



A SERMON BY THE REVEREND WILLIAM R. FLEMING
MARINERS' CHURCH OF DETROIT
THE TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY
NOVEMBER 15, 2015

WE GIVE THANKS TO GOD AND THE FATHER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, PRAYING ALWAYS FOR YOU, SINCE WE HEARD OF YOUR FAITH IN CHRIST JESUS, AND OF THE LOVE WHICH YE HAVE TO ALL THE SAINTS... (FROM COLOSSIANS, CHAPTER 1)

PAUL HAS WRITTEN A LETTER TO THE PEOPLE IN COLOSSIANS. THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH AT COLOSSE WAS ONE WHICH PAUL HAD NOT CREATED AND WHICH HE HAD NEVER VISITED. HOWEVER THE FOUNDING OF THE CHURCH SPRANG FROM HIS INSTRUCTIONS.

THE COLOSSIAN CHURCH WAS MAINLY COMPOSED OF GENTILES. PAUL IN PRISON IN ROME WAS TRULY PLEASED WITH THE NEWS FROM COLOSSE AND YET PAUL KNEW THAT A HERESY WAS COMING, AND—HE IS A GOOD PLANNER, HE DECIDED TO MAKE POSITIVE MOVES BEFORE DIFFICULTIES REALLY FLARED UP. NO ONE REALLY KNOWS WHAT THE SERIOUS PROBLEM WAS, BUT ALL ANTICIPATED IT. THE LETTER TO COLOSSIANS WAS UNDOUBTEDLY WRITTEN BY PAUL. . IT WAS A HIGH POINT EVEN THOUGH COLOSSE WAS NOT AN IMPORTANT TOWN. BUT IN SO

DOING HE FORESTALLS DIFFICULT THINGS WHICH COULD BE COMING.

PAUL USES HIS APOSTOLIC MINISTRY TO BUILD A STRONG WELCOME FOR HIMSELF. HE LINKS TIMOTHY TO HIS MINISTRY AND CALLS HIM BROTHER WHICH ENDEARS HIS FLOCK TO THEM BOTH.

VERSES 6-8 ARE A SUMMARY OF WHAT THE GOSPEL IS AND DOES. UNDER PAUL'S TEACHING WE LEARN THE ESSENCE OF THE GOSPEL.

1. THE GOSPEL IS GOOD NEWS OF GOD. THE MESSAGE IS OF A GOD WHO IS A FRIEND AND LOVER OF ALL HIS PEOPLE; WHO SENT US IN A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.
2. THE GOSPEL IS TRUTH. THE CHRISTIAN GOSPEL IS NOT A "GUESS" ABOUT GOD, IT GIVES US CERTAINTIES ABOUT GOD AND THE TRINITY.
3. THE GOSPEL IS UNIVERSAL. FOR ALL THE WORLD; THE GOSPEL IS OPEN TO EVERYONE WITHOUT EXCEPTION.
4. THE GOSPEL IS PRODUCTIVE. IT BEARS FRUIT. IT HAS POWER TO CHANGE INDIVIDUALS AND THE SOCIETY IN WHICH WE LIVE. IT GIVES ALL MEMBERS THE OPPORTUNITIES THAT GOD WANTS US TO HAVE.

5. THE GOSPEL TELLS OF GRACE. GRACE IS WHAT GOD OFFERS. HE TELLS NOT MUCH OF HIS DEMAND FROM US AND OF HIS GIFT TO US.
6. THE GOSPEL IS HUMANLY TRANSMITTED. EPAPHRAS WHO BROUGHT IT TO THE COLOSSIANS SAID HUMAN CHANNEL THROUGH WHICH THE GOSPEL CAN BE COMMUNICATED IS NECESSARY. IN THE PASSAGES 9-11 WE LEARN THE PRAYERS OF A SAINT FOR FRIENDS TO COMMUNICATE.

FROM WILLIAM BARCLAY'S *MOVED TO PRAYER*

1. PRAYER BEGINS BY ASKING THAT WE MAY BE FILLED WITH AN EVER GROWING KNOWLEDGE OF THE WILL OF GOD. A GREAT PURPOSE IS TO KNOW THE WILL OF GOD. MAKE OURSELVES LISTEN TO GOD. THE FIRST OBJECTIVE OF PRAYER IS NOT SO MUCH TO SPEAK TO GOD AS IT IS TO LISTEN TO HIM.
2. THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD MUST BE TRANSLATED INTO OUR HUMAN SITUATION WE WORK TO UNDERSTAND. THE GREAT TRUTH OF CHRISTIANITY MUST BE ABLE TO APPLY TO TASKS AND SITUATIONS. CHRISTIANS MUST KNOW WHAT CHRISTIANITY MEANS, NOT IN A VACUUM BUT IN THE BUSINESS OF LIVING.

