

Colossians 4:7-18

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 24 November 2024

Preacher: Eric Morse

[0 : 0 0] I am excited to preach this morning. We get the opportunity to finish up our series in Colossians. We've had a long time in this book and it's been great, but I also want to highlight quickly where we're going.

So next week we're going to be actually starting our next series, which is going to be an Advent series. And in your bulletin, if you grabbed one, there's an insert, and on the insert you'll see a sort of a little handout slash summarization of what we're going to be talking through. And we get to do Advent.

And what Advent is, is it is an opportunity to anticipate the coming of the Messiah, Jesus. Now you may be saying, well why would we go back and anticipate He's already come?

The reason why we go back and we anticipate all over again is to continually put ourselves in a place of expecting, seeing, and savoring the Messiah that God has sent to redeem us.

So that's what Advent's about, is anticipating the coming of Jesus that we celebrate in this country around Christmas in December. So in that series we're going to be talking about the kingship of that Messiah. So we've aptly named it, Let Earth Receive Her King, from the off-sung hymn, Joy to the World.

[1 : 2 0] But from that comes an idea that there is somebody who came. And His coming was not just random, it wasn't irrespective of what is happening in God's plans. In fact, that very one came to be the king of all the earth. To rightly set in place what once was. God as ruler, chief over His people, and His people as loving, loyal servants and followers. So we're excited to start that next week. We'll be in 2 Samuel 7, kicking off that series. So come back next week, all through December, we'll be doing Advent together. I'm excited for that. But for now, we get to finish the book of Colossians. So turn with me. We're going to read the entire section here all in one go. This is the very last part of the book, Colossians chapter 4.

In my Bible, the heading for this is entitled, Final Greetings. And what we're going to see in this section before we read it, is that what Paul is going to do in his prison letter, in house arrest, in Rome, the final part of his letter, is he's going to take a second to give some personal greetings, exhortations, addresses to individual saints in the church in Colossae.

Now we've seen the book. He's already written his thoughts to the whole church. What is my thought for you? I want you to be rooted in Jesus, to savor the splendor of Jesus in all things. But now at the very end, he takes a second, and he does some interpersonal pastoring by intimately speaking to individuals, and yes, even other churches in the area. This is pretty cool. And the reason why texts like these are so important, if you're like me, I can look at some texts that have a bunch of names, and just, and I can wrongly just assume this isn't as important as the heart of the letter. This isn't as important as the messages earlier in the letter. This is just the ending that we have to do because it's in there, but we're really, it's not that important. I've been that. I've thought that. Sometimes I think that now, but here's what I want to teach us and encourage us in. Texts like these are just as inspired as the great marvelous theology that we see in the beginning of this book, where Paul talks about being delivered from the domain of darkness and into the kingdom of his beloved son. That text, that beautiful thought, is just as inspired by our great God as texts like these. So texts like these are important also because they put flesh and bones on the church. Oftentimes, when deep in study looking at these epistles, it can be difficult to visualize the individual people that make up the church body in favor for the church at Colossae. But these texts are important because while preachers like myself generically refer to the Colossians or use pronouns like them when we preach these books, we have to keep in mind, guys, that churches are made up of people just like us. Sinful, broken, but redeemed individuals.

This is true whether you were a member of the 60 AD Colossian church or a member of 2024 local church in Spokane. These were names and faces that made up Christ's beloved bride in Colossae.

And now we get to meet them. How cool is that? So let's read Colossians 4, 7 to 18. Be gracious with my name and pronunciation. I chose one for each, but there's many that are debated.

[5 : 03] Verse 7. Tychicus 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.

Our Starkus, 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, 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 with 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 Damas. Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea and to Nympha and the church in her house.

And when this letter has been read among you, have it read also to 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.

[6 : 24] I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you. There's the end of Colossians.

I want to make a quick point about American society for a minute. Many of us, after leaving today, will go and watch an NFL game in which you're watching two teams that compete against one another.

And usually you have a team you're rooting for. Now, if we live in this place in this time, I'm not one of them, but you may root for the Seahawks. Okay? Four years at SPU, I got a lot of hate for that one.

