

REAL PEOPLE—GENUINE LOVE

Studies in Colossians

Study 4

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Note: This week, we will look at some details of Colossians 4 and 1; over the next two weeks, Randall Lawton will expound Colossians 3 for the class, in my absence.

INTRODUCTION

The ministry of the Risen and Ascended Jesus is unceasing, in love for his people:

23 Furthermore, the former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office; 24 but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. 25 Consequently he is able for all time to save those who approach God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them (Hebrews 7:23-25).

Jesus always lives to make intercession, to intervene on behalf of his people. As we consider Jesus ongoing ministry, we do so in relationship to real people. Often enough we can read the Bible text, listening for current day similarities, mindful of helpful applications, distilling principles, and discerning theological insights. Remember that Jesus said: 'By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another' (John 13:35). In this study, I hope we can gain a deeper appreciation of the people, and their fellowship together, and the love they have had for one another.

COLOSSIANS 1:1-8; 4:7-18

1:1 **Paul**, an apostle of Christ **Jesus** by the will of God, and **Timothy** our brother,

1:2 To the saints and faithful brothers and sisters in Christ in Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

1:3 In our prayers for you we always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, 4 for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, 5 because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. You have heard of this hope before in the word of the truth, the gospel 6 that has come to you. Just as it is bearing fruit and growing in the whole world, so it has been bearing fruit among yourselves from the day you heard it and truly comprehended the grace of God.

1:7 This you learned from **Epaphras**, our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, 8 and he has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

4:7 **Tychicus** will tell you all the news about me; he is a beloved brother, a faithful minister, and a fellow servant in the Lord. 8 I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts;

4:9 he is coming with **Onesimus**, the faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you about everything here.

4:10 **Aristarchus** my fellow prisoner greets you, as does **Mark** the cousin of **Barnabas**, concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, welcome him.

4:11 And Jesus who is called **Justus** greets you. These are the only ones of the circumcision among my co-workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me.

4:12 **Epaphras**, who is one of you, a servant of Christ **Jesus**, greets you. He is always wrestling in his prayers on your behalf, so that you may stand mature and fully assured in everything that God wills. 13 For I testify for him that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis.

4:14 **Luke**, the beloved physician, and **Demas** greet you.

4:15 Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters in Laodicea, and to **Nympha** and the church in her house. 16 And when this letter has been read among you, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you read also the letter from Laodicea.

4:17 And say to **Archippus**, "See that you complete the task that you have received in the Lord."

4:18 I, **Paul**, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.

PEOPLE

The following names are mentioned in this letter, and so in the community of faith:
What happens to your thoughts of the early church when you see lots of names mentioned?

- **Paul** - a leading Pharisee, trained by Gamaliel (Acts 22:3-21)
- **Jesus** - Nazareth: taught, healed, ministered, loved, Saviour of world
- **Timothy** - mother Jew, father Greek (Acts 16:1-3; 1Tim. 4:12; 2Tim. 1:2-5)
- **Epaphras** - He was a local (1:7; 4:12), and first preached the gospel to the Colossians; visited Paul in prison, telling him of the problems.
- **Tychicus** - It appears that he had paid Paul and Timothy a visit in Rome
- He was a representative of the churches in Asia (Acts 20:4).
- Accompanied Paul on his visit to Jerusalem; common name
- He was with Paul in Greece, accompanied Paul to Troas
- He was sent to Ephesus (according to 1Tim. 4:12) his region
- He, or Artemus, possibly replaced Titus in Crete (Titus 3:12)
- He is warmly described as *a beloved brother*
- He functions as Paul's envoy to the churches (Eph. 6:21)
- Tradition says he was *Bishop (overseer)* of Colophon and a martyr
- **Onesimus** - The slave on whose behalf Paul wrote his letter to *Philemon*;
- He accompanies Tychicus with the Letter to *Colossians*
- He was either the slave of Philemon or of Archippus
- A child to father relationship existed, with Paul (Philemon 10)
- Paul implies that he should be given his freedom, but freely
- An Onesimus is mentioned as a Bishop in 2nd century
- Mentioned in letter to Ephesus, from Ignatius of Antioch
- Some identify him as the Onesiphorus, in 2Tim. 1:16-18
- **Aristarchus** - Acts 19:29; Acts 20:4—possibly of Thessalonica (Acts 27:2)
- **Mark** - a young boy eyewitness of Jesus (Mark 14:50-52).
- - It is good to see strained relationships restored, among Christians.
- **Barnabas** - An encourager (Acts 4:36), he disagreed with Paul (Acts 15:36-41)
- **Justus** - his real name was 'Jesus'—a common name, until 2nd century AD
- **Luke** - Beloved physician (Col. 4:14); In Acts 16:11-20:6, Luke joins Paul
- **Demas** - he greeted the Colossians in the letter (Col. 4:14)
- **Nympha** - she (or he) had a church at home (4:15); only 3rd century AD when churches first owned public worship centre buildings
- **Archippus** - possibly Philemon's son (Philemon 2); "complete the task!" (4:17)