3. PRAYER MUST RESULT IN RIGHT CONDUCT. PAUL PRAYS HIS PEOPLE UNDERSTAND PRAYER. HE HELPS THEM TO UNDERSTAND WILL, WISDOM, PRAYER AND ACTION GO HAND IN HAND.
4. WE NEED POWER. PEOPLE STRENGTHENED IN PRAYER IS THE POWER OF GOD. WE RECEIVE POWER TO FOLLOW FAITH IN SO MANY WAYS.
5. WE NEED TO PRAY FOR LOVE. NOTHING CAN DEFEAT THE LOVE OF GOD AND VICE VERSA. STRENGTH—STAND TOUGH IN DIFFICULT SITUATIONS.
6. WE NEED TO PRAY FOR PATIENCE. “MAKE ME O LORD VICTORIOUS OVER EVERY CIRCUMSTANCE—MAKE ME PATIENT WITH EVERY PERSON AND ALSO WITH MY LORD.
7. THERE IS JOY. LIFE IS NOT JUST A FIRM STRUGGLE. IT CONSISTS OF EVENTS AND PEOPLE WHO HAVE A RADIANT APPROACH TO LIFE. ALL THE PROBLEMS CANNOT OVERCOME US.
8. THE CHRISTIAN’S PRAYER IS: MAKE ME (WITH OUR LORD) VICTORIOUS OVER EVERY CIRCUMSTANCE; MAKE ME PATIENT WITH EVERY PERSON AND GIVE ME THE JOY WHICH NO CIRCUMSTANCE AND NO ONE WILL EVER TAKE GOD’S COMPASSION/LOVE FROM ME.

ONE QUESTION REMAINS. MANY SCHOLARS DO NOT BELIEVE THAT PAUL WROTE THIS LETTER AT ALL. HERE ARE SOME OF THEIR REASONS:

1. THEY SAY THAT IN COLOSSIANS THERE ARE MANY WORDS AND PHRASES WHICH DO NOT APPEAR IN ANY OTHER OF PAUL'S LETTERS. THAT IS PERFECTLY TRUE. BUT IT DOES NOT PROVE ANYTHING. WE CANNOT DEMAND THAT PEOPLE SHOULD ALWAYS WRITE IN THE SAME WAY AND WITH THE SAME VOCABULARY. IN COLOSSIANS, WE MAY WELL BELIEVE THAT PAUL HAD NEW THINGS TO SAY AND FOUND NEW WAYS TO SAY THEM.

2. THEY SAY THE VIEW OF CHRIST IN COLOSSIANS IS FAR IN ADVANCE OF ANY OF THE LETTERS KNOWN TO HAVE BEEN WRITTEN BY PAUL. THERE ARE TWO ANSWERS TO THAT:

A. PAUL SPEAKS OF THE UNSEARCHABLE RICHES OF CHRIST. IN COLOSSE, A NEW SITUATION MET HIM, AND OUT OF THESE UNSEARCHABLE RICHES HE DREW NEW ANSWERS TO MEET IT. IT IS TRUE THAT THE CHRISTOLOGY OF COLOSSIANS IS AN

ADVANCE ON ANYTHING IN THE EARLIER LETTERS OF PAUL; BUT THAT IS FAR FROM SAYING THAT PAUL DID NOT WRITE IT, UNLESS WE ARE WILLING TO ARGUE THAT HIS THOUGHT REMAINED COMPLETELY STATIC. IT IS TRUE TO SAY THAT PEOPLE THINK OUT THE IMPLICATIONS OF THEIR FAITH ONLY AS CIRCUMSTANCES, PAUL THOUGHT OUT NEW IMPLICATIONS OF CHRIST.

B. THE GERM OF ALL PAUL'S THOUGHT ABOUT CHRIST IN COLOSSIANS DOES, IN FACT, EXIST IN ONE OF HIS EARLIER LETTERS. IN I CORINTHIANS 8:6, HE WRITES OF *ONE LORD JESUS CHRIST THROUGH WHOM ALL THINGS AND THROUGH WHOM WE EXIST*. IN THAT PHRASE IS THE ESSENCE OF ALL HE SAYS IN COLOSSIANS. THE SEED WAS THERE IN HIS MIND, READY TO BLOSSOM WHEN A NEW CLIMATE AND NEW CIRCUMSTANCES CALLED IT INTO GROWTH.

WE NEED NOT HESITATE TO ACCEPT COLOSSIANS AS A LETTER WRITTEN BY PAUL.

IT REMAINS A STRANGE AND WONDERFUL FACT THAT PAUL WROTE THE LETTER WHICH CONTAINS THE HIGHEST POINT IN HIS THINKING TO AN UNIMPORTANT TOWN AS COLOSSE THEN WAS. BUT, IN DOING SO, HE HALTED A TENDENCY WHICH, HAD IT BEEN ALLOWED TO DEVELOP, WOULD HAVE WRECKED ASIAN CHRISTIANITY AND MIGHT WELL HAVE DONE IRREPARABLE DAMAGE TO THE FAITH OF THE WHOLE CHURCH.