

Past, Present and Future

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Date: 11 February 2024

[0 : 00] I'll begin our worship this evening by singing to God's praise. We're going to sing in Psalm 1a. Sing Psalm's version, page 1 of the psalm book, Psalm 1a.

Blessed is the one who turns away from where the wicked walk, who does not stand in sinners' paths or sit with those who mock. Instead, he finds God's holy law, his joy and great delight. He makes the precepts of the Lord his study, day and night.

We'll sing the whole of this psalm, 1a, to God's praise. Blessed is the one who turns away from where the wicked walk, who does not stand in sinners' paths or sit with those who mock.

Instead, he finds God's holy law, his joy and great delight.

He makes the precepts of the Lord his study, day and night.

[1 : 45] He prospers ever like a tree that's planted by a stream.

And in whose season yields its fruit, its leaves are always green.

Not so the wicked they are like the chaff that's blown away.

They will not stand when judgment comes, For with the righteous stay.

It is the Lord who sees and knows The way the righteous go.

[3 : 09] But those who live and need will lie, The Lord will overthrow.

Let's bow our heads in a word of prayer. Let us pray. Our Father in heaven, we do come in need of your presence at all times, In need of your help, in need of your blessing over us.

We know, Lord, that your word reminds us again and again That apart from you, we can do nothing. But we thank you that it continues to remind us, too, Of your great mercy towards us, Your great love towards us, That you are a God of faithfulness towards your people.

And we have been singing of what it means to walk in the ways of being blessed. And we sing these words that remind us that It is about being close in our relationship with you.

It is about your word and the study of it. And how your word instructs us and helps us Day by day to know you and to worship you as we should And to live according to your ways.

[4 : 37] To live a life pleasing to the Lord, Even as we were considering together this morning. And we thank you that your word Gives us such wonderful encouragement and instruction.

A word that reminds us of Our frailties and yet your strength. That you are the one who makes strength perfect, Even in our weakness.

And we thank you, Lord, That you are the one who is able to do so much for us. That there is none of us here this evening, As we come under your word, Who is ever too far away from you.

That your mighty arm is not able to save. There is no one here who is going through Any struggles that you are not able to help with. There is no one here this evening Who can stand before you saying, Look at what I have done for you In our own strength.

But we can all come and plead with you before you To have mercy on us. And thankful for all that you have done for us Through your Son, Christ Jesus our Lord.

- [5 : 47] And when we fall short, as we often do, We thank you that we have a great Saviour. That in Jesus Christ we have your Son, Who you sent into this world for sinners.
- And we are all that. But we thank you that he came to be with us. That he came to be among your people in this world. To bear witness to you.
- To show the fulfilment of all your prophecies and promises. To show the fulfilment of your great mercy towards us. That you would provide a Saviour.
- The one whom the woman at the well spoke of When she said that we know that Messiah is coming. And he stood before her and said, I am he.
- And we thank you that this evening we come Looking to Jesus, the one who is the Messiah. The Redeemer. The Saviour of the world.
- [6 : 48] And we pray that you will Remind us of what that means. Remind us of who we are in light of it. That in the world that we live in, Which can be so confusing at times.
- And full of so much sorrow and sadness. So much uncertainty. A world that is so often changing Even before our eyes. And even as we change Before your eyes too.
- And yet we come To the one who never changes. The one who is the same Yesterday, today And forever. And we pray to know you. To know you And your mercy and your grace More and more abundantly.
- In all our lives. To know what it is to repent. And to confess our sins before you. To know what it is. To know forgiveness for our sins. That you are faithful and just To pardon our sins.
- And so help us that we would come In that sense of confession. But also repentance. Turning from our sin. And we thank you that in prayer We have such a wonderful way To come to you.
- [7 : 58] Not just with words to you But even with the groanings of our hearts. That nothing is hidden from you. And we thank you That even before we open our mouths That every uttering of our lips Is known to you.
- Our very hearts are poured out to you. For you see them already. You know our grief and our pain. You know our joy and our gladness. You know all things about us.
- And you know the world in which we live. You created it and formed it. You were pleased with it. As we read at the beginning of the Bible. In the book of Genesis.
- And you saw all that you made. And it was very good. And yet. Not long after that. We know that sin. Sin came into the world. And spoiled the creation.
- And there is nothing good in us now. But we thank you for your goodness. And your mercy towards us. And we pray Lord. That in the wickedness of the world. In which we live.
- [8 : 57] That you would come in your mercy. And in your power. We so often pray for circumstances. And situations around the world. That where we see evil and wickedness prevailing.
- Where we see the wickedness of man. And it's in humanity against one another. And we pray Lord. As we often do. For your mercy over those who desire evil.
- And whose hearts are wicked. We pray for mercy for them. But even as we have been singing in this psalm. We are reminded too. That you are a God who is able to overthrow.
- And sometimes maybe that needs to be our prayer as well. That you would overthrow those in authority. And ruling over nations. Where there is wickedness to the fore.
- Where there is war and greed. And so many tragic things happening. We pray Lord. That these wicked rulers. And environments Lord.

