

Coming in First Place – the preeminence of Jesus Christ

“... so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything”(Colossians 1:18).

Coming in First Place – The Book of Colossians

The Christian’s Experience – Putting On: Sanctified Fellowship (4:7-18)

Sanctified Fellowship (4:14-18) – Demas, Nympha, Archippus and Paul

14 Luke, the beloved physician, sends you his greetings, and also Demas. 15 Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea and also Nympha and the church that is in her house. 16 When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea. 17 Say to Archippus, "Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it." 18 I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my imprisonment. Grace be with you.

If you could read my notes, you would see that the persons I intend to speak to you about this morning include everyone found in verses 14-18 with the exception of the very first person named, which is Luke. There is a reasonable explanation for this. Most of you know that beginning in February we are starting a new series on Sunday mornings from the book of Acts. Most of you are also aware that Luke, the very Luke mentioned in Colossians 4:14, is the author of that book. Therefore, on the advice and insight of one of the men in the church, we will look at what the lives of the remaining people of our text teach us of church life, sanctification and Christlikeness and leave Luke for next week to serve as our transition from Colossians to the book of Acts.

By way of reminder, I offer you this chart of the names of the people we have been studying along with a one-word summary of their lives:

1. **Tychicus** (7-8)
The **faithful** man

2. **Onesimus** (9)
The **fugitive** man

3. **Aristarchus** (10a)
The **fearless** man

4. **Mark** (10b)
The **forgiven** man

5. **Justus** (4:11)
The **friendly** man

6. **Epaphras** (4:12-13))
The **fervent** man

7. **Luke** (4:14a)
The **famous** man

8. **Demas** (4:14b)
The **floundering** or **faithless** man

9. **Nymphas** (4:15-16)
The **fruitful** man

10. **Archippus** (4:17)
The **faltering** man

11. **Paul** (4:18)
The **fettered** man

So this morning let us look at Demas, Nymphas, Archippus and Paul, noting from their lives everything from floundering faithlessness to fettered faithfulness. In each of these four lives, we find warnings and reminders of how to strive in our pursuit of Christlikeness in the midst of

Coming in First Place – the preeminence of Jesus Christ

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serving one another in the church. Or to say this yet another way, there is no true loving, serving and intimacy with Christ without loving, serving and being personally engaged in the lives of Christ people, the Church.

We begin then with Demas, a man whose name means “popular”; but as we come to see, maybe popular for the wrong reasons. As we read in verse 13 of our text, you will notice that Demas is the only one in this text of whom nothing is said. He simply is listed here as one who sends greetings to the folks at Colossae.

We have just a brief insight into Demas over in Philemon 24, a letter written at the same time as this one, that lists Demas as a “**fellow-worker**” along side of Mark, Aristarchus and Luke. Beyond this, we have no other information about him. We do not know where he is from; we have no testimony of his coming to faith; and we are given no clue as to how he came to be part of Paul’s team. Our first encounter with Demas is here where he is an associate of Paul while Paul was under house arrest in Rome. The year is about 60 AD according to our text here and to this point, because of his apparent faithfulness, Demas had earned Paul’s confidence. Paul passes on greetings from Demas to others, so Demas must have been known among the churches in Colossae, Laodicea and others.

It is safe to assume that Demas started well and had stayed the course during some trying times. He was faithfully with Paul while in Rome during the first Roman imprisonment. It would appear that Demas was also with Paul when he was released and that he traveled with him during a brief window of freedom. But something happened along the way. Paul was arrested a second time. But unlike the first imprisonment, Paul was not being held in a house, but rather was incarcerated in the infamous Mamertine Prison. This prison was first built around 600 BC and was carved in the underground rock, accessible only through a hole in the ceiling. Typically it was reserved for high profile prisoners and now into this stinking hole Paul was being held. It thus became evident to Demas that Paul would not leave this imprisonment alive. The sword of Nero, the Roman Emperor was hanging over Paul’s head and even Paul himself knew that his death was imminent.

It had dawned on Demas that Paul’s circumstances were now a threat to his own life. At one time, when the ministry, although filled with danger, seemed to be exciting, with people coming to Christ and all kinds of accolades we being received; but now with the threat of death, to be on Paul’s team ceased to be an adventure. It was very possible that Nero’s eye would soon turn upon Demas. We do not know the exact whys but all we know is that Demas cut and ran. Let us turn over to 2 Timothy 4:9-11 and read what Paul says happened to Demas. This is written just about five years after our text in Colossians.

9 Make every effort [Timothy] to come to me soon; 10 for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. 11 Only Luke is with me. Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service.

