

Colossians: The Supremacy of Christ (Col. 4:7-18)

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[0 : 00] Is this on? Great. Have you ever noticed something? People tend to unnecessarily drag out endings.

! In fiction, in a book, it could be that the author is unable to conclude a story, and so the book drag on and on. In a TV show, perhaps the writers don't want to lose their revenue. We can all see where the ending goes, but the show just drags on and on.

We see this in real life as well, during goodbyes. We don't want the pain of separation, so the goodbyes just drag on and on.

Maybe that's even because there's a fear of loss. We may not see this person again. We see this in Acts 20 when the Ephesian elders, they're not willing to let Paul go because they're not going to see him again.

So we know this pattern in life. We all recognize it. But here's the problem. When we start from familiar observations of life and use that as the lens to interpret Scripture, that's wrong.

[1 : 16] We cannot interpret Scripture based on our experiences alone. That cannot be the lens through which we understand God's Word. Because when we do that, we come to a wrong conclusion that the opening greetings and this concluding goodbyes in New Testament letters, they're just perfunctory formalities. That is not true.

They tell us something very important. You see, all Scripture is God-breathed, including these long goodbyes, and we should invite God to use them to teach and prove and correct and train us so that we may be complete and equipped for every good work.

So, this letter to the Colossians, which we've been studying for the last several months, contains some extraordinary truths.

Just looking back, what we learned right from the beginning, we learned that everything, visible and invisible, exists because they were created by, through, and for Christ.

It summarizes the incarnation and atonement of Christ in this way. Let me read from chapter 1. For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him, and through Him, Christ, to reconcile everything to Himself, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through His blood shed on the cross.

[2 : 48] What a stunning summary of the grandeur of Christ. Then it goes on to summarize the good news, the gospel in this way, that God erased the certificate of debt with its obligation that was against us and opposed to us, and has taken it away by nailing it on the cross.

He disarmed the rulers and authorities and disgraced them publicly. He triumphed over them in Him. Praise God. So, in just a few pages, Paul powerfully articulates the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ in this short letter.

So, after reading all that profound theology, it may be tempting to quickly skim over these final goodbyes. That is a mistake because these goodbyes have a lot to teach us about how to live in response to the truths that were articulated earlier in this letter.

So, what we learn in these personal notes of Paul is that there are a lot of things Paul told his readers earlier, and what we may easily miss is that in these final goodbyes, he's actually illustrating his own teaching.

For example, earlier, it just so happened that Brendan read that. He talks about doing everything in the name of Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him, and that in everything we do to work heartily as for the Lord and not for men.

[4 : 25] He's actually going to be illustrating that in these final goodbyes. So, with that, let's dive into this passage that Pastor Scott just read. In this passage, we will see a few things.

First, we will see how God's redemptive purposes are revealed through relationships between individual Christians and their roles in the life of the church.

Redemption, relationships, and rules. We will see each of these three things in this passage. Let's talk about redemption first. Everything in this passage is because of the redemption of Christ. Unless we understand and internalize the gospel that God loved the world in this way, that he sacrificed himself on our behalf at the cross, so that whoever believes in Christ will not perish but have everlasting life with him and for him, unless we understand that truth, we cannot live out the implications of that truth.

So, that is the background to this. The redemption of the cross of Christ that we read about is the background to this, and this is all about how then to live in response to that truth.

[5 : 45] So, the second half of this letter transitions from that orthodoxy, right teaching, to orthopraxy, right living, in response to the truth.

Because of who Christ is and what he has done, how should we live? We are given real-life examples of what it means to put on the new self, which is being renewed in the knowledge after the image of its creator.

Paul said that earlier in the previous chapter. He's giving real-life examples of that teaching here. Because of the cross of Christ, God repurposes lives that were previously destined for destruction and repurposes them as instruments of his glory and the good of others in a way that is extraordinary but also relatable and ultimately perplexing.

How does God do this? We see glimpses of that repurposing in three lives. One is Paul, one is Mark, another one is Onesimus.