- [9 : 56] Will be overthrown by you. And for a day of peace to come. For you to come in your power. And to show your power in our midst. You do so so often in many ways.
- And yet we heed it not. But we pray Lord. That as you show yourself in all of these ways. That you would bring us to our knees. And to cry out for mercy.
- So Lord hear our prayers. And receive our thanks at this time. For all your goodness to us. As a people here. And as we represent just a small part of your church this evening.
- We thank you for one another. We thank you for the bonds of fellowship that exist here. And for all your praying people. For all who gather week by week around your word.
- Both present in the building. And also tuning in online as well. And we thank you that we come prayerfully to you. Pleading with you Lord. For your goodness over us as a people.
- [10 : 55] For your help towards every home and family represented here. To know your peace over us as a people. To know your strength in the midst of times of weakness.
- To know your blessing even as we pray for the week ahead. And we thank you that we can commit one another to you. We can commit those who are unwell. And those who are suffering in different ways.
- Those who are mourning and grieving. Lord we continue to pray for your help. And your comfort in the midst of so many difficult situations. But we thank you too that life is not always sadness and sorrow.
- But that there are times of much blessing and rejoicing. And we pray to know these days. Even in our own week ahead. That we would be able to rejoice with those who rejoice.
- As we even mourn with those who mourn. And we pray that there will be rejoicing in our midst. Oh Lord in this coming week. As we gather for worship and for communion. We pray as we read in the word.
- [11 : 58] That there will be rejoicing in heaven. Over one sinner who repents. Lord we long to see that many come to Christ. And we pray. That your hand will be upon us for good.
- To that end even in these coming days. That by your word and by your spirit. By the preaching of your word. That we would come under your mighty hand. And that we would recognize who you are.
- And our great need of you. And so we pray your blessing. As we prepare for our communion weekend. To bless the preaching and ministry we receive.
- And the fellowship we enjoy with one another. Around your word. That you would be in the midst of all that we do. May you go before us in all of these things.
- Lord and prepare our hearts and the way ahead as well. And Lord help us to continue faithful in prayer day by day. Help us to walk closely and humbly with you.
- [12 : 54] As we long to see your goodness over us. We pray Lord that you will help us and strengthen us. For all of our days. We pray for our church as a whole Lord.
- That you will pour out your blessing on us. That we would know the spirit. And its mighty work over our land and our nation in these days. Lord we ask all these things pleading with you.
- To remember us. To do us good. And to pardon all our sins. As we bring our prayers before you. In the mighty name of Jesus Christ our Lord. As we ask it for his glory.
- Amen. Amen. Well we will again sing to God's praise. This time in Psalm 86 in the Scottish Psalter.
- Page 340 of the Psalm book. Psalm 86. We will sing from verse 1 down to verse 8. A psalm that reminds us that as we pray to God.

