

Place: Lurgan Baptist 21:4:2013

COMPLETE IN HIM

Reading: Colossians 4:7-18

14. FINAL THOUGHTS

When Andrew Morton released his book “My Story,” detailing the life of Diana, the Princess of Wales, he burst a bubble that left many people disappointed and disillusioned with life behind the closed doors of the royal residences at Kensington Palace and High grove. On the heels of Mr. Morton’s sensational publication came the equally sensational revelations about Sarah, the Duchess of York, and the consequent breakdown of her royal marriage. Faith in royalty and esteem for the Royal family had been dealt a heavy blow. Margaret Thatcher’s book “The Downing Street Years,” was soon on the book shelves. In this book Baroness Thatcher in her own forthright way spilled the beans by frankly telling of the double dealing that went on within her Cabinet, and at times behind her back, prior to her forced resignation after eleven years at the top of British politics. Once again the Cabinet revelations left many disillusioned and disappointed with some of our political leaders.

Nor has the Church escaped the public’s disenchantment with organised religion. The notorious Bishop of Durham has relegated the Christmas message to a matter of myth and fable and other clerics readily agree. Thanks to this

confusion brought on by those who profess to belong to Christendom, the same disappointments have also effected some people’s perception of Jesus Christ. Today, there are many voices which tell us that we need something more than Jesus Christ, *some more exciting experience*. Others propose that we can do with something less than Jesus Christ saying all ways lead to one God. And many preach something, or someone other than Jesus Christ. Sadly, even among Christians a mild indifference to the centrality and supremacy of our Lord Jesus has set in. The church at Colosse was being threatened by serious trouble. False teachers had entered the Christian community with a combination of false teaching, the Judaic and Gnostic doctrines. On the one hand there was Greek Philosophy which said *Christ plus knowledge equals salvation*, on the other hand there was Jewish Ceremony which said *Christ plus works equals salvation*. So Paul wrote Colossians to state that **Christ plus nothing equals salvation.**

He writes this letter to set forth the pre-eminence of the Lord Jesus. You see over and over again in this epistle Paul emphasises the Pre-eminence of the Lord Jesus, so as to give Him His rightful place as Lord of Lords and King of Kings. Paul says “*For in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily,*” and you are what ? “*Complete in him.*” (2:10) Isn’t that wonderful ? There’s the answer. You want to know God ? Christ is the image of God. You want knowledge ? In Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. You want to be accepted by God ? Worship Christ not angels or celestial intercessors.

You want holiness ? It doesn't come from abusing your body, it comes from setting your affections on Him. Now we have come a long way from the opening chapter to where we are this ! Indeed what we have in this closing verses are “ **Final Thoughts,**” and these “ *Final Thoughts,*” gather themselves around three persons or groups. Epaphras, the church of the Laodiceans and Archippus. In other words Paul's talks here about,

(1) A SPIRITUAL MINISTRY

What is it ? Prayer. Leonard Ravenhill, a revival author and preacher made a statement that we all do well to read slowly and introspectively specifically as we examine the nature of our prayer life. “ *The self-sufficient do not pray, the self-satisfied will not pray, the self-righteous cannot pray. No man is greater than his prayer life.* ” Are you convicted ? I hope so. I certainly am. Robert Murray McCheyne (1813-43) saw God move in revival power at Dundee, Scotland. A great part of this revival was prayer, about which McCheyne said, “ *What a man is on his knees before God, that he is, and nothing more.* ” Enter Epaphras the man of prayer. Do you recall we met Epaphras in (Ch 1) ? He was the man who founded the church at Colosse. He had been led to Christ through Paul's ministry at Ephesus and had returned home to share the good news of the gospel. It seems likely that Epaphras also founded the churches in Laodicea and Hierapolis. Did you notice how Paul refers to him ? “ *Epaphras who is one of you, a servant of Christ.* ” (4:12) You see, Epaphras has come to Rome to tell Paul about this heresy that was threatening the church yet even removed from

them by that distance he still has great zeal for them and that zeal reveals itself in prayer. I mean do you notice that,

(a) **HE PRAYED CONSTANTLY:**

“ *Always labouring fervently for you in prayers,* ” he was not satisfied with occasional or spasmodic concern and prayer. My even his absence from them did not diminish his interest. He was persistent in his praying for them. He was not content with asking once but rather he bore these Colossian believers continually before the Lord. Do you recall the Saviour's words ? “ *Men ought always to pray and not to faint.* ” (Lk 18:1) How easy it is to lose heart, but not Epaphras he was habitually engaged in this ministry for those who were in need of spiritual blessing. He did not only pray when he felt like it like many believers today. Nor did he pray when he was told to pray, not did he pray when the other believers prayed. No he was constantly in prayer seeking God's blessing. My don't give up. Don't quit praying. Who knows what God is going to do ? Who knows what may happen tomorrow in the life of that individual ?

