AM Colossians 3:1-11 & 4:7-18 Finally

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[0:00] And to Colossians chapter 3, it's on page 1185 of the Church Bibles.

! And today we're actually going to finish it with the final verses from chapter 4.
But I want to just prefix that with chapter 3 and verses 1 to 11.
It's especially verse 11 that I want you to keep in mind when we look at the greetings at the end. So Paul writes, If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.
Set your mind on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.
[1:25] When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Put to death, therefore, what is earthly in you, sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

On account of these, the wrath of God is coming. In these, you too once walked when you were living in them.
But now you must put them all away. Anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.
Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices, and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge, after the image of its creator.
Here, there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free.
[2:39] But Christ is all, and in all. And then we turn over to chapter 4.

And this is the passage we're actually going to look at a little later. Chapter 4, reading from verse 7 to the end. Tidicus 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.
[3:57] And Jesus, who is called Justice. 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 of 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.
[5:22] I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.
Let's bow together again for the last time to Paul's letter to the Colossians.

And the passage we read, chapter 4, from verse 7 to the end. I began this series on Colossians in January 2024, three years ago.
And all we have left now are the final greetings. Hence my title, Finally. Now when you and I write letters, the last few lines are usually a bit of a formality.

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Hope you enjoy your holiday. Say hello to Uncle George for me. That kind of thing. You might think then, that there won't be very much to get out of Paul's final greetings.
But Paul is so full of the Spirit that even these final lines breathe an air of spirituality. They show, firstly, something of how the church had grown.
[7:01] As I was saying to the children, in 30 odd years. There are so many people, so many churches. They show us, secondly, something of Paul's relations with the many Christians that he knew.

the love, the love, the concern, the appreciation that he has for them. Paul had written earlier about family relationships.
Well, here is Paul's relationship with the family of God. These are his brothers and sisters in Christ. And he's more concerned for them than he is about his own sufferings in prison.
They show us also the variety of people that there were in the early church.
Paul had written back in chapter 3. And I read this verse specially.
[8:16] Here, there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free. But Christ is all and in all.

He doesn't mean by that that there are no differences, but there are no barriers. And that, I think, is beautifully illustrated in these greetings.
We'll have to do just a little bit of digging to see that, but there are here people of all kinds of different backgrounds. And they're all bound together in Christ.
Just like the leaves on that plant that I showed to the children. I'm going to divide it into five parts. All of them, I promise, very brief. The two messengers in verses 7 to 9. Greetings from Rome in verses 10 to 14.
[9:25] Greetings to Laodicea 15 to 16. An appeal to Archippus, verse 17. And then a final personal greeting, a request and benediction in verse 18.

First of all, though, let me just remind you of the background. The date is about AD 60. Paul is under house arrest in Rome.
After three long missionary journeys, he had returned to Jerusalem, bearing gifts from the Gentile churches. And the believers there had welcomed him.
But the Jews had heard that he was telling the Gentiles they didn't need to keep the law of Moses. And they were outraged.
And there was a riot. And Paul, rather, had ended up in prison. Eventually, he was sent on to Rome, where he is being kept under house arrest, awaiting trial.
[10:41] Conditions probably were not as bad as they might have been. He was evidently allowed visitors. He was allowed to share the gospel with people who came to him.

He could write letters. It was here that he wrote Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. But it can't have been pleasant.
He says he was in chains. And there would certainly have been Roman soldiers guarding him. Now, these letters had to be sent by hand.
There was a postal service in ancient Rome. The cursus publicus. The riders who went from city to city.
But that was only for the official documents. Ordinary citizens had to make their own arrangements. And so we come to the two messengers.
[11:46] In verses 7 to 9, Tychicus will tell you about my activities. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and a 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. These two men, Tychicus and Onesimus, had a two-fold duty.
First, they were presumably the couriers, carrying Paul's letter to Colossae, and probably taking the letter to Ephesus and Philemon as well.
Imagine that, being entrusted with the original manuscript of Scripture. You have it personally in your hand.
[12:50] If you lose it, the word of God is lost to the world. What a responsibility. What a task to take it to Colossae.