Not a Seahawk fan. But you may root for the Seahawks for sure they're playing. Or maybe you're a fan of the Olympics and you like to watch competition and watch your favorite runner or swimmer compete.

Or maybe we can go simpler. Let's go into the home. In a family of seven kids, as I grew up in, maybe the competition isn't on the field, but it's for the last bowl of the best cereal in the cupboard.

[7 : 30] Whatever it may be, I want to just offer to us that our society is deeply competitive. Now, competition in and of itself is not an evil thing.

I myself have competed a lot in sports throughout my life and in other arenas. But I want to just offer for us a sobering reality that I think is true of the American church.

And that is that oftentimes, churches can give in to competitiveness with one another. Now, one of my favorite superheroes and supervillains is Batman and the supervillain, the Scarecrow.

If you know anything about the Scarecrow, what does he do? He takes a certain compound drug that he makes and he poisons this people of Gotham so that all they can see when they get this compound in their system is everything they see is something scary.

Something to be feared and something to view in that way. And unfortunately, I think oftentimes in the church, this is actually the way that we can view other churches that are around us.

[8 : 45] I grew up in a church that valued gospel partnerships and then I went to college at a church that saw every other church as having it wrong and not really being on track.

But we are. So I've seen the spectrum of what churches can do in the arena of viewing other local bodies. The reason I share all of this is what we're going to see, what we've already read and we're going to look at together is in the last section of Colossians, we see something absolutely staggering from Paul.

Something absolutely countercultural in every way. What we see from Paul is an unbelievable, warm, beautiful, elegant paragraph.

Yes, speaking to individuals, but hidden in this paragraph is a heart for gospel partnership, even with other churches.

Why is this countercultural? Because again, we live in a society and even in Paul's time where competition was the name of the game. How can you outdo someone else and be better than them?

[9 : 57] But here's the reality for the kingdom of God and for Jesus Christ, the Savior, who unites all believers under one banner, the reality is that the church is called to partnership.

To encouraging, to coming alongside, to equipping, and yes, to even speaking well of other churches. So what we're going to see today is the splendor of Jesus in gospel partnerships.

And here's the big idea. Kingdom advancement takes everybody and every body. Now, I'm not talking individual human bodies there. Let me read this again.

Kingdom advancement takes everybody, all of us, individuals in the church, and every body, meaning other local bodies, local churches around us.

This is what Paul is all about in this section. And we're going to see that. And here's what we're going to do. We're going to work through this person by person. So we're going to start with Tychicus and then we will work our way all the way through every individual quickly, scanning over what is it that Paul is saying about the people that make up the church.

[11 : 06] But then secondly, what is he saying about the other churches and how we should interact with them? And this is to the glory of God. So let's start with Tychicus. He says in verse 7 that Tychicus will tell you all about my activities.

I would offer to us that there are three heavily under-known but massive early church leaders in the New Testament. The three that I'm going to offer are Barnabas, Apollos, and Phoebe.

You may have heard those names. They're all the way through the New Testament and they're very, very important church figures. But they're pretty under-known. If you were to add a fourth to this list, you could probably add Tychicus.

Now, why do I say these are under-known characters? Well, if I were to ask you who Tychicus is, maybe some of you out there who are incredibly biblically literate and have incredible memories and are studious beyond belief would say, Tychicus, I can do it.

I know who that is. But if you're like me, who before this sermon had no idea who Tychicus was, I want to bring us along here. Tychicus played a massive role in spreading the gospel throughout the world in the early apostolic era.

[12 : 18] Let me offer this to us. Here's what Paul says about Tychicus. He's a beloved brother, a faithful minister, and a fellow servant in the Lord. And not only is he all of those things, I sent him to you for this purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts.

Paul mentions this man, Tychicus, by name in the following books. Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Timothy, and Titus. Meaning, pretty much every time Paul picks up the quill, what does he write about?

Tychicus. He's with me. He's one of my dudes. He's one of my guys. I love this. So here's where Tychicus is. He joined Paul on the third missionary journey in the 20th chapter of Acts.

And then from that point on, he never leaves Paul's side throughout all of his ministry. He's like a personal friend and partner in gospel ministry, on the mission field with Paul.