- [13 : 54] We pray that he will hear and answer prayer according to his will. O Lord do thou bow down thine ear and hear me graciously. Because I sore afflicted am and am in poverty. Because I am holy let my soul by thee preserve it be. O thou my God thy servant save that puts his trust in thee. We will sing from verse 1 to verse 8. To God's praise. Amen. O Lord do thou bow down thine ear and hear me graciously. Because I sore afflicted am and am in poverty. Because I am holy let my soul by thee preserve it be.
- [15 : 18] O thou my God thy servant save that puts his trust in thee. Sith unto thee I daily cry. Be merciful to me. Rejoice thy servant soul. O Lord I lift my soul to thee. For thou art gracious, O Lord. And ready to forgive. And rich in mercy. And rich in mercy. All that fall upon thee to relieve.
- [16 : 46] Hear, Lord, my prayer. And to the voice of my request. In trouble, my prayer. In trouble, my prayer. In trouble, my prayer. In trouble, my prayer. I will call on thee. For thou will answer sin. Lord, there is none among the gods that they with thee compare. And like the works which thou hast done. Not any work is there. And then, I will call on thee. Amen. Amen. We will turn to reading God's word now in the New Testament and Paul's letter to the Colossians. Colossians chapter 4.
- [18 : 12] You will find this around page 1185 or thereabouts. Colossians chapter 4. And we take up our reading at verse 2. Paul's concluding remarks to the church at Colossae. And he gives instruction to them. And he reminds us in the last part about people, greetings from different people. And it's that we're going to focus on at the end of the chapter from verse 12 in particular as we come to look at this passage. We'll read from verse 2. Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. At the same time, pray also for us that God may open to us a door for the word to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison. That I may make it clear which is how I ought to speak. Conduct yourselves wisely towards outsiders, making the best use of the time.
- [19 : 17] Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person. Tericus 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. 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.

[20 : 31] For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and Hierapolis. Luke, the beloved physician, greets you, as does Demas.

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 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.

I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you. Amen.

And may God bless that reading from his word. Before we turn to look at this passage again, we'll sing to God's praise once again in Psalm 28.

[21 : 32] Page 33 of the psalm books. Let's sing Psalm's verse in Psalm 28. And we can sing from verse 4 down to the end of the psalm, verse 9.

So you have these verses that show a pleading with the Lord to deal with the injustices of this world.

And then in the final verses, you see what it is to lift up our eyes to the Lord. My heart uplifted leaps for joy. My thanks to him I gladly sing.

The Lord God is his people's strength, a saving fortress for his king. We'll sing from verse 4 down to the end of the psalm. To God's praise.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Repay them for their evil deeds and for their acts of wickedness.

[22 : 56] Bring back on them what they deserve and punish their unrighteousness.

Because the Lord's works they despise and treat his actions with disdain.

In justice he will tear them down and never build them up again.

Praise to the Lord for he has heard the plea for mercy which I made.

He is my strength, he is my shield. I trust in him who sends me there.

[24 : 17] My heart uplifted leaps for joy. My thanks to him I gladly sing.

The Lord God is his people's strength. A saving fortress for his king.

Lord, save your people, your own flock. Be pleased, your heritage to bless.

Be their good shepherd, carry them Forever in your faithfulness.

We can turn back to our reading in Paul's letters to Colossians chapter 4.

[25 : 33] And like I say, we're looking at the end of this letter from verse 12 down to the end. We're seeing different characters and different people here and learning a little from them of what it means.

Connected with what we were looking at this morning, you see this letter is just beside 1 Thessalonians which we were looking at this morning and looking at the theme of living a life pleasing to God.

And we see this evening what that looks like in some ways and also perhaps what it doesn't look like too as we look at some of these people mentioned at the end of this passage.

We read 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 all the will of God.

For I bear witness, bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis and so on. It's maybe hard for us to imagine what it was like to be a people receiving this letter from Paul as we read it together this evening.

- [26 : 49] It maybe doesn't have the same impact as it did to the people who were hearing it for the very first time. The church at Colossae had known a great blessing as Paul had come to minister to them as the church was established there as they came to hear of the great mercies of God through Jesus Christ, his son.

They'd learned so much. Paul had been then taken away from them. He had gone to other places. And as you read through this letter, you find that Paul is now in prison.