What is striking in this text is the weariness, loneliness and disappointment in Paul’s tone. “**Only Luke is with me,**” says Paul. The others either have scattered in fear or are gone due to necessary ministry assignments. But Demas, this man that Paul had counted on for personal encouragement and support in the past; Demas has deserted – that is forsaken; leaving Paul in

Coming in First Place – the preeminence of Jesus Christ

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the church. And why did Demas do this? What was it that dragged the heart of Demas away from service to God and God’s people? Paul says that Demas had **loved this present world** and fled to Thessalonica.

We learn that something was not right in Demas’s thinking. For all his previous service, and much of it had obviously been meaningful, he had now abandoned. His affections for ministry had been misplaced and usurped by something so subtle; yet so deadly to any ministry. He had become what the book of James call a double-minded man; a person who has half his heart in the service of God; but the other half considering the pleasures of the world. He had not totally committed himself to serving others. Yes, He had served others, but the reasons were not necessarily for the benefit of others and the glory of God; but rather how it suited him. And so, let me share with you a principle or truth we learn from his life. Demas represents to us *a person who is divided between faithful service to God’s people and fulfilling personal desires. A deadly dichotomy for such a person is doomed to flounder in ministry at best and forsake ministry at worst.*

This is not an uncommon affliction and it is not limited to church leaders. Sadly, it often goes unrecognized in many in the church. We can be part of a fellowship, we can take on responsibilities of service or leadership; be we are not always careful to examine if what we do is really to stroke our own egos and make us feel good rather than for the glory of God and the good of God’s people.

I read a story of a young man who during the Vietnam War era, was seeking ordination to ministry. As he stood before the ordination council, he was seek to more than aptly defend the faith and all on the council felt sure he was ripe for ministry. And then one of the council members asked him, “Why do you want to be ordained?” He answered honestly saying, “Because I don’t want to get drafted.” In other words, he loved this present world and wanted to use ministry to keep him out of harm’s way. Thus ended the ordination proceedings.

Demas represents the way many people look at the church and ministry. We go to church and serve because it is part of being a good person, a good Christian, and we want others to see us as good. We can see God as being just one, a large one, but just one of the planets that orbits the circle of our lives and we want Him to be the first and closest of those planets. But we forget that our lives are to orbit His; not the other way around. When we make service to God secondary and try to balance God along with a host of other activities and affections, and when push comes to shove and we have to make the hard choices between that which brings us the most pleasure versus that which will most honor God and benefit His people, the deepest affections of our hearts are exposed and how we invest our time, talents and treasures; and whether or not we will speak the necessary but unwelcome words of witness or rebuke; or whether we will even stay faithful to the church of the living God begin to be compromised.

All we know is that Demas loved this present age, that is what the world offered him, more than he loved Christ and God’s kingdom. When Demas was threatened with significant loss, he followed his heart and the truth is, each one of us do this as well. By his own doing, Demas revealed where his truest affections had always been and sadly, this is the last we hear of him. Demas fades into the shadows of obscurity, and what is his legacy? He leaves as the floundering, faithless man, who when the going was the toughest and when he had the best opportunity to be an encouragement to Paul, he failed and fled from ministry, a failure from which

Coming in First Place ~ the preeminence of Jesus Christ

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he apparently never recovered. Let us resolve not to be like Demas. Do not seek a ministry but seek to minister. Do not seek to be served but to serve others.

The next name in our list as found in Colossians 4:15 is that of Nympha. We read, "Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea and also Nympha and the church that is in her house." There is some question as to whether or not this person was male or female as some texts have Nymphas, the masculine form of the name. ^[slide 07] But regardless of gender, Nympha presents to us the following truth: *a person who sees all that he has as a means for furthering the ministry will prove to be fruitful for ministry.* Let me ask you, how do you view your belongings? Are they for your comfort and pleasure, or are they gifts from God that can and ought to be used for the benefit of God's people?

It is obvious that Nympha was a person of some means and that these means were used to benefit the body of Christ. Ministry that is most effective, that is most fruitful is that ministry in which you seek to be involved and engaged in the lives of others; and Nympha was just such a person. Lives that are most positively affected for the Lord are through active hospitality and participation in one another's lives. Are you making time for others in the body of Christ? Do you see your possessions and your time as gift from God to be used to that end? We see an example of this in the early church. To be sure, what we read about in Acts 2 is in part due to the extraordinary need of so many new believers in Jerusalem at the beginning of the church, yet the principle is the same. We read in Acts 2:42-47

42 They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. 44 And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; 45 and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. 46 Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Notice that as needs were met and the people met together "from house to house" that there was praise to God; favor from God and souls being saved. All of this because the concern was for God's glory and one another's good.

