are **four qualities** that are referred to. (While not listed as some kind of formula... they are the **four qualities** which we find **most consistently** in **both Jesus** and now taken up by **Paul.**)

Sharing New Life in Christ involves...

1. Praying that engages us in the mission

Paul begins...

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. ³ And **pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message**, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. ⁴ **Pray that I may proclaim it clearly**, as I should.

It's probably only natural that we should be called to begin in prayer.

This mission brings us into the spiritual realm. Paul had come to grasp that **we live in the intersection of two dimensions...** and relate to both. This is what the disciples of Jesus had begun to recognize was at the center of his life. So they ask him.. 'Lord teach us to pray.' And his model of prayer was directed to the Father in the heavenly real... and asked... "Let your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.'

Clearly Paul sees this to include the mission of God's reign reaching out and reclaiming lives. This is what we saw flow out of Jesus as he touched the least and lost and said his very reason for coming was that of seeking and saving those lost.

"with an alert mind" or "**being watchful**" (**wide awake**)

When is God actively at work? Always. That is what Jesus grasped as he lived fully alive.

John 5:17 (NLT)

Jesus replied, "My Father is always working, and so am I."

Sharing New Life in Christ involves...

2. Sacrificing our comfort for the sake of others

Paul **notes in verse 3** that **this mission has led to being in chains.** ('...for which I am in chains.')(Likely he is under **house arrest**...where he is bound to his home while waiting trial.)

Paul's mention doesn't reflect a sense of 'what went wrong'... but more a sense of 'as is fitting of what this involves.'

Resistance is natural.

He wasn't looking for conflict...but he accepted that it is inevitable.

The world has become **so adversarial...so volatile... about every issue...** that I find people are becoming **either more combative... or more avoidant** of any conflict...at least directly with friends and family.

The sacrifice being described here is not that which comes from being mean or manipulative... but of simply sharing what we believe.

This makes me think of my relationship to resistance... and in how I need to understand the nature of this mission. If I only want to share with those who won't have any resistance...I won't have much relationship at all.

And... then it's really about my comfort... and I haven't become a servant for others.

(I have found that when I am simply sharing my story... over time...people respect the convictions. People sense that I have risked their response....that I am willing to stand on what I believe.)

We must simply remember, we are not marketers but witnesses.

It also causes me to think about **finding mission in the mundane**. Paul is bound up in a jail cell or small home. We can think that if we are involved with a mission... it will always be the venturing out that is in adventure. But Paul understands that the mission is always at hand... even when life may seem limited. Paul doesn't allow the limits to steal the mission.

Sharing New Life in Christ involves...

3. **Seeking opportunities** to genuinely relate

On screen:

Colossians 4:2-6

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. ³ And pray for us, too, **that God may open a door for our message**, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. ⁴ Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. ⁵ Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; **make the most of every opportunity**. ⁶ Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

Paul's prayer and purpose is 'that God will give us many opportunities to speak'... and that in the same that all who grasp this life will (verse 5) 'Live wisely among those who are not believers, and make the most of every opportunity.'

We get a great understanding of what this means in what he wrote in...

1 Corinthians 9:19-23 (NLT)

Even though I am a free man with no master, I have become a slave to all people to bring many to Christ. ²⁰ When I was with the Jews, I lived like a Jew to bring the Jews to Christ. When I was with those who follow the Jewish law, I too lived under that law. Even though I am not subject to the law, I did this so I could bring to Christ those who are under the law. ²¹ When I am with the Gentiles who do not follow the Jewish law, I too live apart from that law so I can bring them to Christ. But I do not ignore the law of God; I obey the law of Christ. ²² When I am with those who are weak, I share their weakness, for I want to bring the weak to Christ. Yes, I try to find common ground with everyone, doing everything I can to save some. ²³ I do everything to spread the Good News and share in its blessings.

This is such a rich expression of how we should live. It's about common ground. It's not about becoming deceptive by pretending to be what we are not... but recognizing that we actually can relate

to the various places people find themselves in. They are a part of us. I think the **great tragedy** is that we **make more** of our **differences** than what we **share in common**.

If someone is open...but hesitant to be told what to believe... I know that feeling... it's a very real part of me.

If someone is **turned off by what they call 'organized religion'**... which usually reflects that seems to emphasize outward conformity but lack real inner integrity... I can relate to those feelings. There is a lot to explore... including how much Jesus spoke so pointedly at this problem.

(Example of fellow parent of child's soccer team telling me about he and his wife's struggle with religion just last week... especially with the role of the priests... then after about 15 minutes... apologized for going on so intensely... and asked me what I do. After his surprise... rather than estrangement... I found lots of opportunity to identify with their tensions with religion... and to help recognize that Jesus confronted many of the same issues.)