And he's writing from prison this letter to them to encourage them and to strengthen them in the Lord, knowing that there's a great many challenges going on around them and especially those who are coming into their midst with a different kind of teaching, a different teaching to the gospel that was seeking to take them away from their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So it's hard to enter in just what it was like to hear this letter for the first time because so many of them would have been wondering what was happening to Paul, what was going on in his life, what was happening to all these people like Epaphras who had gone from them and gone with Paul, what was going on in their lives.

And letters, especially as you find letters written by hand, very personal letters, they have a powerful impact on us. And you can maybe think of letters you've received yourself or letters you've read yourself.

- [28 : 23] It's not as common today because we communicate in a very different way, whether it's texts or WhatsApps or short messages. We're often using them now. Perhaps in an email, we'll write a little longer, but we still keep it short and to the point.

But there was a day when very personal letters would be written and sent. Maybe when you were away in university or college, back in the day, you were hearing from different people, writing letters to you, telling you what was happening back at home.

For myself, it was when I was away at sea, different parts of the world and receiving letters from home and hearing what was happening. It didn't have to be anything out of the ordinary, just the little things.

But just to receive a letter handwritten with such a personal touch that someone had taken time to write and was thinking of you as they wrote it, it means so much.

And that is really what is behind this letter as well. There's a sense of the personal nature of it and Paul's love for the church at Colossae, as you see in so many of the letters that he writes in the New Testament.

- [29 : 38] They're powerful. They're personal. They're longing that the people would be growing. We saw it this morning with 1 Thessalonians, his longing for the people to grow in the Lord, to live a life pleasing to God.

So we live in a world where communication is so often instant, where if we send a message, we expect a reply within almost seconds sometimes.

Maybe you've got someone in your life, a parent or a partner who they message and then if you haven't replied within a minute or two, they're getting worried, they're getting anxious and they're phoning you.

You didn't reply to my message. Where are you? Is everything okay? Well, if Paul was sending letters from Rome, as he was in prison, to places like Colossae or Thessalonica, it was going to take months, maybe even over a year for the letter to get there and then a reply to come back.

It wasn't the instant communication that we have. But his letters are beautiful letters and they're worth just reading through and taking your time.

[30 : 51] God's word through him to the church at Colossae here. God's word to ourselves today. There's a beauty in these words and a power in these words.

And this evening, I want to give you two bits of homework. The first bit I'm going to give you just now to do later on with something to do.

And then the last part as we come to the end is something to think about, to take away and think about and see if you can understand it for yourself. So the first one is something to do.

And what I want you to do is to go home tonight and to read through the whole of this letter. It's not a long letter, four chapters, but to begin in chapter one and just to take your time and read through the whole of the letter and to see the power of God's word, to see what it's saying to us, the wonder of God's love and mercy to us, the wonder of a concern and a compassion as we see Paul's heart for the people here and the way the power of God's word is able to change and to keep us on the right track.

So go home, take your time to read through. It'll take only 10, maybe 15 minutes to read through the whole of the letter and it'll hopefully help to put this evening sermon into context as well.

[32 : 21] We're only looking at the very end of the letter, but if you just go back even to the very start of the letter, it starts with a real sense of relationship there.

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God and Timothy, our brother, to the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae, grace to you and peace from God, our Father.

Then he goes into the next section that we are always giving thanks to God in our prayers for you. There's a warmth from the outset, there's teaching as you go through it, and then there's warmth and love as it comes to a conclusion as well.

So that's your first part of your homework, to go home and to read the whole of this letter, to get a feeling of what's behind it and the context of it arriving with a sense of concern that people had what was happening and then hearing the love of Paul and the love of God towards them through it.

So this evening we're going to just look at the concluding part of this letter from verse 12 and looking down to the end of chapter 4.

[33 : 35] And what you find as Paul is concluding his letters is so often he mentions people by name. And you can learn a lot from these people. We've already looked at this letter before, verse 7 down to 11.

We looked at it a few months ago and we picked out the characters that we see there and just learned a little about them and what it means for ourselves. We're just going to do the same thing this evening, picking out some of the characters we see here and learning a little bit about them.

There's individual characters, but the last one we're looking at is Archippus, but also the church. It's the wider context of this letter being written about a people.

It says in verse 16, when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans. The people of God are to hear this letter.