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It was 1,300 miles. It would have taken at least 30 days. These were deeply devoted and reliable men.
They had to be for such an important task. Who were they? Well, Tychicus first appears in Acts 20 and verse 4 as one of Paul's companions on the way to Jerusalem.
Came from Asia, the same province as Colossae. Whether he had remained with Paul throughout or whether he had gone home and then come to Rome as a visitor, we don't know.
But Paul had a high opinion of him. He's a beloved brother, a faithful minister, a fellow servant in the Lord.
[13:57] Notice, incidentally, the order here. He is first and foremost a beloved brother.

After that, he is a minister and a fellow servant. We should, I believe, value one another first for what we are and only then for what we do.
We love one another as brothers and sisters. Even if that brother or that sister doesn't appear to be doing anything at all, they're still your brother and sister.
We regard them with love. And if they are doing something, well, that's over and above. We love them all the more for what they do. Paul certainly valued Tychicus.
We later find that he sends him to Ephesus in 2 Timothy and possibly to Crete as well in Titus 3.
Onesimus, we find in the letter to Philemon.
[15:09] And we learn there that he was a runaway slave. He's from Colossae. He'd come to Rome, the big city where he could get lost in the crowd, but he didn't get lost.

He got saved. He came to Paul in prison and he proved very useful to Paul. The letter to Philemon is a very tactful letter to his master suggesting that he should receive him back again as a brother.
And Paul has a word play on his name. The name Onesimus means useful. Previously he said he was useless to you. But now he's useful.
But Paul says nothing here about his past. Doesn't even mention that he was a slave. Describes him simply as our faithful and beloved brother who is one of you.
So here is Tychicus, presumably a free man, traveling with Onesimus who is a runaway slave. They're together as brothers.
[16:34] Isn't that precisely what Paul means when he says that in Christ there is neither slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.

Christ is all that matters to these men and Christ is in them both. And that's how it should be with us.
Whoever we are, whatever we've done, we are brothers and sisters in Christ. These two men then are to deliver Paul's letter as couriers.
But there's something more. They're not only couriers but also messengers. They will tell you of everything that has taken place here.
Tychicus as a minister will also encourage them presumably by preaching the word. Paul has sent them for this very purpose he says that these men might tell you what's going on here in Rome.
[17:44] He wants them to know. He hasn't actually said very much about himself in this letter. That's rather striking isn't it? When we write letters it's usually all about us isn't it?

The holidays we've had our hospital appointments and so on but not Paul. He entrusts all of that to Tychicus and Onesimus.
Partly this was for safety. If he had written about these things in the letter there's all likelihood that the Roman censor would have got hold of it. And if perhaps he'd said something a little bit unkind about the way the soldiers had treated him well who knows what trouble he would be in.
But also I think it's because to Paul spiritual things were more important. He had better things to write about than how heavy the chains were.
But he knows that these friends in Colossae they will want to know. They love him. He's their brother and they will want to know his news.
[18:58] and so he asks Tychicus and Onesimus to tell them. As brothers and sisters we should and we do care about each other.

And sharing news is actually important. Some Christians like to keep themselves to themselves and tell you nothing.
And they may even consider themselves very spiritual for doing that. But the Apostle Paul sends two of his most faithful men for this very purpose to share news to tell them what is happening.

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Let's move on rapidly. Secondly we have greetings from Rome 10 to 14. And he begins with three Jewish Christians in verse 10.
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 Justice.
[20:14] These are the only men of the circumcision in other words Jews among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God and they have been a comfort to me.