SCRIPTURES ABOUT THE PEOPLE IN THE COLOSSIANS LETTER

Acts 22:3 "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, educated strictly according to our ancestral law, being zealous for God, just as all of you are today. 4 I persecuted this Way up to the point of death by binding both men and women and putting them in prison, 5 as the high priest and the whole council of elders can testify about me. From them I also received letters to the brothers in Damascus, and I went there in order to bind those who were there and to bring them back to Jerusalem for punishment. 6 "While I was on my way and approaching Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone about me. 7 I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' 8 I answered, 'Who are you, Lord?' Then he said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are persecuting.' 9 Now those who were with me saw the light but did not hear the voice of the one who was speaking to me. 10 I asked, 'What am I to do, Lord?' The Lord said to me, 'Get up and go to Damascus; there you will be told everything that has been assigned to you to do.' 11 Since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, those who were with me took my hand and led me to Damascus. 12 "A certain Ananias, who was a devout man according to the law and well spoken of by all the Jews living there, 13 came to me; and standing beside me, he said, 'Brother Saul, regain your sight!' In that very hour I regained my sight and saw him. 14 Then he said, 'The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear his own voice; 15 for you will be his witness to all the world of what you have seen and heard. 16 And now why do you delay? Get up, be baptized, and have your sins washed away, calling on his name.' 17 "After I had returned to Jerusalem and while I was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance 18 and saw Jesus saying to me, 'Hurry and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about me.' 19 And I said, 'Lord, they themselves know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you. 20 And while the blood of your witness Stephen was shed, I myself was standing by, approving and keeping the coats of those who killed him.' 21 Then he said to me, 'Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'"

Acts 20:4 He was accompanied by Sopater son of Pyrrhus from Beroea, by Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, by Gaius from Derbe, and by Timothy, as well as by Tychicus and Trophimus from Asia.

Ephesians 6:21 So that you also may know how I am and what I am doing, Tychicus will tell you everything. He is a dear brother and a faithful minister in the Lord.

2 Timothy 4:12 I have sent Tychicus to Ephesus.

Titus 3:12 When I send Artemas to you, or Tychicus, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there.

Mark 14:50 All of them deserted him and fled. 51 A certain young man was following him, wearing nothing but a linen cloth. They caught hold of him, 52 but he left the linen cloth and ran off naked.

Acts 4:36 There was a Levite, a native of Cyprus, Joseph, to whom the apostles gave the name Barnabas (which means "son of encouragement"). 37 He sold a field that belonged to him, then brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

Acts 15:36-41 After some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Come, let us return and visit the believers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord and see how they are doing." 37 Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. 38 But Paul decided not to take with them one who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not accompanied them in the work. 39 The disagreement became so sharp that they parted company; Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus. 40 But Paul chose Silas and set out, the believers commending him to the grace of the Lord. 41 He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

Philemon 10 I am appealing to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I have become during my imprisonment. 11 Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful both to you and to me. 12 I am sending him, that is, my own heart, back to you. 13 I wanted to keep him with me, so that he might be of service to me in your place during my imprisonment for the gospel; 14 but I preferred to do nothing without your consent, in order that your good deed might be voluntary and not something forced. 15 Perhaps this is the reason he was separated from you for a while, so that you might have him back forever, 16 no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a beloved brother--especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord. 17 So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. 18 If he has wronged you in any way, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. 19 I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand: I will repay it. I say nothing about your owing me even your own self.

PEOPLE IN CHRIST, LOVING PEOPLE

In *Peanuts*, Linus Van Pelt famously says: "I love mankind, its people I can't stand". In the early church, the wonders of Jesus Christ's resurrection and of God's love and future for the world—in giving eternal life, through Jesus in his living, ministry, death, resurrection and ascended power, and outpoured Spirit—was so dynamic, that a deep mutual love broke out in the community, the people . . . in wonderful ways:

Acts 2:44 All who believed were together and had all things in common;⁴⁵ they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Jesus said: 'I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father' (John 14:31). The love of Jesus for the Father, and of the Father for Jesus his Son, flows from the suffering cross and grand resurrection of Jesus, by the Holy Spirit out into the lives of the early church. This was the intention of Jesus ministry: 'I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them' (John 17:26). This love is so significant for the outworking of the gospel in the world, that when it is lost, or diminishes, Jesus admonishes the early church for such a loss. Indeed he spoke strongly to the churches very near to Colossae in the words we find in Revelation 2–3:

Revelation 2:1 "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands: 2 "I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance. I know that you cannot tolerate evildoers; you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them to be false. 3 I also know that you are enduring patiently and bearing up for the sake of my name, and that you have not grown weary. 4 But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. 5 Remember then from what you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. 6 Yet this is to your credit: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 7 Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. To everyone who conquers, I will give permission to eat from the tree of life that is in the paradise of God."

Revelation 3:14 "And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the origin of God's creation: 15 "I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. 16 So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth. 17 For you say, 'I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing.' You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. 18 Therefore I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire so that you may be rich; and white robes to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen; and salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. 19 I reprove and discipline those whom I love. Be earnest, therefore, and repent. 20 Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me. 21 To the one who conquers I will give a place with me on my throne, just as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. 22 Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches."

EYEWITNESSES OF THE RISEN CHRIST

This love and wonder is founded on the eyewitness accounts of real people. Richard Bauckham, in *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* (Eerdmans, 2006, p. 8), recently argued that scholars miss a crucial point: 'in imagining how the traditions reached the Gospel writers, not oral tradition but eyewitness testimony should be our principal model'. Eyewitnesses of the Risen Jesus (eg. Mark, and Paul) were amidst such communities.