We will see how each of these three lives were repurposed by the redemption of Christ. Let's talk about Paul. Many have utterly incorrect views of Paul, and the distorted views of Paul that people have actually reveal a misunderstanding of the Christian life itself.

[7 : 18] In the imagination of some, and I make it clear that it's imagination, in the imagination of some, Paul was this rigid doctrinal watchdog just going out of the way to correct everybody else's theology and behavior.

That's not true. In the imagination of some others, Paul was this fearless lone ranger who forged ahead to do whatever God called him to do, regardless of whoever was with him or not, I'm just going to do what God has called me to do.

That's also wrong. The real life Paul, that old Pharisee in him, was crucified with Christ, as he tells us in Galatians.

Paul's new life in Christ was characterized by deep love for other believers. And his work for Christ was in the context of deep relationships with other believers.

God's grace had irrevocably changed Paul's life. Subsequently, the grace of other mature believers like Barnabas shaped Paul's life.

[8 : 35] And based on the grace he received from Christ and the grace he experienced from other believers like Barnabas, Paul then showed that grace to other people in his life.

And we see two examples of those who are recipients of Paul's grace in Mark and Onesimus. Let's talk about Mark. Like Paul and many other Jews in that era, he had both a Jewish name, John, and a Greek name, Mark.

By the way, Saul was his Jewish name, Paul was his Greek name. It's not the before Christ, after Christ. No, they had a Jewish name and a Greek name. So he had a Jewish name, John, and a Greek name, Mark.

That was very common. And his mother, Mary, was a prominent figure in the early church. When you read in Acts 12, when Peter was arrested, where were the apostles gathered to pray?

In Mary's home. So Mary was a prominent figure. This is Mark's mother, was a prominent figure in the early church, who likely hosted the church, or at least the gatherings of the leaders of the church in her home.

[9 : 51] So she was a trusted, prominent figure in the early church. So Mark had a good lineage, if you will, in the faith. But it's not just his mother. We are talking about his cousin, Barnabas.

Barnabas also, by the way, had a Jewish name, Joseph, but he was better known by his Greek nickname, Barnabas. And he had a cousin who was a prominent leader, mother who was a prominent leader.

Barnabas, by the way, was a senior guide or a mentor figure to Paul. So Mark comes with an extraordinary lineage of faith, if you will.

But despite that prominent background, Mark also had a prominent blemish in his past. We see in Acts 13 that he abandoned the mission.

To think about the seriousness of it, consider this. Most militaries in the world consider desertion a serious crime, even punishable by death.

[10:54] Why? Because desertion demoralizes the entire troops, the entire army. When you have somebody in the army who abandons the fight and runs away, it demoralizes everybody and leads to failure of a mission, which is why most militaries in the world take desertion extremely seriously.

And in this particular case, Mark's desertion actually led to a conflict between Paul and Barnabas. So he had a very prominent blemish in his past.

But here is the beauty of God's forgiveness and redemption, because that was not the end of his story. Mark kind of disappears from the scene for about 10 to 12 years, but later he shows up in the pages of Scripture again as someone who is more mature and trustworthy and praised by everybody, including Paul.

We know that he was a protegee of Peter, and presumably it's Peter's memoirs that he writes in the Gospel of Mark.

And Paul himself commends Mark repeatedly. Paul could have held this grudge against him.

[12:14] You damaged my ministry. You did something that was harmful for me and for the ministry and for the church, my relationship with Paul. Paul could have held a grudge against Mark.

But he did not, because Paul had experienced God's grace. Paul had experienced grace from other believers. Now Paul is extending that grace to Mark by both welcoming him and publicly praising him.

Paul praises Mark here, and in the letter to Philemon, he praises him, and in the letter to Timothy, he praises him. This is Paul extending grace to someone who had a prominent failure in the past, but by the grace of God, that was not the last word on his life.

Now, let's talk about Onesimus. The account of Onesimus is difficult for us to understand from our cultural lens.

To understand how God's grace played out in Onesimus' life, we have to put ourselves in the shoes of a Roman worldview. And here's the challenge.