(b) **HE PRAYED FERVENTLY:**

Do you see it ? “ *Labouring fervently,* ” (4:12) It's the word found in connection with the apostle's own prayers. (1:29 2:1) and its similar to the word translated “ *agony,* ” which is associated with our Lord in Gethsemane. Do you recall how Dr. Luke describes Christ ? “ *And being in agony he prayed the more earnestly,* ” (Lk 22:44) He was on his knees

agonizing in a prolonged, intense, effectual, fervent prayer. It says “*always labouring,*” working at it, agonizing in prayer. My prayer is not simply flipping up little thoughts to God, it is agonizing, it is struggling, it is wrestling with God like Jacob and saying, “*I will not let thee go except thou bless me.*” (Gen 32:26) Paul uses the same word in (1 Cor 9:25) of an athlete who runs a long race and beats his body to make it go, drives it, agonizes it. My Epaphras prayed like that. He prayed in an intense, spiritual wrestling with God. We get the impression that prayer was serious business with Epaphras. My is it serious business with you ? I mean, do you pray ? Do you really pray ? Are you here when the church prays ? Someone has said “*That the popularity of a church is measured by its Sunday morning attendance, the popularity of a preacher is measured by its Sunday evening attendance and the popularity of the Lord is measured by its prayer meeting attendance.*” But Epaphras prayed fervently. Did you ever see Christians excited ? If you want to see them excited you’ll have go to a football match, or rugby match or a golf tournament. Warren Wiersbe says, “*If believers put as much concern into their praying as they did into their sport we would have revival.*” (a) (b)

(c) **INDIVIDUALLY:**

“*Labouring fervently for you in prayers,*” he did not pray around the world for everyone and nobody in particular. He centered his intercession on the saints in Colosse, Laodicea and Hierapolis. No doubt he mentioned some of them by name. A story is told about an old pastor who

every Saturday afternoon could be seen leaving his study and entering the church building by the back door, and about sundown he would be seen going home. Someone’s curiosity was aroused enough to follow one day and watch through a window. It was in the days when the family pew was an institution of the church. *The old pastor was seen to kneel at each pew and pray for every member of the family that was to occupy it on the Lord’s day.* He called each member by name as he poured out his heart to God for his flock. His was a ministry of power and his people reflected the grace of God on them. Blessed is that church which has such a praying shepherd or shepherds.

(d) **HE PRAYED PURPOSEFULLY:**

Well, what is he praying for ? “*That you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.*” He wants you mature. The word “*perfect,*” is (telios) complete, mature, filled-out, fully developed. The second word, the word “*complete,*” is an interesting word that means fully assured. He wants you mature and confident that the truth is the truth and not having your minds messed up by false teachers. He wants your doctrine to be mature and he wants your behavior to be mature. My should this not be the goal of every pastor and elder ? That his people might be mature, and convinced in their mind that this is the truth. And how do you make them mature ? Well, “*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine for reproof for correction for instruction in righteousness that the man of God may be perfect (mature) thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*” (2 Tim 3:16-17) My it’s the Word of God

that brings maturity and Epaphras believed in teaching God's truth. He wanted his people mature. He wasn't satisfied that they were there, he wanted them grown-up. He wasn't satisfied that they gave their money, he wanted them assured that the truth was the truth so they wouldn't fall into error because he cared, because he loved them. My do you know something ? Somewhere along the line we've got to get past the physical. I mean its fine to pray for physical things but when will get to pray for what really matters ? When will start labouring in prayer for people's spiritual welfare ? I mean do you ever hear anyone praying in a prayer meeting like this ? (a) (b) (c) (d)

(e) HE PRAYED SACRIFICIALLY:

“ *For I bear him record that he hath great zeal for you*,” he was enthusiastic about his church and the churches at Laodicea and Hierapolis. How zealous are you towards other Christians ? You know, when the Lord Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane He sweat great drops of blood. Paul had great “ *conflict*,” (2:1) and Epaphras experienced “ *much distress*.” I mean there was sacrifice here. It cost him to pray. Indeed “ *praying that costs nothing accomplishes nothing*.” E. M. Bounds was a great prayer warrior of the last generation. He would often rise early in the morning and pray for many hours before he began the work of the day. His many books on prayer testify to the fact that Bounds like Epaphras knew how to agonize in prayer before the Lord. Do you ? (1)