The truth is that we are living amidst a culture that has already been exposed to at least some idea of Christianity.

Most people think they know what we believe... but in truth have a **very confused understanding**. Inoculated... and **developed defensive beliefs**.

- ***Religion has become the problem.***
- ***No one should claim there is only one way.***
- ***Religion is in conflict with science.***

Now Paul refers to the nature of Christ... as a mystery... not because it is mystical... but in reflection of the definition of mystery that reflects simply what is unknown or unidentified. So we want to help people identify the true hope that lies in Christ. This leads to the last element involved...

Sharing New Life in Christ involves...

4. **Sharing with the sensitivity** that allows the unidentified hope ('mystery') of Christ to be understood

On screen:

Colossians 4:2-6

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. ³And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. ⁴Pray that I may **proclaim it clearly**, as I should. ⁵Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. ⁶**Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.**

Paul speaks of **conversation**...

Not simply speaking at someone...but WITH someone.

I know how hard it can be... how common it has become to think we can just show people Christ by our actions.

But sharing who Christ is and what he offers...involves speaking.

Talking about who Christ is and what he has done... is **not something we should shy away from**... nor **should** we feel the need to shy away from it. If we are appropriate in our conduct and sensitive to relating to people appropriately... we really can rise above the awkwardness that generally comes because we **think**

we have to be perfect and thus become pretentious... or because we **think we have to bring some formula** that doesn't really reflect what we understand.

Paul wants an opportunity SPEAK. ('...opportunities to speak about his mysterious plan concerning Christ.') (Hefner - 'Christian faith is an experience of the Word: God spoke creation into being, the prophets spoke, Jesus spoke, the apostles and every generation of Christians since then have spoken. And we are to speak. So Paul, does not even try to convince us to speak, rather he focus on how we are to speak.') So he refers to wanting to 'speak as he should'... and all growing in the same.

In this he notes speaking...

- **Clearly** ("that I may make it clear") - **inteligiable**
- **Graciously** - **respectfully**
- **Individually flavored** ('seasoned with salt'; **flavorful**)

When Paul writes, "**know how you are to answer every person,**" he is **not telling us** to know how to **win an argument... but how to help someone know God**. We don't argue or prove people to Christ. Rather, Paul is reminding us that **each person we encounter is unique**, with their own special needs and concerns. We can share the life of Christ in **ways that are sensible** to the unique issues that one is aware of.

Everyone needs a touch from God. But as Christ demonstrated, that touch may be different. It may be the **guiding hand of the Shepherd**, the **healing touch of the Great Physician**, or the **prophetic voice of the True Revolutionary**.

I want to give each of us who claim this life... **an opportunity to consider at least one person** we now who we can pray for. I want us to consider their need... to pray for an appropriate opportunity... and an appropriate response to their needs.

Some of us need to get over ourselves.

We may think our lives are too much of a mess. They probably are. But if God is at work... we can still love people. When someone is remodeling their home... they are still a neighbor.

CLOSING –

Throughout his letter Paul declared how Christ is the one who comes above all the empires and forces of this world... and has begun a new humanity... it is nothing less than the subversive hope of a resistance movement that was set in motion by a leader who came and defied all powers and went ahead... now calling us who to join his way of life... and his mission.

So then let us continue devoted in prayer, making use of the time we have, and allowing the grace that resides in our hearts to issue forth from our lips.

[Story: WOMAN DIED, UNNOTICED FOR MONTHS]

I am reminded of a story that has too often played out.

On March 17, 1992 an 84 year old woman was found dead on her balcony in Stockholm, Sweden. She was sitting on a chair, dressed in a coat and hat with her forehead leaning against the railing. Upon further research it has been learned that she may have died as early as New Year's Eve while sitting on her balcony watching fireworks. Just inside the door of her apartment, policemen found untouched newspapers that dated back to the beginning of January. (In Sweden, papers are delivered to apartments through the

mail slot in the door.) Margaretha Marsellas, a neighbor, realized something was wrong when she saw the woman on the balcony around the clock despite freezing temperatures. [1]

No one wanted to knock on the door.

There are people all around us who may look like they are fine... but they are dying... and need someone to knock on the door.

CLOSING PRAYER

Resources: N.T. Wright, Tyndale New Testament Commentary (Colossians and Philemon)
Sermons on this text by Jason Hefner (From Sermon Central)

Notes:

1. The Houston Post, March 18, 1992, p. A-10