[13:27] The biblical teaching is that every man and woman is created in the image of God, and all peoples on earth share a common ancestry.

That is the biblical teaching. However, the Roman Empire did not hold to that worldview. Therefore, in the Roman Empire, slavery was very common.

By some estimates, some 40% of Rome were comprised of slaves. Because they did not have a biblical worldview, this is just how life was, and the Roman law reflected it.

Onesimus was likely born a slave. In fact, his very name means useful. That's his name. Think about having a name.

What's your name? I'm useful. As if he had no identity or value other than his value to his owner. It's sort of a demeaning, degrading name.

[14:26] That's just a name that's given to a slave. So that's his background. And what we learn is that somehow he escaped slavery and on his way out, presumably stole money from his master, Philemon.

And while on the run from the law as a fugitive, somehow he encountered Paul. And through that, he comes to Christ and Paul became a spiritual father to him.

And what we see beautifully is how Paul addresses him. What we see is that though Onesimus was a criminal, according to Roman law, Paul saw him first and foremost as a brother in Christ.

Paul said earlier in Galatians 3.28, and he said this earlier in Colossians 3, here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all and in all.

In Christ, Onesimus received a new identity, not as a slave who was useful to somebody else, but as a beloved brother to Paul.

[15:43] But here's the twist. Contrary to world's wisdom, it is not a life without constraints that is satisfying. We are taught all along that freedom means having no constraints.

It's only living without constraints is satisfying. That is a lie. True joy is in finding the right constraints on your life.

Jesus did not say, go live for yourself. Jesus said, take my yoke upon you. It is in finding the right constraints that we find joy and meaning and purpose in life.

Instead of living as he wished with his newfound freedom, it turns out that Onesimus once again became useful.

In fact, that's how Paul talks about him in the letter to Philemon. There is an interesting play on words over there. Yes, his name means useful, but Paul is saying that he is now useful for the kingdom of God.

[16:48] So with his freedom, Onesimus was no longer living for an earthly master. He was no longer living for himself, but he was living for the Lord.

That is the beauty of the repurposing that comes with redemption. And we see the grace that Paul extends to someone. Paul could have said, well, this guy is a criminal under the law.

I don't want to have anything to do with him. No. Paul takes personal interest and praises this man for who he is in Christ and who he is in the kingdom of God.

That is redemption, the best repurposing possible. So, what do we learn from these lives?

We've talked about Paul. We've talked about Mark. We've talked about Onesimus. What do we learn from their lives? First, God redeems and repurposes whatever flaws, whatever baggage you have in life.

[17:57] We see evidence of this throughout the pages of Scripture. No matter what your baggage, no matter what your history is, God is able to redeem and repurpose your life for his greater purposes.

Recognize this work of God in your own life. This redemption and this repurposing applies to every life.

So, recognize how God's redemptive purpose is playing out in your own life. Second, with Mark, Paul did not hold Mark's past failures against him.

Paul recognized Mark's growth and praised him. So, what's the application? Very simple. We should do that for each other.

It's very straightforward. Each one of us in our relationships, we know something that the other person has done wrong, perhaps to us, perhaps to the church.

[19:04] We know that. That's just a reality of life in a fallen world. But recognize how God's grace is causing someone to grow and praise the person for their growth.

Third, we just talked about this. Paul valued Onesimus not based on who he was in this world, but who he was in the kingdom of God.

We should do that for each other. We must prioritize our adoption into God's family and our standing in the kingdom of God, not on who we are in this world.

We have significant implications of this passage in terms of how God's redemption works in how we live our lives. And that plays out in the second category of teachings in this passage, and that is about relationships.

Members of the body are not independent. They function in rich interdependent relationships within the body.

[20:13] Let's talk about this very letter, Paul's letter to the Colossian church. Paul had actually never been to Colossia. He has never been to this church. Well, maybe he has been to the city, but he has never been to this church.

Yet, despite enormous barriers to long-distance communication, for now, now for us, long-distance communication is easy. 2,000 years ago, long-distance communication was exceptionally difficult.