Probably a lot younger. Probably someone that could take on a lot of the things that Paul just couldn't do. But he was so trusted by Paul in ministry that Paul gave him pastoral letters to deliver, hand deliver across the known world to different churches.

[13 : 35] And it wasn't as simple as putting something in the mail that didn't really happen. It wasn't as simple as saying, okay, well I have to hand deliver it, so I'm gonna get on a plane and just keep it in my briefcase and hope that baggage doesn't lose it.

No, no. Traveling and being a letter courier was a massive job that required you to travel hundreds of miles through open land and wilderness, exposed to the elements, oftentimes on a boat, in order to make it to one specific place where you would then say, out of breath, here's the letter.

This is a big deal. To be entrusted as a courier, especially of the great apostle Paul's letters, is a massive responsibility. But not only that, he's trusted by Paul to shepherd the church.

Notice Paul says, he's a faithful minister, and I sent him that you might know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts. In other words, I'm sending you a pastor to encourage you, to probably teach you and preach to you.

Tychicus is a big character in the New Testament. But here's what's so cool about Tychicus. He is the one that took the letter of Colossians to this church.

[14 : 51] And in so doing, he arrives to them with a curated beautiful letter written from the apostle Paul himself, and he reads the words, likely, of Paul to the church as they're gathered.

In other words, think of a sermon. He delivers Paul's sermon. And what's so great about this title that Paul gives him is he calls him a fellow servant in the Lord.

And I want to open up this section about gospel partnership by highlighting this term, fellow servant in the Lord. This is a wonderful description of what gospel partnership really is all about.

What unites us together as Christ followers? Whether it be local or global church, what is it that unites us together? It's Jesus.

It's the Lord. And Paul says, of this guy, the only reason he's who he is and I'm who I am and that we partner together is because we're both fellow servants in the Lord.

[15 : 55] He is our God. We are his servants. And because of that reality and that reality alone, we partner together to do ministry. And this is a great opening for this whole section that I want to encourage us to think this way throughout the rest of this passage, that our calling is to follow Christ.

And when we come alongside each other and follow Christ together, we naturally look to our left and our right and we see other faithful brothers and sisters who are also fellow servants. And in that calling, we march together to serve Jesus.

That is the opening for Paul on gospel partnership. I love this. So now we're going to move on to Onesimus. Onesimus, maybe you recognize this name from the book of Philemon. That's the book that really has to do with Onesimus.

But here's something astonishing. He refers to Onesimus as the following, our faithful and beloved brother who is one of you. Now the title faithful and beloved brother is important because if you know anything about Onesimus, he was once an unfaithful runaway slave of a man named Philemon.

But now Paul considers him later on as a faithful and beloved brother. See, in the letter to Philemon, Paul urges this man who was likely the host of the church and a parent master of Onesimus to take him back and treat him kindly as a brother in the Lord and a slave no longer.

[17 : 24] We don't know why but for some reason Onesimus ran away from his master, Philemon, and he met Paul on one of his missionary journeys. Paul takes him, shares the gospel with him, ministers to him, watches him grow in the Lord, essentially disciples this guy into the faith and then from that place says, okay, you now see that you're a servant of the Lord.

You now see that you should not have deserted your master. You should be faithful to him. So now I'm going to send you back, Onesimus. This is what Philemon's about. And I'm going to write to your master to receive you as a saint, not a slave.

This is unbelievable what Paul does for this guy. But here's what is so amazing about Colossians. The letter of Colossians was carried by Tychicus as we saw, but it was also the epistle of Philemon that was carried at the same time by the same person.

So in other words, Tychicus has two letters, Colossians and the letter of Philemon. And he goes back likely with Onesimus and they go together and here's what Onesimus has to do.

He has to embrace and stand in front of his master that he ran away from. And here's what Paul wants to happen. He wants Philemon to see his former slave as no longer a slave and now as a saint.

[18 : 48] This is marvelous. Notice what Paul says about Onesimus. He is one of you, meaning he probably grew up in Colossae. But I think that one of you phrase is deeper than just he grew up in your same town.

I think Paul also could be saying here he is one of you as a brother. He's not lower in class. He's not a servant or a slave. He is a brother in Christ.