And when we think of people, we often describe people in different ways. And the title for the sermon this evening is Past, Present, and Future.

[34 : 51] And the reason for that is we see how it applies to people here in Paul's day and to ourselves today as well. This letter speaks into the people's past, into their present, and into their future in the same way as it speaks to us of the past, the present, and the future.

And what kind of people do we find in life? we find people who sometimes live in one of these three categories. You can often find people being described as people who live in the past, harking back to previous days.

Others, you hear of, they're just living in the present. They're living for the moment, just wanting to enjoy the here and now. Or others, they're living with, we sometimes say, one eye on the future, one eye on what lies ahead.

But the reality is we should be all of these. We should never lose sight of our past. We want to live in the present, but we always want to have an eye, not just one eye, but both eyes on the future, on what lies ahead.

And that's what we find as Paul concludes this letter. There's a little of the past, the present, and the future. And let's begin by reflecting on the first character we have here in verse 12, Epaphras.

[36 : 21] We take him and we look at him just for a few moments. The mention of Epaphras here would take the people back to the past. Epaphras, it says, who is one of you?

He has been with them in the past. But the question would be, well, where is he now? If you go back to chapter 1, verse 7, verse 6 and 7, this word that has come to them, as it says, which has come to you as indeed in the whole world, it is bearing fruit and growing, as it also does among you since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth, just as you learned it from Epaphras.

our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf. So, there's a beauty in these words as they begin to hear of Epaphras from the outset and here he is again mentioned in the closing stages.

It would be easy for the people of Colossae to think Epaphras has almost bailed out on them, that he's gone away from them and just forgotten all about them, that he's not concerned for them anymore, but Paul, as he writes to them, he mentions Epaphras at the beginning and the end.

He's one of you and he says he still has this concern for you. And what we see in Epaphras is what we would long to see in all of ourselves as well.

[38 : 04] As we were reflecting this morning on what it means to live a life pleasing to God. Here is an example for us. Epaphras. It says here in verse 12, Epaphras 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 Hierapolis. They may have been thinking that he has abandoned them, that he has lost any thought of them, but it's the complete opposite.

He's never forgotten them and he's always, as it says, struggling on your behalf in his prayers. He always has them in his heart and in his prayers.

He's longing for them to stand mature and fully assured in the will of God, even though he is far from them. And that's the wonder of God's grace in life as well.

The grace that we see in this life of Epaphras. He was fully aware of the dangers of false teaching that was present in Colossae. And he was praying, Lord, keep them.

[39 : 29] Lord, look after them. Lord, be near them. Hear my prayers for them. When it says there, always struggling on your behalf in prayers, it's not meaning that he's struggling in the sense of he just can't get his prayer together.

He can't find the words for prayer. It's a struggle of a fight in prayer. It's a struggle of never letting go in prayer.

And it's the kind of struggle that we should have in our prayers as well. We're not going to let issues go. We're not going to let people go in our prayers just because we feel our prayers are not being answered.

We are going to keep praying. We are going to keep struggling in our prayers on behalf of them, whether it's family or friends or work colleagues or anyone we have around us, to have a people that we are praying for.

I noticed online just yesterday that North Tolstair, the congregation there, they're setting a challenge to the congregation for each month.

[40 : 44] And for the month of February, it's to think of three people in the community and to pray for them. And I think that's a great thing.

To think of three people and to pray for them, for that month, to pray for them. We will all have people on our minds, family members, people we know well that we pray for often.

But even from time to time, to think of someone new, someone different, and to pray for them. This is the example of Epaphras. He's one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, struggling on your behalf in his prayers.

He is laboring in prayer. He's intense in prayer and he's intentional in his prayers. But we see to another side that, yes, there is prayer, but he's also one who is hard-working.

It says, I bear witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and Hierapolis. He's a faithful servant of Christ Jesus.

[41 : 58] In his prayers, struggling and laboring there, but also in his work. He is laboring, working hard for them and for others in the kingdom of God.

And again, it's a challenge for ourselves too. as we think of a life pleasing to God, what does that entail? Well, again, it's just a wonderful example to us to be a people of prayer and to be a people of practical, practicing our faith in life, doing for the Lord.

