

In Memory of Forgettable People

May 23, 2010

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I) Colossians 1:1-14

II) Introduction

A) *Forgettable people*

- 1) Most of us will never be awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor, an academy award or a Pulitzer prize. I have no plans to build a bookcase for an Olympic Gold medal or a Nobel Peace Prize.
- 2) Most of us will end our working career without getting an honorary doctorate or even a gold watch. We will simply clear out our desks and walk away. We are among the unwashed masses of people throughout the centuries who go through life as best we can – we work hard, raise families, try to make a small difference in the world, and eventually die. We are forgettable people.
- 3) By the time our great grand children roll around, even if we are still living we begin to fade from the world's memory. One by one our older friends and family die. Once we too pass on, it is safe to say that it will not be long before we are forgotten along with the billions of people who have gone before us.
- 4) Even if you leave some semblance of a legacy by writing a book, have a building named after you or you even make it into the history books you no longer have control over what is said and done in your name.

B) *The forgotten city*

- 1) Out of all of the cities to which the Apostle Paul wrote letters in the New Testament, the city of Colossae was the least important.
 - (a) *Colossae was only 110 miles from the great city of Ephesus in what is now Turkey. It was considered part of a tri-city area along with Hierapolis and Laodicia.*
 - (b) *Hierapolis was an important center of political activity and Laodicia a thriving center of trade and commerce. Colossae, on the other hand, faded in the middle part of the first century to be an unimportant, forgettable place.*
- 2) The tri-cities were situated in the valley of the Lycus River – an area known for having frequent earthquakes. In the year 62 A.D. an earthquake hit the area leveling all three cities. Because of their importance and wealth Hierapolis and Laodicia, they were rebuilt. Colossae on the other hand was left in ruins – forgotten, except for a letter that was left behind.

C) *Paul's audience*

- 1) As we begin our study in the book of Colossians, bear in mind that these are people like you and me who are not at the top of their game. These are not the winners, the geniuses or the stars.
- 2) These are people who are trying to make it through by doing the best that they can to follow Jesus.

- 3) Paul did not plant the church in Colossae, in fact, before he wrote this letter he never even visited there. The church was likely planted and nurtured by Epaphras. Epaphras you may remember also had an important role in Paul's communication with Philemon.

D) Reason for writing

- 1) Paul was probably in prison at the time of this writing either in Ephesus or in Rome. The speculation is that Epaphras brought a troubling report about what was going on in the church so Paul, whose name and reputation certainly had weight in Colossae, wrote the letter.
- 2) As with all of the churches there was plenty to be discouraged about, and so the Christians in Colossae needed encouragement. But they faced some very difficult issues that Paul saw as lethal influences to their faith and mission.
- 3) Paul wrote to address what he called, other philosophies. Theologians today see the main purpose for Paul writing to the Colossians was to deal with what is now known as the Colossian heresy. False teaching that threaten the very life of the church.

E) Importance for you and me.

- 1) The reason Paul is writing to the church in Colossae is especially important for us to hear. Just as the Colossian church was surrounded by a variety of teachings and cultural pressures to dilute the truth with self serving dogma, we too must pay close attention to the attitudes, motives and teachings that influence us.
- 2) These are dangerous times to be a Christian. Dangerous because unless we are diligent in our discernment about what is true and refuse to bow to what is not true, we will not only fail Christ's mission but we could destroy something living, strong and truly beautiful, the church.

III) Exegesis

A) Salutations

- 1) I encourage you to have your Bibles open to Colossians 1.
- 2) As with all of Paul's letters he opens with salutations.
 - (a) *Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae: Grace and peace to you from God our Father.*
- 3) You can tell that Paul thinks highly of the Colossian Christians because he calls them holy and faithful. This is not intended to be a harsh reprimanding letter, it is to build them up to grow in Christ and take action to defend against the false teachings in their midst.

B) Prayer of Thanksgiving

- 1) Paul spends the rest of chapter one telling the Colossian church how he is praying for them.
 - (a) *We can learn from this. Yes, it is critical that we pray for each other and various concerns for the church, the community and the world. But there is also power in telling each other how and for what we are praying.*

- (b) *I know that you pray for me. Some of you have told me specifically in person, in emails and notes that you have written how you are praying. I can't tell you how much that encourages my faith! I am more cognizant as I go through the week of God's guiding hand on my life in ways that are certainly the result of prayer.*
- 2) The first part is a thanksgiving prayer and one of the great run-on sentences in scripture.
- (a) *Verse 3, We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints – the faith and love that spring from hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel that has come to you.*

c) Faith, Hope and Love

- 1) Paul introduced a very familiar theme that he uses in letters to other churches as well. "Faith, hope and love" weave their way throughout the epistles. The most famous use of the triad is of course in 1 Corinthians 13 where Paul distinguishes their level of importance when it comes to how we relate to each other and other people.
- (a) *And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.*
- 2) In Colossians, Paul chooses to focus on the truth of who we are in Christ and not so much on how we relate to each other. So, looking at his use of faith, hope and love we can conclude in this letter that even though the greatest of these is love, it all begins with hope.