He's one of you. And that's what the gospel does. Remember we saw in chapter 3 of Colossians that Paul says this, here there is neither Greek and Jew circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free, but Christ is all and in all.

Nothing separates us. Only Christ unites us. And God is in the business of redeeming sinners and freeing one's slaves to sin, to freedom in Christ.

And in Onesimus' case, he's no longer defined by earthly servitude but now by heavenly servitude to Jesus. He's a brother in Christ, full stop. Ready for ministry and ready to serve the Colossian church.

[19 : 52] And that's what Paul does. Receive this guy back as a brother and servant of the Lord. How cool is that? So now we move on to Aristarchus. Now Aristarchus, you're going to see in verse 10, Paul's going to call a fellow prisoner.

Here's what's so amazing about Aristarchus. He's a Thessalonican who has been a co-sufferer with Paul in almost every occasion of his suffering. So Paul calls him here a fellow sufferer.

But I want to remind us or maybe point us to Acts chapter 19. We're not going to flip there but I'll just sort of go over it real quick. In Acts chapter 19, Paul goes into with a lot of his friends in the gospel, his partners in the gospel, they go into the theater in Ephesus together.

Now the Ephesian theater was a massive theater. You can still visit it today if you go to Ephesus. I would love to go there someday. You walk into this theater and it's a giant amphitheater where thousands upon thousands would sit and listen to a play or watch a show and Paul in all boldness on one of his missionary journeys takes all of his fellow ministers and pastors, traveling missionaries, they walk into this theater, it says in Acts chapter 19, and Paul starts preaching Christ to people who don't want Christ to be preached.

And here's what happens in Acts 19. It literally says that the people started a riot and violently drug Paul and all of his fellow ministers out of the theater and into the courts.

[21 : 24] That's a long way from the theater to the courts. Drugged them through the ground violently. Who was with Paul when that happened? Aristarchus. But not only that, Paul mentions him here as being imprisoned with him.

Meaning Paul and Aristarchus are chained to the floor of a house. What's the point? Suffering is a natural part of being a Christ follower.

Jesus promised us suffering if we follow him. But I want to encourage us that suffering is so much easier when we do it together. Our joy in suffering reciprocates back and forth between our full hearts when done together.

And Paul has had Aristarchus by his side through suffering. There's nothing that bonds a family or a friendship quicker than going through hardship together.

And although we know very little about Aristarchus, it's what we do know. The one thing Paul lets us in on, he was there when we were drug out of the theater. He's been there every time we've been imprisoned. And he's with me now in chains.

[22 : 31] I have a brother with me in chains. And that's an encouragement to Paul. We're seeing the gospel partnership threads. They're building. We suffer together. Our identity is in Christ together.

But not only this, he's going to mention Mark quickly here in 10b. And who's Mark? Well, we know this about Mark. Again, we're back to Acts again. In the second missionary journey of Acts, here's what happens to Mark.

He's a friend or cousin of Barnabas. And Paul and Barnabas are going to go on this big missionary journey together. And Paul took Mark as a help to that trip. But here's what happens. As soon as they get out onto the water of the trip, this guy, Mark, gets cold feet and gets scared.

We don't know exactly why, but he gets scared and he abandons the missionary journey. Now this made Paul pretty upset. Someone who has ministered his whole life and committed his life to life-threatening dangers in order to see the gospel go forward is not impressed by this flaky behavior by a guy named Mark.

So here's what happens. They go on another journey and Barnabas, who is Mark's cousin, and Paul, who are Barnabas and Paul, best buddies in ministry, they don't agree on whether they should take Mark on the next journey.

[23 : 47] And both have fairly good arguments. Paul's is, he abandoned us on the first one. We can't do missions by having people abandon us. And Barnabas is on the other side saying, why would we not take him?

Let's give him another chance. It's the gospel. I'm just summarizing their arguments. So they disagree and they go separate ways. This is one of the biggest divisions you see in the whole Bible between believers.

But here's what's so amazing. I'm inclined to think that Barnabas had it right. Listen to this. Why is Mark's inclusion so inspirational on this list?

Because of the redemptive reconciliation we see. You may be thinking this is just some random guy in the church that Paul's given a shout out to.