You sense a certain disappointment that there were only these three Jewish Christians who stood by him. Paul loved his people he loved Israel he longed for Israel to be saved so should we.
And here were just three Jewish Christians standing by him but still three was better than none.
Aristarchus is mentioned in Acts 19 he was a Macedonian from Thessalonica who was with Paul during the riot in Ephesus.
He was also one of Paul's companions on the way to Jerusalem. In Acts 20 he was actually on the ship with Paul when he went to Rome.
He calls him now his fellow prisoner. Mark was the young man that he and Barnabas had taken with them on their first missionary journey.
[21:37] And Paul and Barnabas had fallen out over him when it came to choosing a companion for the second journey because Mark had given up halfway through. Paul didn't want him but Barnabas wanted to give him a second chance.

Well that rift seems to be healed now. Paul is happy to commend him. In 2 Timothy he describes him as useful for the ministry and of course he became the author of one of the gospels.
Jesus justice is not mentioned anywhere else but what a name. Now along with these three Jewish Christians Paul adds three Gentiles.
First Epaphras in verse 12. 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 the will of God.
He says back in chapter 1 and verse 7 that they had actually learned the gospel from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant calls him a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf.
[23:01] It was Epaphras who brought news of Colossae to Paul in Rome and now in Rome he is still praying for them indeed struggling in prayer the Greek is agonizube agonizing like Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane and not only for Colossae verse 13 I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and Hierapolis to nearby cities I wonder if Paul could say the same of you that you've worked hard for the church and that you have agonized over it in prayer not just mentioned it in your morning prayers but agonized over it because you want so much to see the church grow secondly there's

Luke in verse 14 the beloved physician greets you Luke was Paul's companion throughout the later journeys also of course the author of gospel and acts and Demas what do we say about Demas Paul says nothing about him Demas sadly fell away later to Timothy 4 10 Demas in love with this present world has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica maybe that's why he said nothing about him maybe already even at this stage he wasn't sure what to say about this man there was something not quite right about him even amongst Paul's closest companions there was one bad apple it's no surprise is it after all amongst
Jesus' twelve apostles there was one traitor and we mustn't be surprised if amongst so called Christians even those who appear to be close to us there are some who let us down three Jewish Christians three Gentiles isn't that again a fulfillment of that verse in Colossians three here there is neither Greek nor Jew circumcised or uncircumcised it doesn't matter the racial differences are not important what matters is that they are united with Christ Jews and Gentiles as we should be today whatever our national racial or whatever background it is
Christ who unites us thirdly greetings to Laodicea verse 15 give my greetings to the brothers of Laodicea and the church in her house Laodicea was about nine miles from Colossae and the two churches had close links it is good to have fellowship with other churches sadly Laodicea also later fell away revelation three Christ condemns them as a lukewarm church Demas Laodicea both individuals and churches can let us down but that was a generation later they were still faithful at this point Paul greets especially Nympha and the church in her house interesting phrase occurs a number of times
Romans 16 5 Paul greets Prisca and Aquila and the church in their house 1 Corinthians 16 19 Aquila and Priscilla send greetings with the church in their house Philemon 1 verse 2 speaks of the

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church in your house some of the older commentators took that to be just a picturesque way of describing the family but almost certainly Paul means literally what he says there were no church buildings in those days and it was perfectly normal for Christians to meet in someone's house there was back in the 1970s a movement called the house church movement which advocated going back to that no need to go to that extreme buildings are useful but there must have been a real sense of being a spiritual family all meeting together in someone's house as for nymph some translations turn her into a man nymph but there's no reason why a woman shouldn't open up her home for the church
[28:42] Lydia did so in Philippi why not nymph if so it's another example of the inclusiveness of the church male and female are not mentioned in that verse in Colossians 3 but they are mentioned in Galatians 3 28 where Paul says that in the church there is no male or female for you are all one in Christ Jesus now Paul sets limits on women's ministry 1 Timothy 2 12 he does not allow a woman to teach or have authority over a man and we mustn't think of nymph as being in charge of the church but men and women are equally saved by the blood of Christ they're equally loved in the sight of