(2) A SPECIAL MESSAGE

Look if you will at (4:16) What was “ *the epistle from Laodicea* ?” The simple answer is we don't know, but this does not mean we are missing part of the Word of God. But did you notice the emphasis on reading ? Three times in (4:16) the word “ *read*,” appears. This is the public reading of the Scriptures. Do you recall Paul said to Timothy ? “ *Till I come give attendance to reading*.” (2 Tim 4:13) You can learn a great deal about a church when you just visit a service by whether or not the people have copies of the Bible. If you go to a church and there are not many copies of the Bible that tells you that probably there's not a real emphasis on the Bible. I wonder how many of you have a Bible today. *Would you hold it up* ? Let me see. If you have your Bible today would you hold it up ? You see, we need to place the emphasis where it belongs on the Word of God, and we need to give attention to the public reading of God's Word. Now in God's Word we have the Book of Colossians and did you notice what Paul says in (4:16) ?

Now do you recall I told you there were three cities in close proximity ? Hieropolis, Laodicea and Colosse. Now we know that another letter, some thirty-five years after this time, was addressed to the church of Laodicea. Do you remember that ? It was a letter written by none other than the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Do you recall what He said to the church at Laodicea ? (Rev 3:14-15) Now isn't that an interesting thing ? Here was a church that thirty- five years prior to that time was evidently alive, active, and alert. Now, thirty-five years later, there is no enthusiasm, there is no excitement, there is no evangelism, and the Lord Jesus Christ says, “ *You make*

me sick.” Isn’t it sad that such a thing can happen in such a short period of time ? Here is a Christian once on fire for the Lord, now they’re lukewarm and indifferent in their life. Here’s a believer who would not miss a meeting, now they lie in bed on Sunday mornings. Isn’t it a tragedy that that could happen in the life of a church ? Have you ever seen a church that was once on fire for Jesus Christ and now it is just cooled off in its ardor for the Lord ?

**“ Prone to wander Lord I feel it,
Prone to leave the God I love,”**

Now why is it then that the Holy Spirit especially says that this letter to the Colossians is to be read to the church of Laodicea ? *Well, you see, if they had heeded the message of Colossians then they would never have needed the message of our Lord in Revelation (Ch 3)* You see, what that tells us then is that there’s a special message in this book that will help us not get lukewarm in our faith. Could I just suggest some things to you as you look back over this Colossian letter, that if you and I will heed them, if we will pay attention to them we will not become indifferent, lukewarm in our faith, sickening to Christ. Do you recall (Ch 1)

***(a) Chapter 1: Is All About The SUPREMACY Of
Christ:***

Do you remember that ? (1:15-16) The Lord Jesus is Lord of Creation. Astronomers estimate there are millions even billions of galaxies. What they can see leads them to estimate the number of the stars in the universe as roughly

the number of all the grains of sand on all of the world’s beaches and your Saviour put it all together. I mean how can you get indifferent in your faith and believe that the very God who flung the universe off His fingertips is your personal Savior ? But not only is He the Lord of Creation, He’s the Lord of the Church. Look at (1:18) “ *And He is the head of the body, the church.*” The word “ *head*,” gives the sense of origin and source as well as leader and ruler. No preacher is the head of any church, no group of men are heads of any church, Jesus Christ is the Lord of His church, Jesus Christ is the pre-eminent One in His church. Well, how can you get indifferent then if you have a Head like that ? But look at (1:18) Do you see that word pre-eminence ? It means number one. My if you make up your mind to put the Lord Jesus first in your life, and if every day of your life you reaffirm the supremacy of Jesus Christ as Lord of your life, then you can’t be indifferent. Do you see that Laodicea needed this message of the Supremacy of Christ ? But do you recall (Ch 2)

***(b) Chapter 2: Is All About the SUFFICIENCY of
Christ:***

I mean look at (2:9-10) Is this not what the false teachers at Colosse were denying ? My the sum total of who God is resides permanently in Jesus Christ. “ *All the fulness*,” of the divine essence dwells in Jesus Christ. He was God, He is God and He ever shall be God. “ *And ye are complete in him*,” you are filled with all the fullness in Him. Why do I want anything else if I’ve got it all in the Lord Jesus ? My when you get Christ you get it all.

Why we have entitled this series “ *Complete in Him,*” Why ? Because when we come to know the Lord Jesus as our personal Saviour He becomes everything we need to live the life we need to live. Do you see that Laodicea needed this message of the Sufficiency of Christ ? But do you recall (Ch 3)

(c) Chapter 3: Is All About The SOVEREIGNTY Of Christ:

His sway in our personal life (3:1-17) in our home life (3:19-21) and in our work life. (3:22-4:1) In other words all of life is to be lived from heaven’s point of view. Do you see that Laodicea needed this message of the Sovereignty of Christ ? But do you recall (Ch 4) ?