No, Mark is now well known to Paul. Many, many years later now. Even though what happened between him and Paul earlier, here's what we know.

[24 : 44] God is gracious and merciful because his cousin Barnabas evidently ends up redeeming Mark's poor decision by training him for ministry and giving him more chances. So much so that Mark ends up committing to ministry later in life and has been reconciled to Paul.

Not only that, Paul has found him competent for ministry and entrusts him with this very letter. To take it along with Aristarchus and Tychicus.

to go to Colossae and be a part of the church. Why does this matter for us? God is a God of redemption and reconciliation. He's a God who supplies all the grace we could ever need in order to be reconciled.

First to him, then to others. And when we find ourselves at a crossroad or potentially in a spot where we could divide from one another, we have to remember the grace of God.

The same grace that redeemed somebody like Mark has redeemed us. Next we have Justice whose name also means Jesus.

[25 : 49] Talk about that for a namesake. Here's all we know of Justice. We know essentially nothing. We know that he shares a namesake with his Savior and that he is Jewish. Notice what Paul says in this section.

He points to all three of these guys, Mark, Justice, and Aristarchus as being men of the circumcision. You see that in verse 11. These are men of the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God and they have been a comfort to me.

So all we know is he's a Jew who has come to Christ and his name also means Jesus. But here's what's so great. We are to comfort one another in partnership as brothers and sisters across the aisle, even in different churches, which happens when pastors get together and congregations serve together.

We comfort one another. So justice. But here's what's so cool. You see Jewish believers in these three. But then what Paul's going to do is teaching the Colossians a lesson here in unity amidst diversity.

Next we have a Gentile clan that have come to Christ. And right away we see this diversity in the church. In this time in world history and even today, tensions between Jew and Gentile are extremely high.

[26 : 59] But Jesus came to break down that wall of hostility, brothers and sisters. In Christ, there is no longer Jew or Gentile, only Christ followers. And Paul knows this, which is why he then lists three Gentile believers on the heels of three Jewish believers.

So here's the three Gentile believers, Luke, Epaphras, and Damas. Let's take Epaphras first because he's mentioned. Now we've already studied Epaphras from earlier in the letter, but here's what we know about Epaphras.

This dude ministered. So much so that here's what Paul's going to say about Epaphras. Verse 12, Epaphras, who is one of you, meaning he's a Colossian, a servant of Christ Jesus greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers.

May that be said of us that we struggle on behalf of our brothers and sisters in prayer. But then he says this, that you may stand mature and fully assured in the will of God, for I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis.

Meaning, Epaphras was the one that planted the church in Colossae. We know that from earlier on when we saw in chapter 1, verse 7, that Paul says, just as you learned the gospel from Epaphras, meaning, Epaphras was sent by Paul to plant a church in the city of Colossae.

[28 : 19] Do we know anything about church planting? Maybe in our culture and context we know a little bit more, we're learning a lot more, we still got a lot to grow, don't we? But in this culture and context, to go into a Roman city, completely pagan, no Christian influence, which was Colossae, full of mysticism and strange spirituality, but not Christ, to go into that context and to preach Jesus Christ crucified and to establish a church on the merits of the only thing that can hold a church up, which is Christ himself.

That's what Epaphras did. But now we're learning from Paul, very likely the language here is suggesting that he also planted two other churches in the nearby cities of Hierapolis.

And Hierapolis was a town about 15 miles away from Colossae. But not only Hierapolis, Laodicea. And what is the church at Laodicea?

Where do we see Laodicea come up elsewhere in Scripture? The church at Laodicea ended up being so big and so prominent and grew so large that it was one of the longest lasting churches from the apostolic era.

In the book of Revelation, about 30 years later, probably when that book was written, Jesus Christ himself, our Messiah, writes his own epistle to the church at Laodicea.

[29 : 49] So just imagine here, you're Epaphras and you planted a church in a little town called Laodicea that then would grow to a point where Jesus Christ himself writes his own epistle to the church that you planted.

God is a God of mercy and grace. That he would allow us to join in this work. And that's what Epaphras did. He went and planted churches. But then we see Luke in verse 14.