God and they are equally able to serve the Lord apart from the greetings Paul also orders that Colossae and Laodicea should share letters verse 16 when this letter has been read among you have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans see that you also read the letter from Laodicea another example of church fellowship the letter from Laodicea is a bit of a mystery it's generally assumed to be a letter from Paul to the Laodiceans it's only from Laodicea in the sense that it's passed on from them well if so that letter is lost there is a Latin manuscript from the 6th century called the letter to the Laodiceans John
Wycliffe actually included it in his Bible but it's thought to be a forgery and it is actually just a rehash of verses from Paul's other letters notice incidentally that Paul expects his letters to be read out aloud to the whole congregation there is something special about reading scripture aloud we all have our own copies we could all read silently on our own if we wish and I hope you do but it's special when we come together and the word of God is read publicly fourthly an appeal to Archippus verse 17 say to Archippus see that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord Archippus is mentioned just once elsewhere Philemon 1 verse 2 appears to have been a prominent member of the church in Colossae possibly acting as minister in place of
Epaphras whether this is a gentle rebuke for not fulfilling his ministry or simply an encouragement to do so we don't know but either way it's a reminder to us to fulfill whatever ministry the Lord has given to us Paul says in Romans 12 having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us let us use them if prophecy in accordance with our faith if service in our serving!
the one who teaches in teaching the one who exhorts in exhortation the one who contributes in generosity the one who leads with zeal and the one who does acts of mercy with cheerfulness so we're not just talking about ministers preaching the gospel here we're talking about any kind of ministry that God may have given you why do people not use the gifts that the Lord has given them lack of confidence perhaps discouragement from past failures absorbed too much in the world we all need to take this to heart and fulfill ministry finally a personal greeting request and benediction verse 18 first a personal greeting
[33:27] I Paul write this greeting with my own hands quite likely the letter was written by an amanuensis someone else wrote it down at Paul's dictation that was common in those days this personal handwritten greeting gives it authenticity then a personal request remember my chains Paul had asked for prayer in verse 3 for his ministry that was the most important thing but he does need prayer as well for his personal circumstances we too should remember those who are suffering for Christ and there are thousands hundreds of thousands of them all over the world and they are crying out for our prayers

Hebrews 13 3 says remember those who are in prison as though in prison with them and those who are mistreated since you also are in the body remember them in prayer that God would uphold them and give them courage and if it's his will release them and remember their sacrifice as an inspiration in all the challenges of your own life finally the benediction grace be with you short but precious grace what more can we want than grace by grace you are saved through faith by grace you are enabled to live the Christian life Paul began this letter grace to you and peace from God our father now he ends with grace as it says in

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Zechariah he shall bring forth the top stone with cries of grace grace to it let me close with three questions first are you part of this great network of Christians worldwide are you a leaf on the plant as I said to the children earlier Paul mentions 13 Christians by name here and there are many many more in the three churches that he mentions all of them are precious brothers and sisters faithful servants in Christ there are hundreds of Christians here in Dumfries there are millions worldwide are you among them a Christian is simply someone who has trusted in
Christ as their Lord and Savior who recognizes their sin and their need for cleansing from sin by the blood of Christ that was what bound these Christians here together with each other and with Paul and that is what binds together true Christians today are you part of that community how tragic it would be to be left out of it how tragic to come along to a church and actually sit in the congregation and yet not really be part of that Christian community if you're not yet a Christian trust in Christ trust in that glorious Christ that Paul has been writing about in this letter and be saved secondly if
Paul were to write to our church today what would he say if he'd mentioned you by name what would he say about you would he describe you as a faithful brother and sister in the Lord would he regard you as a fellow worker would he say that you were a comfort to him or to anyone else would he be impressed with your prayers would he have to remind you to fulfill your ministry and finally does our church fulfill that glorious description back in chapter 3 of the inclusive church neither Jew nor Greek slave nor free nor any other barrier neither
[38:47] Scotsman nor Englishman nor Iranian neither young nor old neither rich nor poor all these distinctions so important to the world fade away in the church because Christ is all and in all let's close our service now by singing again of the church church

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