IV) Trees

A) Dutch Elm Disease

- 1) In the northern states there is a terrible plague spreading throughout the countryside. It is called Dutch Elm Disease. What is interesting about Dutch Elm disease is that to the regular person looking at a big majestic Dutch Elm tree, you would never believe that it was terminally sick. You gaze at its extensive roots, sturdy trunk and broad canopy of limbs and leaves and say, "wow, what a beautiful tree. Let's build a treehouse!"
- 2) Dutch Elm Disease is pretty sneaky. The disease is caused by a fungus with a really long name that is introduced most often by beetles.
- 3) Not "the Beatles," the 60's rock band, who, according to my parents, bored their way into American culture and brought with them the deadly fungus of Rock and Roll and long hair which led to a terrible diseased plague that is killing American culture. No we are talking about – bark beetles.
- 4) By boring under the bark the beetle infects the tree with the fungus which then spreads in the sap to the whole tree. There are very few outward symptoms at first but the tree's death is certain and the longer the tree stands the more risk there is for other trees to be infected.

B) Paul's warning

- 1) In writing to the Colossians, Paul sent a strong message that there are Bark Beetles boring toward the heart of the Church. If the heresy of their teaching is allowed to infect the embrace of the truth of Christ, it will lead to the certain death of the church.
- 2) Do you know what heresy is? Heresy is any teaching or philosophy outside the truth of Christ. So, if heresy is like the fungus with a really long name that can kill the church, then what are the Beetles?
- 3) Remember, we are not talking about "The Beatles," Beetles. Stay with me on this.

C) Church Beetles

- 1) Church Beetles are the attitudes and actions that bore into the bark of the church and carry the deadly heresies and lies that will eventually kill it. I've thought about this. Here are the 4 Church Beetles.
- 2) **Beetle 1: Spiritual Apathy**
 - (a) Spiritual Apathy is passionless faith that only goes through the motions of religion but is indifferent to the life transforming call of Christ.
- 3) **Beetle 2: Intellectual Laziness**
 - (a) Intellectual laziness bores its head into the practice of a church that is more interested in entertainment and comfort than it is about the discipline of the study of scripture and seeking the heart of God.
- 4) **Beetle 3: Religious Arrogance**
 - (a) Religious arrogance is assumption of superiority without regard for true humility before God. This arrogance inoculates the church from fulfilling the Great Commission because we see ourselves somehow as better than other people.
- 5) **Beetle 4: Sleepy Watchmen**
 - (a) The Sleepy Watchmen beetle is the carelessness of the church to look out for potential attacks of the evil one. It is unprepared for battle and the people have not clothed themselves with the full armor of God.
- 6) There is plenty of evidence today that as soon as a church starts to compromise on the pursuit of the truth of God's word and in the name of tolerance opens itself up to any heretical philosophy or teaching that comes along, its witness and usefulness to the kingdom is put in jeopardy. The church may look healthy on the outside but its fate is already sealed.

D) Tree on the Cover

- 1) I'd like you to take out your worship folder for a minute and look at the Worship Notes with the tree on it.
- 2) Throughout his thanksgiving prayer, Paul uses agricultural language. To help us get a picture of what he is talking about, consider this tree as a metaphor.
 - (a) *The roots are deep and support the massive forces of the weather and weight of the tree but also supply it with nourishment of minerals and water from the ground. A tree without an adequate root system cannot stand.*