Now Luke we know a lot about. He's a close friend of Paul. And Paul here calls him a physician, the beloved physician. Which makes a lot of sense because if you read Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, those four gospels, what you'll notice about Luke's gospel is that it's extremely heavy on healing and miracles.

Why? Well I can imagine, we've got a few doctors in here. I can imagine if you're a doctor, what part of Jesus' ministry are you the most fascinated with?

Miraculous healing. Yeah. Luke's gospel contains up to two to three times as many miraculous healings than any of the others. That's who Luke was.

[30 : 59] His MO for the entire gospel of Luke is Jesus is the great physician who came to heal the sick. Isn't that amazing? So Luke has a heart to see the sick go to healing.

Spiritually and physically. But also we know this about Luke. Church history tells us that he was a massive funder of Paul's missionary journeys. Even in this time, doctors were wealthy.

And so Luke has wealth and he has means that he stewards for the glory of God. So he funds a lot of Paul's missionary journeys. He ends up being a massive philanthropist for the church.

And here's what I want to encourage us with. All that we have is the Lord's. Whether you have lots of means in here today, like Luke. Or you have little means like the widow that gave everything she had.

I want to encourage us. All that we have can be used to advance the kingdom. Giving is not an obligatory act for the Christian. It's an invitation by God to demonstrate gratitude and to soak in his grace.

[32 : 02] And Luke is an example of that. Then we have Damas. Little known of this man, we know pretty much nothing except this is kind of sobering. At this point, Paul knew Damas and he used him in ministry.

He even refers to him here as somebody who is going to give a greeting. But unfortunately, what we find out later, at the end of his life, in 2 Timothy, Paul's last thing he wrote, here's what Paul says of Damas.

Damas, who was in love with the present world, has deserted me. This is sobering. At the time of Colossae was written, Damas was a faithful follower that was in ministry, but then at the end of Paul's life in 2 Timothy, when he's in prison for the final time, headed to his death, he had a guy named Damas with him.

And he left Paul, an old man ready to die. For Paul says, in love with the present world. And the reality is that for Damas, loneliness, we don't know what it was that drew him away from Christ or away from the mission field, but we do know this, that he deserted Paul in his time of need.

And I want to encourage us that loneliness is a real thing. It seems to find us at times when we most need fellowship. Stay closely connected with others and closely connect yourself to them, especially in times of need.

[33 : 24] Next, we have Nympha, who very quickly was probably a very wealthy Christian woman in Laodicea, who had a large home that she stewarded well to host the church. Paul says that she's a host of the church in Laodicea, meaning they didn't need a gym, they didn't need a church building, all they needed was Nympha's home.

That speaks a lot of Nympha. Not just that she had means, that she had a home, but that she was willing to use it to steward it for the kingdom of God. Nympha, a great example of using what you have for God's glory.

If you have a home here today, or you have even an apartment, or some place where you gather with your wife, or your family, or yourself, I want you to encourage you to use that for the glory of God.

Next, we see in 15 and 16 the Laodicean church, and this is where we'll finish this morning. Here's what Paul says of the Laodicean church. He looks out upon the entire area that surrounds Colossae, and he says this, When this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of Laodiceans, and see that you also read my letter from Laodicea.

Meaning this, a nearby town was Laodicea, and it was a place right down the road from Colossae, but also right down the road from Laodicea was Hierapolis, meaning you have three cities at this time, and they're all 20 miles apart from one another.

[34 : 54] 20 mile radius, three big towns, and we're told earlier that all three have a church in them. So when we talk about gospel partnership, I want us to notice something. Gospel partnership literally refers to this.

I've got a definition up here for us. Local churches working together to unite around the gospel and equip one another toward the collective goal of kingdom advancement. It's a little bit of a mouthful, but this is what gospel partnership is.

So I want to give us a contextual idea here of what we're looking at. Laodicea, Colossae, and Hierapolis are within 20 miles of one another.

And Paul assumes that they are partnered together for the gospel because that is what we do as Christians. And I want to expand our ecclesiology here for a moment when it comes to defining the church.

Theologians have typically utilized two terms to help us think biblically, which are both very helpful. First is the local church, and maybe you've heard this term. The local church refers to an individual local body of believers in a specific time and a specific place.