So from verse 15 we read of Nympha and how lives are positively affected by active hospitality and participation in one another's lives and now in verse 16 I would have you notice that lives are also positively affected by the reading of God's Word in our homes and meetings. That is the implication of verse 16, "***When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea.***" There is something significant and important about reading and hearing the Word of God together. This is why Paul exhorts the young pastor Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:13 saying, "*Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching.*" Beloved, we must long to hear and then apply the word of God. Notice that one of the characteristic that set the early church apart was that when the church gathered, be it in a house or in a building, the Word and exhortations of God were read aloud.

Coming in First Place – the preeminence of Jesus Christ

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How might our own homes and the people who visit us be affected if we devoted more time to reading the word of God? If we are to be a people of the book, we must be a people who read and hear the words of the book! C.H. Spurgeon said of John Bunyan, the author of *Pilgrim's Progress* and a vital instrument for the spread of the gospel in the 1600's, that if you were to cut him “his blood would bleed Bibles.” Oh that our lives would be so saturated with the Word of God that such could be said of us! Such a quality of life comes only from a simple commitment that says to your heart; “I long to know the God of the Bible and therefore I commit to picking up the Word and reading it.” Oh for hearts like that of Martin Luther who said, “For some years now I have read through the Bible twice every year. If you picture the Bible to be a mighty tree and every word a little branch, I have shaken every one of these branches because I wanted to know what it was and what it meant.”

It would seem that the house of Nympha was a home in which God's people met to engage in meaningful ministry to one another as well as a place to hear and apply the Word of God. Would you see your home, your life, your lunch dates, your meetings with others as opportunities to minister to others and to communicate the Word of God?

This brings us to verse 17 and to Archippus of whom we read, “*Say to Archippus, ‘Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it.’*” I submit to you that Archippus represents the following truth: *a person who forgets that service to the Lord and to His people is a gift and privilege to be guarded and exercised will falter and become ineffective in service.* How easy it is to forget that ministry is from the Lord, by the Lord and for the Lord. And in serving the Lord we must serve His people. There are three things we can glean from this exhortation to Archippus that are reminders for us in our service to the Lord and His people; exhortations that will keep us from being a faltering man like Archippus.

First, *serving one another is a gift received from the Lord.* Notice that Paul wants Archippus to be reminded that ministry, that is any service to the Lord, from nursery service to the ministry at the Maples; from cleaning the church to the composing of sermons; any service to the Lord is a gift received from the Lord. As a gift then, any opportunity to serve ought to be seen as a delight and not merely a duty. Have you ever been so overwhelmed by the graciousness and generosity of a person that you resolved to yourself and to that person, “I will do anything for him” simply as an expression of gratitude? If you have, you have experienced the minutest part of what ought to be our attitude toward God. Never forget the grace of God; first to save you from your wretchedness; a heart alienated, hostile to God and engaged in evil deed to bring you into the blissful hope of eternal life in the kingdom of His beloved Son – that is your reason to delightfully serve Him and His people; but in addition, never forget the grace of God, by means of the Holy Spirit to distribute spiritual gifts to His people, to direct their use and to develop the scope and success of their use. Listen to how Paul exhorts the believers in Corinth in 1 Corinthians 12:4-7 concerning this matter. Never forget your gifts.

4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. 6 There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. 7 But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

Coming in First Place – the preeminence of Jesus Christ

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All these gifts, all our service is to be for what? The common good of the body of Christ. You have received your gift to be used in service for the good of one another. But in addition to seeing service as a gift, we must secondly see that *serving one another is a privilege to be guarded from the diminishing effects of worldly cares*. Notice how Paul begins the exhortation; **“Take heed!”** - “see to it!” – “be absolutely sure” – “pay attention!” This is a warning! If you see a sign that says, “Take heed of the dog – or beware of dog” what do you do? You proceed carefully. Paul is calling Archippus to be on guard, to watch over the ministry or service he has received from the Lord. Evidently Archippus had been neglecting his ministry. It may have been that his family or his secular work was making heavy demands on him. It may have been that he was discouraged by what he was seeing in the church. We do not know; but Paul gives this word of wisdom; “take heed to your ministry” – guard your service to the Lord and do not let anything diminish it. Hear how Paul exhorts Timothy in a similar manner in 2 Timothy 2:1-4 -

1 You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. 2 The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. [this is Timothy’s ministry or service] 3 Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. [it will not always be easy] 4 No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier. [take heed to you service and do not be distracted].