- 3) In big bold letters I'd like you to write the word, "**HOPE**," over the roots on your picture.
 - (a) *We can infer that the roots of a healthy tree must grow deep in the soil of the word of truth: **the faith and love that spring from hope... that you have already heard about in the word of truth.***
 - (b) *You can write "**TRUTH**" somewhere to indicate the kind of soil that the tree is planted in.*
 - 4) The trunk of the tree is faith. The trunk is the first to sprout from the root system. Go ahead and write, "**FAITH**" inside the trunk. It's interesting. According to Paul, hope is not grounded in faith but rather, faith is grounded in hope.
 - (a) *Mark Twain says of faith, "Faith is believing what you know ain't so."*
 - 5) The fruit of the tree is love. Write boldly the word, "**LOVE**" in the branches of the tree. It is in the foliage of the tree where the fruit grows. Jesus said, "a tree is known by its fruit."
 - (a) *Even though we have a strong root system of hope, and a sturdy trunk of faith, the measure of a fruit tree's worth is in the fruit of love that is harvested.*
 - (b) *I am very aware that the tree in the picture does not have fruit on it. That's your job. You can draw any kind of fruit that you want on that tree, just make sure that it is good fruit!*
 - 6) **Verse 9, For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.**
 - (a) *The life blood of a tree is the sap which brings nourishment to every part of the tree. Consider Paul's prayer to fill the Colossian church with the knowledge of God's will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding as the sap in our tree metaphor.*
 - (b) *It makes sense that knowledge of God's will stimulates faith, hope and love in every way. We can also see why Paul is concerned that if the knowledge of God's will is contaminated with an heretical fungus, that false teaching will effect the whole tree and potentially kill it.*
- v) **Live a life worthy**
- A) **Conclusion**
- 1) Finally, Look at verse 10, Paul says,
 - (a) ***And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way.***
 - 2) Paul does not pray for the forgettable people of Colossae to avoid pain or difficulties or trials. No, he prayed to encourage them and hold them accountable to "live a life worthy of the Lord."
- B) **Bee-Encouraged**
- 1) If you think about it, **to live a life worthy of the Lord**, we need to live opposite of those who allow Church Beetles to bore into the life of the church.

- 2) In other words, Bee-Encouraged! You are welcome to draw your Bee-Encouraged Bees on the the on the flowering tree on the front cover.
- 3) **Bee-Encouraged #1: Be Spiritually passionate**
 - (a) The Bible says to, "Love the Lord with all of your heart, mind, soul and strength." If apathy and indifference are among the deadly dangers, then a living a life that is passionate toward God is a sign of health.
- 4) **Bee-Encouraged #2: Be Intellectually Curious**
 - (a) God can take your hard questions. Throughout the ages there have been movements that encouraged people to remain ignorant. It honors God when we use our mind to learn and grow in matters of faith and life.
- 5) **Bee-Encouraged #3: Be a Religiously Humble Bumble**
 - (a) Humility is not a weakness. On the contrary, true humility is disarming to the arrogant. If you humble yourself before God you are then confident in His strength. Paul says that he even boasts in Christ's strength.
- 6) **Bee-Encouraged #4: Be an Alert Watchman**
 - (a) The alert watchman does not sleep at the post because the whole community is put in danger if we fall asleep. An alert watchman always puts on the whole armor of God as Paul describes it in Ephesians 6. Protective armor against the attacks of the evil one so you can stand firm.

c) Encouragement for forgettable people

- 1) We've had fun with Beetles and Bees today. But the fact is that Paul's prayer, is a very serious matter. **Live a life worthy of the Lord.**
- 2) Pray for me and I'll pray for you, let's all pray for each other to not just talk about it, or put on some kind of act to fool people into thinking we are living a worthy life.
- 3) Does this mean we have to be perfect. No. It means that we take ownership of how we live as children of God, and through the help of the Lord we live a life worthy of the passion, wholeness, humility and hope we have in Christ.
- 4) We may all be forgettable people but while we are here, live a life worthy of the Lord.
 - (a) *It used to make me so angry when my mom would use that line of reasoning with me when I was being obnoxious. Yes, I was an obnoxious kid, at times. She didn't have to scold me for what I was doing wrong or go into a long explanation of how to act correctly in a given situation like a restaurant or church.*
 - (b) *She simply said, "Ricky Carlson, you are a child of God, act like one." My mother is a wise woman.*
- 5) So, my friends, live a life worthy of the Lord and pray for each other to live a life worthy of the Lord. Amen.

VI) Prayer

- 1) Lord Jesus, You are our hope. And in that hope we know that you are with us now to nourish and encourage us to grow in love with you every day. Help our roots of hope to grow deep and broad, not afraid to always grow in wisdom and knowledge of you.
- 2) Increase our faith that we would be strong enough to stand against the forces of untruth and threats around us.
- 3) Help us to love to live in your light, to bask in your transforming presence so that we can produce good fruit of your Spirit.
- 4) Lord, metaphors aside. We need to hear this encouragement today because we so often measure the success of our faith and the church by simply counting numbers, increased budgets and more responsibilities. The truth is you measure success in spiritual growth even when everything else in the community or country is going badly.
- 5) Help us to live our lives in a manner worthy of your name, in whom we pray, Amen.

VII) Hymn Come Thou Fount

VIII) Benediction

- 1) You are rooted in hope, out of which springs faith and spiritual fruit. Go in the wisdom and knowledge of Christ in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.