But despite that, what we see here is that both parties truly cared for each other. Paul cared for the Colossians, and it was reciprocated by how much the Colossians cared for Paul.

Notice, in the end of the passage, in the very last verse, here's Paul asking them to pray for him in his imprisonment. Remember, my chains, is Paul asking for their prayers for his imprisonment.

Why is Paul asking this church he doesn't know anything about to ask to pray for him? Paul reminds them that he is a mere human like the rest of them, and he needs their spiritual support like everybody else.

[21:22] One of the mistakes that people have with Paul is that of this doctrinal watchdog who goes around correcting everybody, picture of Paul, is that Paul only corrected others in the context

of deep relationships.

Paul wasn't going about holding strangers accountable to standards of truth. But Paul also did not ignore the errors of those whom he loved because of what we mistakenly call grace.

Jesus, in his incarnation, we are told by John that he was full of grace and truth, and Paul demonstrated that in speaking truth in love.

We see how Paul dealt with correction in the context of deep relationships in all of his letters. His letters are written to those he loves, those he cares for, not to strangers.

We see two examples of Paul's transformative relationships here with Epaphras and Aristarchus. Let's talk a little bit about Epaphras.

[22 : 32] We read about him in the passage, we read about him in the beginning of the letter. Epaphras was likely a Gentile, he was not an Israeli, he was not Jewish, he was a Gentile who was mentored by Paul, and Epaphras lived what he was taught.

Epaphras served as an extension of Paul's ministry in Ephesus, but as he was traveling about throughout the Roman Empire, living out what he was taught, he made sure to maintain a close relationship with Paul wherever Paul was.

And in this particular case of the Colossian church, Epaphras appears to be the founder of the Colossian church, and perhaps even of the Laodicean church that we read about in Revelation 3, as well as the church in Hierapolis.

In 3 John, John talks about he had no greater joy than to hear his children are walking in the truth. then imagine the joy that Epaphras would have brought to Paul.

He was brought to Christ by Paul, he was mentored by Paul, and now Epaphras is living out by living for Christ and doing things that are pleasing to God.

[23 : 54] Imagine the joy that Paul would have received, that Paul is in prison, but the one that he mentored, he is going around the Roman world living out the faith, and that would have brought immense joy to Paul, just as what John is talking about, his children in the faith walking with the Lord.

That type of relationship is necessary in the body of Christ. Now let's talk about Aristarchus.

Aristarchus is talked about in the latter part of this passage.

Aristarchus was likely Jewish, but he was a Macedonian from Thessalonica and therefore he had a Greek name. Again, going back to those Greek, Jewish people with Greek names, Aristarchus was likely one of those.

And Aristarchus had accompanied Paul on many travels and Aristarchus joined Paul in facing various trials.

We see this throughout the Accountant Acts and Philemon. we see how Aristarchus is just standing side by side with Paul in his hard times. The letter to the Hebrews says in verse 3, 13, 3, Remember those who are in prison as though you are in prison with them and mistreated as if you were suffering bodily with them.

[25 : 23] It turns out that Aristarchus took that lesson to heart. What we are told here is that implicitly that his relationship with Paul was so deep as the text implies Aristarchus joined Paul in his imprisonment to assist Paul.

I don't know, I don't want to know if I go to jail which one of you will come to jail with me. But that is the depth of the relationships that existed in the early church.

That people loved each other, cared for each other so much that they would go to prison with the other person to make sure the other person was okay. So that is the type of depth of relationships we ought to see in the body of Christ.

Finally, the third teaching that we see from this passage is pertaining to roles in the body of Christ. We see a lived out example in Romans 12 and then in 1 Corinthians 12 we are taught by Paul using this illustration of the body, different parts of the body have different roles.

He talks about how the church ought to function just like a body, different parts of the body have different roles. We see lived out examples of that here in these final goodbyes.

[26 : 47] What we see here is that Paul is praising many individuals for different roles that they play in the body of the church because that is the best thing for the church.