And he's got this heart desire that the people would stand mature and fully assured in the will of God.

And if you're thinking, what do I pray for people? Well, there is a prayer for us, that people would come to know the Lord, that people would come to stand in the Lord, to become mature in the Lord, to become fully assured in the will of God, that God would work in their lives and in their hearts.

So, Epaphras, he was one they maybe felt had abandoned them in some ways, had never been heard of again, and yet they're reminded here he's never forgotten them.

[43 : 27] He's always laboring for them in prayer. He's always working hard for them. So, an encouragement and an example to them at Colossae, but also to ourselves as well.

the second ones we want to look at here. We want to take Luke and Demas, and we see that in verse 14.

Luke, the beloved physician, greets you, as does Demas. Now, it doesn't seem to say much to us, but we're reminded here that there's something in the present, and the present here with both Luke and Demas is that they are fellow workers with Paul.

So, if you look at the current situation as Paul is writing to the Colossians, if you look at Philemon as well, you find them mentioned there, Demas and Luke as well, fellow workers with Paul, and it all looks good.

It all looks positive. And again, just looking back to this morning, as we were thinking of Paul writing to the Thessalonians, he was so encouraged by the report that Timothy brought back from Thessalonica about what was happening there, that they were standing firm in the faith.

[44 : 56] They were encouraged to hear that. And initially, there's encouragement here for us. Luke and the beloved physician greets you, as does Demas. So, they're there with Paul.

They're there working for them. That's the present. But then you start looking into Luke and Demas in the future.

What you find with Luke is encouraging. He stands firm in the Lord. We have the gospel of Luke. We have the book of Acts, all written by Luke, the physician.

We have an insight into his life, how he walked closely with the Lord, how he was living a life pleasing to the Lord, and the Lord was working in him.

But as we were thinking of this morning, the reason that Paul was writing to the Thessalonians was that their pathway would continue in that direction, that their pathway would be one that's living close to the Lord all the time, and growing in their knowledge and understanding of God, and their sanctification, as we were thinking about God working in them.

[46 : 10] And he was writing that to these churches, whether it's Thessalonica or Colossae, knowing there's always the temptation of drifting away. And that's what you find with Demas.

Because when you read of Demas in 2 Timothy chapter 4 and verse 10, listen to what it says of him. for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica.

Because he loved this world, has deserted me. He had left Paul. He had gone away from Paul and from God.

And that stands there as a reminder to us of the need to always seek to walk closely with God. In that section in 2 Timothy, it says, Luke is with me.

And you see there the difference. Demas, because he loved the world, has gone away. Luke is with me. And there's the challenge for us.

[47 : 30] You know, what are we doing for the Lord? Are we standing firm in our faith? That's great when we are in the present, but always be on your guard for the future.

Never take your eyes off the Lord. That's the warning that comes through loud and clear here. Luke, yes, he's with Paul. He's standing firm.

And Demas is here at this moment, but Demas, because he loved the world, deserted him. And I'm sure we all know people who have seemed to be walking close with God.

They've been with us perhaps over the years, and we know that they're not there now. And why is that? So often it's just because of what happened to Demas, because he loved the world.

we allow the Lord to lose focus in our lives and in our hearts. We allow things to come in that take us away from that.

[48 : 38] Little by little, as we stop living a life pleasing to God, then we find ourselves just drifting away.

Drifting away little by little. But we should never stop praying for those who find themselves in that situation. And we should never stop praying for ourselves that we will be kept from drifting away as well.

Whatever we do, we are to do as to the Lord. That's what Paul teaches so often throughout this letter. To do as unto the Lord.

To do all for Him. because the moment we start doing it for self, that's when the world starts to come in and the love of this world and the praise of people in this world becomes more important than walking closely with God.

Luke, the beloved physician, greets you it sees. The one who remained faithful to God, who served God with all his heart. And then you have the comparison of Demas, the one who loved the world and deserted, who turned away.

[49 : 57] So there's these warnings, these contrasts for us of a life pleasing to God on one hand, but a life of turning away from God on the other.

There's a past, there's a present, there's a future in all of these lives. Luke and Demas and ourselves. It's not just about looking back and saying that's when I was converted.