Are you a son or daughter of God? Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus? As a child of God, you are blessed with opportunities to serve the body of Christ – do not neglect it and be willing to suffer hardship to whatever degree necessary to accomplish your service. And be on your guard not to let the everyday affairs of life encroach and impede your service to God and His people. Find a way to serve; make a way to serve; and when you are tired or feeling used up; pray for the grace to fulfill your ministry.

One final gleaning from this charge to Archippus is *that our serving one another is to have the desire and goal of growth*. We are not to service and do things for the Lord simply to be doing something. Our prayer always needs to be that God would use our lives make a difference in one another’s lives for His glory. Notice that Paul calls Archippus to do what, to fulfill his ministry! That is the goal; to see God fulfill or complete in use the ministry we received from God. Beloved, ministry is not something we do for God; it is something God does in and through us. The word “fulfill” in verse 17 speaks of God’s definite purposes for His servants to accomplish. It is God who works in us and through us to complete those good works that He has prepared for us. We read in Ephesians 2:10, **“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.”** This word “fulfill” parallels what we learned early from this letter to the Colossians. We have learned of the fullness of Jesus Christ, a fullness that belongs to every believer. And we, like Archippus, are called to fulfill our ministries or service to the Lord because we have been “filled up” or as Colossians 2:10 says, made complete in Jesus Christ.

And so, let us remember that until we make a practical application of Bible doctrine, until what we say we believe actually affects our behavior, our study is in vain. As we come to the end of this letter, having contemplated the supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus as Lord and

Coming in First Place – the preeminence of Jesus Christ

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Savior, if we have not come to see that in Him we have everything we could ever want or need, then we have studied in vain. For all the fullness of God is in Jesus Christ and we have been made complete in Him. We can now truly see Philippians 4:13 be true of us; **“I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.”** And by context this means I can serve God and His people in and through any circumstance because I have Christ, the fullness and completeness of God! Is this not a blessed encouragement? A great reminder to Archippus as well as to us.

This brings us to Paul. We read in verse 18, **“I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my imprisonment. Grace be with you.”** There is much that we could say about Paul, but from this verse may I suggest to you that he represents for us the following truth: *a person who sees all his work, all his service, all his words, all his being as belonging to the Lord for the furtherance of the gospel of Jesus Christ regardless of personal comfort or convenience.* Beloved, ministry is rarely convenient or comfortable. Disasters and distresses that rob our souls of spiritual strength and vigor never come at opportune times. And yet some of the greatest opportunities for service and for being a testimony to the Lord come in the most difficult of our circumstances. Such was the case for Paul as he cries out, “Remember my imprisonment!” In other words, “never forget why I am in chains!” It is not because I am a criminal. It is not because people do not like me! It is because of Christ in me, the hope of glory! In his letter to the church at Philippi, also written about the time of this letter to the Colossians, we get this idea. We read in Philippians 1:12-14 -

12 Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, 13 so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, 14 and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear.

Beloved, we ought to all be wearing such chains! You may feel that your current circumstances are a prison of some sort; keeping you from what you believe God would have you do; but never allow your circumstances to rob you from the truth of Christ in you; and to think that you cannot make an impact for the gospel. Beloved, remember the chains of Paul; who even locked away was convinced that his circumstances would turn out for the greater progress of the gospel. So housewife, stuck at home with the little ones; preach the gospel to those little ones; believing that your circumstances will turn out for the greater progress of the gospel. So worker; whose employer is demanding more and more time from you; live out the gospel; believing that your circumstances will turn out for the greater progress of the gospel. So ill one; laying there bed-ridden, seeing few friends and some health care workers; believe that your circumstance will turn out for the greater progress of the gospel if you will but live for and live out Christ and His word. For Paul, whether he was freely roaming the Roman Empire or was fettered between two Roman guards believed that each of his circumstances were for the progress of the gospel and was faithful, even when fettered to proclaiming the truth of Galatians 2:20 -

I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

Coming in First Place ~ the preeminence of Jesus Christ

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It was not always easy. It did not come at times of convenience and it certainly was rarely comfortable; but to live for Christ was Paul's heart desire. For he knew that whatever he suffered in this life; whatever he lost in this life; whatever was diminished in this life would pale in comparison to the glory that awaited him and awaits every believer in the presence of Christ. Here is our hope as expressed in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 -

16 Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. 17 For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, 18 while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

May our lives not be more characterized by the floundering faithlessness of Demas or the faltering forgetfulness of Archippus, but rather may we strive to see in our lives the fruitful generosity and fettered faithfulness of Nymphas and of Paul to the glory of God and the good of God's people.

Soli Deo Gloria

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