That is how the triune God works. A few weeks ago we heard a message on the Trinity where Pastor Scott talked about how different members of the body have different roles and that is true in the life of the church just as different members of the triune God constantly and consistently point to

the other persons of the Trinity we see that Paul is consistently pointing out and praising other members for the roles that they are playing in the life of the church.

We should do that. It is a very helpful correction to our self-centered focus. Do you realize that we are often the focus of our own thoughts?

Most of our thoughts are really about us. We have to get out of that. And one good way is to recognize that because our value and our worth and our identity comes from Christ, we don't have to be so obsessed about our standing in this world.

We see this, I read this earlier from Colossians 3.11 and Galatians 3.28, it doesn't matter what our race, ethnicity, our gender, our standing, our role in this world is, we have a value and worth in Christ and that does not come from our rules and that freedom actually allows us to serve in any way that is necessary.

[28 : 29] Notice that in this letter, read through this carefully, Paul is commanding people like Tychicus and Onesimus. Paul never says that they were his co-workers, he says that they are your co-workers.

Paul is saying that this is about the church, this is about your well-being, he's not thinking about himself. There was no inappropriate sense of ownership of the ministry in Paul.

Christ alone is the head of the body. Paul, like others around him, were simply a member of the body doing a role. And so he's commanding people who are performing different roles.

Let's look at the various roles in the body that are showing up in this text. It's a very quick passage, but let's pause to think about the value of supporters for the church.

We see this throughout the history of the church. I talked earlier about Mary, the mother of Mark, who hosted the church, or at least the gathering of the leaders in her house.

[29 : 39] And later, in Philippi, we see Lydia, hosting the church in her house. And later, in Romans 16, we see Priscilla and Aquila hosting the church in their house.

We see this throughout Scripture that you have people like Mary, Priscilla, and Aquila, and Lydia hosting the church in their house, and Nympha is following that pattern of hosting a church in her house.

The generosity of these people in hosting the church in their house was necessary for the functioning of the church. Unlike now, where the church is an incorporated, non-profit entity that can have its own property, the early church did not.

So the functioning of the church depended on people like Lydia and Priscilla and Mary and Nympha to be generous in hosting the church in their home.

That is important. But that generosity was not just for their local church. That generosity was to extend to other churches as well.

[30 : 48] I mentioned earlier how extraordinarily difficult long-distance communication was in that period. Notice in this letter, Paul is talking about reading the letter from Laodicea and sending this letter to Laodicea.

Travel was extremely difficult. And when you get a letter from Apostle Paul, you want to hold on to it. But that's not what Paul said. Okay, after you've read this, go take this.

Go get on a trip. Go take this to the other church. Oh, by the way, the other church, that letter you got from me, don't hold on to it. Go make the trip and go give it to the other church. We have to be generous with our time and our talent and our treasure in order to steward the truth of God globally, locally, anywhere, and everywhere.

So, looking at the importance of generous supporters, both for the functioning of the local church and for the thriving of churches everywhere, is clear from this passage.

Another aspect of roles that shows up here is hospitality. Hospitality is a non-negotiable command of God, period.

[32 : 13] Like all virtues, however, its application requires some wisdom and discernment. hospitality. The text speaks about two different kinds of hospitality.

Specifically, there is a distinction between personal hospitality and a corporate invitation. Personal hospitality is something that we are commanded to extend to others because God welcomes sinners like you and me.

So, the personal hospitality is a command of God, but there is a separate type of hospitality that's a corporate invitation for a church to welcome somebody into a speaking, teaching role in the church.

That requires a lot of wisdom and discernment. So, there are two different kinds of hospitality. Personal hospitality and a corporate invitation.

Interestingly, it brought up 3 John. 3 John actually is something that is addressing the theme of hospitality. What's happening in 3 John is that somebody did not welcome a true teacher and 3 John, the letter, is rebuking somebody for not welcoming a true teacher.

[33 : 34] Second letter of John is the opposite. It's warning somebody to not give a corporate invitation to a false teacher. So, when it comes to personal hospitality versus corporate invitation, there is a distinction.