It's not just about looking to the present and saying I'm standing firm now, but it's looking to the future as well and pleading with God, Lord keep me. Keep me on your right path.

Keep me close to you. The final thing I want us to see here is when we look at Archippus and the church.

And what do we learn from them? Well, when you look at what it says about Archippus here, it doesn't say much again. Say to Archippus, see that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord.

[51 : 05] In many ways, it's maybe a little like both Luke and Demas. Luke went on to fulfill the ministry that he was given. Demas deserted.

And here's a reminder to Archippus too. See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord. And then when it speaks about the church as well, and what does it say to us?

Well, Paul is writing here to his beloved and to the Lord's beloved. As it says at the start of chapter 1, verse 2, to the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae.

He's writing to the church, to the people of God. And what he's saying to them is kind of marrying the two things together that we've looked at already.

The place of prayer and the place of working for the Lord. Epaphras was one struggling on your behalf in prayers but working hard.

[52 : 15] Luke was one who worked hard and kept on praying and demons deserted. Archippus is reminded too, see that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord.

It's showing the different aspects of what church looks like. A praying people and a practical people. People who are fulfilling the ministry of the Lord that has been given to us.

And when you think about it, when you look at the past of the church in Colossae, what was it? As we read through this letter we see the wonder of the gospel that's changed this city, changed this place.

The power of the gospel has come to them and has transformed the place. There's still challenges, there's still false teaching coming in, but the church of God has flourished here.

But it was not always that kind of place. It was a place of paganism, false gods, many gods, false teaching was there in abundance, and it had been transformed by the gospel.

[53 : 29] It had a past that was ungodly, it has a present that was very much God in their midst, but what would it hold for their future? Well, that's what he was writing to, to encourage them to remain faithful in prayer and the ministry that the Lord had given to them.

And when we look at ourselves here in our own islands, what do we see when we look to the past? So often our past can look back to days when churches were flourishing and abounding, times of revival and great blessing in our islands.

But you don't have to go too much further back to realize that there was a time when the church here was almost non-existent, when paganism and all these kinds of things were in our islands.

And the church came into the midst of that and transformed, transformed people, transformed communities, transformed so many lives. And we're thankful for the gospel that came to our islands.

But what of the future for ourselves? What of the future for our church here? Well, we stand in historic times in many ways.

[54 : 51] We always stand in historic times. But this is a time that God has given to us as a people. And just as Paul was writing to the church at Colossae, to encourage them to be strong in the Lord, to have courage, to be prayerful, and to be fulfilling the ministry that the Lord has given to them.

And so it is saying the same to us. We have a ministry from God. We have a commission from God in His Word. We have instruction from God in His Word.

Are we fulfilling that ministry in our personal lives? Are we listening to the gospel? Are we heeding the Word of God to us to repent and to believe?

And then are we heeding the Word of God to be struggling in prayer, to be praying for our people, to be praying for our communities, and to be, do we live a life working hard as servants for the Lord, fulfilling the ministry that God has given to us?

We need both. We have seen only prayer can change, and we say that so often.

[56 : 17] But in both Epaphras and Archippus and Luke too, we have the challenge to be prayerful, but to be serving the Lord with all our heart as well.

A life pleasing to God is both. And this is where I want to leave you with your last bit of homework. And it's something to think about.

And I want to read to you a little from something that Charles Studd wrote. Charles Studd was a missionary to China, and he's possibly most famous for something that he wrote, a quote that we maybe often hear, where he said, only one life will soon be passed, only what's done for Christ will last.

I'm sure many of you will have heard that quote. But I want to leave you with something else that he wrote. It's a little longer than that, but I want to share it with you.

He said, too long have we been waiting for one another to begin. The time of waiting is past. The hour of God has struck.

[57 : 33] War is declared. In God's holy name let us arise and build. The God of heaven, he will fight for us, as we for him.

We will not build on the sand, but on the bedrock of the sayings of Christ and the gates and minions of hell shall not prevail against us.

Should such men as we fear, before the world, I, before the sleepy, lukewarm, faithless, namby-pamby Christian world, we will dare to trust our God.