[35 : 58] Lambstand. We are a local church. Any of the churches down the road are local churches. But then second, the second term often used is the global or the universal church, which refers to the priesthood of all believers recognizing that there's one collective bride of Christ made up of saints from every tribe, tongue, and nation, as we see in Revelation 7.

Whether you're a Christian here worshiping in the church or you're a Christian in Uganda worshiping Christ, you are part of the universal global church. But I want to offer to us a third category that serves as a middle category for us this morning that I think is relevant to our text today, and that would be the regional or city church.

And this refers to the collective of local churches in a specific region or city that partner together in gospel ministry. In Paul's day, where the church was just beginning to spread, there typically was only one church per city.

But as the gospel spread, more and more churches grew in neighboring towns and cities to where you now had more churches in a small region. For example, look at the cities mentioned in the text.

For one, we have Colossae, then you have Laodicea, mentioned by Paul four times in this letter, and then finally Hierapolis in verse 13. These cities are within 20 miles like we talked about, and they form a sort of regional church together and would have significantly benefited from gospel partnership.

[37 : 29] Now I want you to think, how do we understand that in today's terms? Well, I want you to think of Liberty Lake, Spokane Valley, and Mead. All three of those cities are within a 20-mile radius.

Now you might be like, okay, there's a lot of churches in each one of those cities. Well, the regional church has the opportunity to say, we are near adjacent local bodies of other believers, and we have something to learn from them, and they have something to learn from us, and we have something to offer them, and they have something to offer us, and we want to build them up, and they should build us up.

And Paul assumes this is the case in this setting. Look with me at verse 15. Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea.

In other words, here's the assumption. When you see them next and partner with them in ministry and encourage them and do ministry with them, say hi for me also.

There's an assumption from Paul that they are connected with the nearby church down the road. What does this mean for us? What is gospel partnership, and how does it affect a church?

[38 : 47] Well, if you're ever looking for additional preaching or teaching midweek, I want to encourage you. Yes, there's a lot of good preachers out there. I love me some David Platt. I love me some John Piper. I love me some Alistair Begg, and they're great.

I'm going to encourage you. Paul says, hey, take my letter and give a copy to the Laodiceans so they can also be encouraged. And then the letter I wrote to them, get a copy of that so you can read that.

I wish we still could see what Paul wrote to the Laodiceans, but the Lord sought it that we didn't need it. But here's what I want to encourage you to do. We are partnered with churches all around Spokane. If you're ever looking for a sermon midweek, log on to one of the websites of the churches that we partner with.

And on your insert, you actually have on the back of it, you've got a list of churches that we partner with. These are churches that I meet with regularly. They're pastors. Churches that we've done camps with, with youth ministry, that have personally benefited from us and we've personally benefited from them.

Let me give you a couple of examples. There's a pastor over at Three Crosses Church that just said, hey, Eric, you guys are a church plant. We've got a bunch of random printers that are commercial, thousands of dollars in value that were just given to us.

[39 : 56] We don't need printers. Do you want them? Yes. It's a great example of gospel partnership. Fourth Memorial Church, our sending church, sent finances, facilities, people, and much, much more in order to make this a reality.

Churches like Grace Christian Fellowship, Indian Trail Church, New Creation Fellowship, have personally counseled me and sent me theological documents, shepherding documents, forming documents, and resources that you may never know have actually been given to you.

Trinity in the Valley, New Creation Fellowship, Indian Trail, Oneco Bible Church down in Colfax, all allowed me to go and preach in order to encourage them about what we're doing.

South Side Christian right down the road that meets right next to Trader Joe's, some of you may know what I'm talking about, up 27th there. I know the pastor Colin there and he has said to us, if you need any sort of facility since you don't have one, you let me know.

You need a member meeting, you want to baptize somebody in the winter, which by the way, if you want to get baptized, we want to see you get baptized and obey Jesus in that way, but if you decide to do that in the winter, you will most likely be baptized at South Side Christian because they're opening their building for us to do that.

[41 : 10] These are the sorts of things that happen when churches unite around a common goal of seeing Christ go forward as Paul is demonstrating in this section. Coffee brewer, Tina, thank you for doing our coffee every week.