What is being talked about in welcoming Mark is not about personal hospitality alone. That's so obvious that you're supposed to welcome another believer is such an obvious thing that, why do I have to tell you this?

That's such an obvious thing. What Paul is really saying is about the corporate invitation. Mark, he is a trustworthy leader and teacher. Give him a corporate welcome as a church.

That is what is being talked about, that Mark is trustworthy, you should listen to him. That type of hospitality is important.

And for us to have a distinction in our personal relationships, how to be generous as God has been generous towards us, but also in a corporate setting, how to be wise and discerning as to who we invite corporately as a church, that's an important part.

[34 : 44] So that's another role, hospitality. There is another role that is mentioned here that we can easily skip past, and that is a very simple role that many of you do not want to hear from me, and that is simply the role of skilled work.

Luke was a Gentile, perhaps from Antioch, based on when the language and acts switched to they, to we, based on the transition, he was perhaps from Antioch, and he was a physician.

He specifically noted in the words a healer, physician, well-trained physician. At one level, we see his physician background in his writings.

It's fascinating when we see Luke's account of Jesus healing the right hand of a man at the synagogue. That account shows up elsewhere, but Luke is the only one who pays attention to that. That was the right hand that Jesus healed. Similarly, at the arrest of Jesus, we have other accounts that Peter cuts off a ear of a servant of the high priest named Malchus, but Luke is the only one who pays attention to, oh, it was the right ear that Peter cut off.

[36 : 05] When you're going to a physician, you want to make sure that they're treating the right hand, the right right. Here, we see his training as a physician come through in the details that he adds color to his text, but there's actually more than that.

That he specifically commended as a physician tells us that he was known for his professional skill, healing. And that he perhaps uses physical healing as a way to point to a deeper spiritual healing. This is a man who combined his professional skills with his ministry calling in a way that wasn't the same person. He is a good example of using all that the Lord has given us for the Lord's work. This is not limited to Sunday morning tasks, but throughout the week in countless ways that the saints, you, are equipped for the works of ministry.

The works of ministry are to be done by the average believer, not just by the paid staff of a church. And Luke is a wonderful example of that.

[37 : 18] A couple more examples of roles. Encouragement. We need to support each other to persevere in our faith. Aristarchus, Mark, and Justice, they encouraged Paul because Paul needed encouragement while in prison.

Tychicus was going to do the same thing to the Colossian church. And Paul encourages Archippus to press on with the ministry that he received from the Lord.

What was the ministry he received from the Lord? That's none of our business. The point here is that Christians must encourage each other to be faithful to the Lord.

Another rule here, praying. In the beginning of the letter, we are told that Paul was struggling for them in prayer. Now he is telling them that Ephaphris was struggling for them in prayer.

Why is prayer a struggle? We see Paul talking about prayer as a struggle. He is talking about Ephaphris' prayer as a struggle.

[38 : 28] Why is it a struggle? Because our flesh, the sinful world, and God's enemy are at work to distract us from this great work of prayer.

Prayer is profoundly humbling because it is an act of dependency on God. and that act of dependency does not come naturally to my flesh.

Prayer is also something in which the focus is on the well-being of others. See, the prayer of Ephaphris was that the Colossians, they may stand mature and fully assured in the will of God. He is praying for the best possible thing for others. The focus is not on himself, but the focus is on the well-being of others, and that is not the way of the world.

And finally, God hears and responds to prayer, and that is not what God's enemy wants. So, for all these reasons, our flesh, the world, and God's enemy conspire against us in praying.

[39 : 34] And that's why prayer is a struggle, but that is a struggle that we must endure because that is the right thing to do. We should pray that way for each other.

A couple of other rules that show up in this passage. There is a role of a messenger. You know, the thing, don't shoot me, I'm just a messenger. This is the way of, like, I'm washing up, I'm just relaying a message.

Tychicus was from modern-day Turkey, and what's called as the Roman province of Asia. He was likely a Gentile who was disciplined by Paul and Ephesus.

He was one of Paul's companions throughout his travels through Greece and Macedonia, and while Paul was imprisoned, he was Paul's messenger to the Ephesian church.