We will venture our all for him. We will live and we will die for him. And we will do it with his joy unspeakable, singing aloud in our hearts.

We will a thousand times sooner die trusting only our God than live trusting in man. And when we come to this position, the battle is already won, and the end of the glorious campaign in sight.

[58 : 40] We will have the real holiness of God, not the sticky stuff of talk and dainty words and pretty thoughts, we will have a masculine holiness, one of daring faith and works for Jesus Christ.

It's a real challenge in these words to us. And that is what his longing was. He saw the time of conflict and war that they were in as Christians.

And he was challenging the church to arise. But this is a challenge and something really to think about as he went on to say this. We Christians too often substitute prayer for playing the game.

Prayer is good, but when used as a substitute for obedience, it is nothing but blatant hypocrisy and despicable pharisaism.

To your knees, man, and to your Bible, decide at once, don't hedge, time flies, cease your insults to God, quit consulting the flesh and blood, stop your lame, lying, and cowardly excuses, enlist.

[59 : 57] When I read the first part of that, I thought, wait, there's a challenge there. We Christians too often substitute prayer for playing the game.

Prayer is good, but when used as a substitute for obedience, it is nothing but a blatant hypocrisy. Is he right?

Something to go away and think about. But the challenge is certainly there for us. We are in warfare. We are in conflict.

Yes, it's a time to pray. It always is. But we need obedience. obedience to the will of God, to the ministry that we have received from the Lord.

And he leaves us with that challenge. Enlist. Enlist. Be among the people of God.

[61 : 01] Be in the army of God. Be in this conflict that we are in. And that was a challenge to the Colossians. To stand firm in the conflict that they were in.

We see it so powerfully at the end of Philippians when it's talking about putting on the armour of God and to stand firm. That is the same context as runs through so many of the letters.

To stand in the Lord. To enlist. To pray. And to be obedient. They shall pass for us all.

as there always is as you reflect on the past even of Colossae we reflect on our own past. A time when God's word was not even here.

We have a past where we've seen God's blessing. We have a present when we're seeing where we are now. We long for the hand of God upon us and his blessing and favour towards us as a people.

[62 : 07] But what will we stand on the side of God? Will we enlist in his army? Will we struggle in prayer?

Will we work hard in obedience to him to fulfil the ministry that the Lord has given to every one of us?

To love the Lord and to work for him as he works. in us. Let us pray. Our gracious Father in heaven, we thank you for so many ways that you have been so faithful to us and the way that you bless us with your word, the way your word challenges us and yet reminds us of the many encouragements that we have.

We pray, Lord, that you will make us a faithful people, even like Epaphras, one who struggled in prayer for our people he loved, that we would be so, that we would labour in our own prayers for those we love and those all around us, but too that we would be a people who work hard, who work hard for the cause of Christ, depending on your strength and blessing for us, but also looking to you and seeking to honour you in fulfilling the ministry that you have given to each and every one of us.

So hear our prayers and guide us in our thoughts and in our continued prayers. We ask it all in Jesus' name. Amen. We'll conclude by singing to God's praise on Psalm 36, page 251.

[64 : 01] Psalm 36 6 on page 251. We'll sing from verse 5 to verse 9. Thy mercy, Lord, is in the heavens. Thy truth doth reach the clouds.

Thy justice is like mountains great. Thy judgments deep as floods. We'll sing from verse 5 to verse 9 to God's praise. verse 10.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thy mercy, Lord, is in the heavens.

Thy truth doth reach the clouds. Thy justice is like mountains great.

thy judgments deep as floods. Lord, thou preservest man and peace.

[65 : 05] How precious is thy grace. Therefore, in shadow of thy wings, men's sons their thirst shall place, they with the fatness of thy house shall be well satisfied.

from rivers of thy pleasures thou wilt drink to them provide.

Because of life the fountain here remains alone with thee.

And in that purest light of life we clearly life shall see.

after the benediction I'll go to the door to my right. We'll close with the benediction. Now may grace, mercy, and peace from God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rest upon and abide with you all now and forever more.

[66 : 46] Amen. God bless him.

For ■■■ me him. Thank you.