(d) Chapter 4: Is All About The SYMPATHY Of Christ:

For do you recall in (Ch 4) Paul talks about “ *them that are without.*” (4:5) And he’s talking here about the importance of evangelism and telling other people about the Lord Jesus Christ. You see, if you get into the heart of the Lord Jesus you will find that the Lord Jesus is concerned about the lost. Do you recall what was said of Christ ? “ *And Jesus when he came out saw much people, and was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd,*” (Mk 6:34) , In the ancient city of Rome in the temple of Vesta there was a fire that continually burned, and if for any reason that perpetual flame went out all business, public and private, ceased and nothing was done until the flame was kindled again. My has the flame of evangelism gone

out in your heart ? Do you need to stop everything you’re doing and do business with God until your heart is on fire for Jesus Christ again ? Now do you see that Laodicea needed this message of the Sympathy of Christ ? **A Special Message.** “ *Cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans,*” (4:16) Had they read it and heeded it they would never have needed the message of lukewarmness which the Risen Lord sent to them. (1) (2)

(3) A SCRIPTURAL MANDATE

“ *And say to Archippus*,” Who is to say to him ? The church. You see, they were to encourage him, for the Bible says, “ *Exhorting or encouraging one another.*” (Heb 10:25) Now who was Archippus ? Well, he was a member of the church in Colosse, possibly the son of Philemon and Apphia and perhaps he was taking the place of Epaphras while he was away in Rome ministering to Paul. *Had Archippus become discouraged ? Had the false teachers invaded the church and created problems for him ?* What we do know is that many pastors face many problems, carry many burdens and some are on the verge of quitting. Paul reminds Archippus of some things before he sets his pen down. Archippus has,

(a) A SPECIAL ENDOWMENT:

“ *the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord,*” in other words his ministry was a gift from God and he was a steward of God who would one day have to give an account of his work. My do you realise that your ministry, that ministry of teaching, singing, comfort,

prayer, testimony, serving is from the Lord ? That's why you have got to "*Take heed*," watch out, concentrate on your ministry. At the Battle of Trafalgar, in 1805 Lord Nelson is said to have told his sailors, "*England expects every man to his duty*." Do you know something ? That's what the Lord of the Churches expects ? (a)

(b) HAS A SPECIAL ENABLEMENT:

1. He has the Servants of God:

I mean Paul has just put a whole pile of illustrations right on the back of the neck of Archippus. And said "*Take heed that thou fulfil it*." Tychicus has. Onesimus has. Aristarchus has. Mark has. Jesus Justus has. Epaphras has. Luke has. I'd like you to.

2. He has the Spirit of God:

For the God who calls is the God who enables. Am I speaking to some believer thisand you are about to quit ? Is it because of loneliness ? Is it because of misunderstanding ? Is it because of opposition ? Is it because you are weary in the work ? Is it because like Demas the world has become attractive ? My why do you want to quit ? Someone give me a motto many years ago that I have kept in my study. Do you what it says, "*Its always to soon too quit*."

(c) HAS A SPECIAL ENCOURAGEMENT:

For the church at Colosse were to encourage him, "*And say to Archippus*," Bob Jones, Sr. used to exhort,

"*Finish the job*." He also said, "*The test of a man's character is what it takes to stop him*." My don't stop. Don't quit. Don't resign. Finish the task that the Lord has given you to do. Paul said "*That I might finish my course with joy*." (Acts 20:24) Wouldn't it be terrible to live for the Lord for years and years and years and then come right to the end of your ministry and blow it ? Wouldn't that be a tragedy ? I want to be like old Vance Havner, I want to finish well. I don't know about you, I want to finish well. "*Lord, I want to finish my ministry, I want to fulfill my ministry*." Do you ? As we take our leave of this remarkable letter may I remind you that we are "*Complete in Him*." We do not need any Addition to Christ, what we do need is a greater Appreciation of Christ so that in our lives "*He might have the pre-eminence*." Years ago a little girl was going to a birthday party and she was trying to put on those long gloves with endless buttons right up to the arm. She got into a muddle that at last she called her Mum. "*Mummy they won't come right*." Mummy explained, "*There's the first button and there's the first hole, get the first right and all the rest will follow*." So it turned out to be. So it always turns out to be. My give Christ the first place and all the rest will follow.

"*That in all things He might have the pre-eminence*," and He must have it, and He shall it, and He will it."

***Lord take my life and make it wholly Thine
Fill my poor heart with Thy great love Divine
Take all my will, my passion, self and pride
I now surrender, Lord in me abide.***