We are told about the Ephesians and 2 Timothy and here to the Colossians, and we are told in Titus that he's the likely messenger to the church in Crete. So here is this guy traveling all over the Roman empire as a messenger of Paul while Paul is sitting in prison.

[40 : 39] Now, think about a messenger. A messenger has nothing original to say. A messenger is just conveying a message. That's the job of a messenger.

But delivers what was entrusted to him to the recipients whose lives depended on the message. But yet, Tychicus was far more than a mere messenger.

He was loved, trusted, and praised by Paul. Paul is not saying, yep, Tychicus, he's just my messenger. No, no, no, Paul is praising Tychicus, how much he loves him, how much he trusts him. Tychicus was entrusted with the money that was collected for the saints in Jerusalem, but he was entrusted with things that are far more precious than money, namely God's word. He had the integrity and wisdom to navigate, I can't imagine how many obstacles he endured in delivering this message to these places.

He encouraged the discouraged and like countless pastors after him, Tychicus was likely the one to convey the contents of this inspired letter and teach it to its recipients.

[41 : 56] He didn't write this, but he was likely the one reading it and teaching this. So, think about the ways in which you can play the role of a messenger of God in someone else's life.

There is nothing mere messenger about this. What we see biblically is that the role of a messenger is a highly valued and praised and vital role in the life of the body.

And finally, there is one role that none of us wants, beginning with me. And yet, it is a role that we see throughout Scripture, and that role is the role of unwanted circumstances.

What we see here is that by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul, while sitting in prison, wrote letters to the Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, and 2 Timothy.

Most people think about Paul and his missionary journeys that lasted in a span of 16 years. But those 16 years missionary journeys that led to the planting of the church were very impressive, but the letters that he wrote in those few years that he was sitting in prison, they lasted way longer than the churches that Paul started.

[43 : 21] And while sitting in prison, the news that the work of the gospel continued, even though its leaders were put in prison, was an enormous encouragement to the early church, they can arrest and kill our leaders, but the gospel is going to go forward, the work of the gospel continues, regardless of whether Peter is killed or Paul is killed, gospel's work continues, is an enormous encouragement to the early church, and that is what Paul is referring to over here.

What does that mean for us? In this fallen world, each one of us has a figurative prism, an unwanted, undesirable life circumstance that we think is holding us back, is holding us captive. I don't know what it is for each one of you, but you know what it is. You know a situation in life that you think is holding you back, you think is chaining you to something that is undesirable. Each one of us has those figurative prisons in our life. What we see from God's word is that no prison can contain the work of the gospel.

And if that was true for Apostle Paul, it is no less true for each and every one of us. So regardless of whatever is the prison that you think is holding you back, recognize that God's work of the gospel in and through your life is not bound by that prison.

[44 : 58] We have to have the boldness and confidence in God's work for God's work to continue despite our figurative prison. So what we see here is that no matter what is the role to which God has put you, whatever is your metaphorical prison, or if your role is to be praying for someone, is to be supporting someone, is to be a messenger to someone, is to encourage someone, no matter what that role is, God wants you to fulfill that role.

And what a great thing that God uses all of these things to build the body of Christ. Our lives must reflect the truth of the supremacy and the sufficiency of Christ.

God is infinitely wise, and His word contains both propositional truths as well as narrative truths like this, of flawed human characters who are transformed by experiencing God's truth and grace.

Hebrews 11.40, in the passage on the Hall of Fame of Faith of Heroes, has a beautiful line in the very end of Hebrews 11. After listing all these great heroes of faith, it says that the work of these heroes of faith is not complete without us.

That is profound. We need to continue the biblical pattern, not to add it or replace it, but to testify to that pattern that each one of us has a role to play in fulfilling the work of others.

[46 : 33] Every generation needs to attest it to the next. When we do so, by God's grace and grand design, each one of us becomes an incomplete, but an indispensable piece in the faithful works and lives of other people's lives.

When we do that, this builds up the church, this glorifies God, and this is for our good. Amen.