The coffee brewer that Tina uses to provide our coffee every morning was given by a church called Connection Point. The coffee you are drinking is a product, yes, of Revel 77 too, but of Connection Point giving us an expensive coffee maker.

These are the things that we are encouraged by when we partner together for the gospel. people. How do I participate in gospel partnerships? I want to encourage us.

First, be a faithful member of your local church. All gospel partnerships start at ground level. Healthy churches with healthy members produce healthy ministry and strong churches, and all partnership we may have with the collective regional church of Spokane is grounded on this premise.

But secondly, invest in prayer. As I mentioned, in your insert, you've got a list of all those churches that we love and partner with. Take a moment this week to sit down and pray over every single one of them. And if you're so inclined, go onto their website.

[42 : 17] Look up some of their leadership. Pray over them specifically. Indian Trail just planted a church in Shadle Park that we should be praying for and lifting up. The Inland Northwest Cooperative, which is a list of all the, or a cooperative of all those churches, started an elder training class for all these churches to grow in that area.

Serve when opportunities become available. Out on the middle table of the foyer, you'll see a sign-up sheet for an upcoming opportunity. Southside Christian has a food pantry. They serve 300 households every single Saturday with free food.

But they take a lot of volunteers to run that each week. So I called them up and said, hey, Lamb Stand's going to serve one of these weeks. Give us a date. And they did. They said, December 7th, we need people. So I signed our church up, not having asked any of you.

So, I obligated you to serve. I will be there and I'm trusting in faith that we'll get at least 15 to 20 people, which is what we need. So if you're interested, sign-up sheet. There's a partnership opportunity right there.

But then finally, let's finish with the last two, Archippus and Paul. Archippus was a pupil of Paul, likely trained in ministry by Paul. And Paul gives him a charge.

[43 : 26] We don't know what the charge context is. All we know is Paul saying, don't neglect your ministry. Serve Jesus as you have been received in that. But then finally, this is the last piece of the puzzle for Paul.

The last thing Paul says is this. I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you. The last verse of this book even points to gospel partnership.

In other words, what Paul just said is, I've been dictating this whole time and somebody's been writing the letter down for me who is very likely Timothy.

So Timothy is dictating. Hopefully Paul was better than most doctors. Dictating down the letters, the words, so that it could be sent.

And then this is what happens. Paul, in the very last verse, walks over to Timothy and says, give me the quill. Takes the quill and writes the last line in his own hand.

[44 : 34] Why is that so impactful? Why does that matter? Because even this very last verse points to the fact that it takes all of us to do gospel ministry.

This is the final exclamation point. Timothy writes most of this and Paul finished it with his own hand, meaning, as this letter would go forward, as the Colossians would receive it, there are two distinct forms of handwriting in this letter.

God produced the epistle of Colossians that we have been so blessed by over the last few months by the literal handwriting of even two different people. How cool is that picture?

Kingdom advancement takes everybody and everybody. Whether you're a nymph or justice, Aristarchus or Epaphras, Timothy or Paul, a children's teacher or the preacher, a brother or sister in the church, what is our identity?

I want to encourage us to stand for the last time in Colossians. Have your Bibles turned open to chapter one. We're going to read this section together as we finish the book of Colossians together.

[45 : 47] We're going to read Colossians chapter one verse nine through fourteen together. We'll read it out loud. I'll start us. And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will and all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him, bearing fruit in every good work, and pleasing in the knowledge of the God, being strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. Amen.

Let me pray as you remain standing. God, thank you for this book. Thank you for your encouragement through your word that, Lord, we are built up and rooted in your Son, Jesus.

I pray that as we enact the truths of Colossians out in our lives, both here today, the coming weeks and months, and for a lifetime, that you would remind us that you have forgiven our sin, you've transferred us from darkness and into the kingdom of your beloved Son, that we are citizens of a greater kingdom, that you have showered us with your grace and your love as children of light.

Lord, may we walk in these truths as a church, may we root ourselves in the only foundation which will never be shaken, Jesus Christ alone.

[47 : 32] We love you, Lord, and we pray that you would make us worthy of the calling of the gospel. In your name, amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.