



## **Colossians 4:16–18**

16 After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea. 17 Tell Archippus: ‘See to it that you complete the ministry you have received in the Lord.’ 18 I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.

### **Reflection**

As we come to the end of Paul's letter to the Colossians today, it's important to remember where this letter began. It began in a gaol cell. Paul's writing under house arrest in Rome, chained to a Praetorian guard night and day. His feet, which have walked the length of the Roman Empire, can now scarcely find room to pace. His eyes, which were always on the Gentile world, are now restricted to four walls. It's an unlikely place from which to change the course of human history. But his great heart, though caged in prison, continues to mark the world. Ephesians, Philippians, Philemon & Colossians – were all written from prison – Paul's reach extending further than ever, not just to the far reaches of the Roman Empire but down throughout the next two millennia, by the power

of the Holy Spirit, his words becoming recognised as the words of God.<sup>1</sup>

Into the darkness of his captivity had come Epaphras, only to make his suffering more acute. In 2 Corinthians at the end of Paul's long list of suffering and hardship for the gospel came his deepest and most unrelenting trial,

28 Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. 29 Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?

Epaphras' news somehow brings a deeper shade of darkness into Paul's prison cell. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? In

<sup>1</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Colossians and Philemon: The Supremacy of Christ* (Preaching the Word; Westchester, Ill: Crossway Books, 1989), 154.

prison and powerless, if not he'd head to Colosse immediately and confront these false teachers with the truth of Christ that by the grace of God he wields like no other. But he is in chains for the same gospel that is under attack. Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn? Paul burns in his powerlessness, in his weakness. But God's power is made perfect in weakness. And so Paul prays and he writes. We've heard his prayer,

9 For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, 10 so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please

him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, 11 being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, 12 and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. 1:9–12

Powerless in prison and therefore one hundred percent reliant on God Paul prays and he writes. We've heard his prayer, and now we've read what he wrote, as he was carried along by the Holy Spirit. If there were a highlights reel, surely these words must both encapsulate the letter and stand amongst the highest words in all of Scripture:

15 The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. 17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. 19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by mak-

ing peace through his blood, shed on the cross. 1:15–20

28 He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. 29 To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me. 1:28–29

6 So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, 7 rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. 8 See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition

and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ. 9 For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, 10 and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority. 2:6–10

3 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Col 3:1–4

We've heard Paul's prayer for the Colos-



sians and we've read Paul's letter to the Colossians and two thousand years later we've seen how God has used both. His letter ends today with these words,

16 After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea. 17 Tell Archippus: 'See to it that you complete the ministry you have received in the Lord.' 18 I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.

Read this letter. Read it in your churches. See that it is read in other churches. Read it and read it again until it is written on your heart by the power of the Holy Spirit to

draw down upon when you need strength and as a constant reminder of why God has put you here. Then see to it that you complete the ministry you've received in the Lord. And remember my chains.

## **Think & Pray**

As we consider these final words from Paul we would do well to apply them to ourselves. God has given us his word to read, and re-read, to meditate over, to pray through, and to become. So that we can share the eternal-life-giving news of Jesus Christ with others and that God's glory might resound throughout all the earth as it does in heaven. God's word is mankind's most precious possession. In it we have eternal life. In it we have communion with the Creator of the universe. In it we

have wisdom for the ages and the pathway for living the fullest expression of human life possible. The Bible is the way that God has chosen to reveal to us his character, his will, his love and his plan for our lives. Can you imagine leaving it unread? Can you imagine treasuring other possessions above it? And yet who amongst us is not guilty of these two things?

As the Christmas season comes upon us followed by the New Year why not commit to the Lord today to make 2018 the year in which you read, and absorb, and enjoy your Bible more than ever before? Get to know your God in 2018 through the pages of Scripture more than ever before. God's word takes us higher. It enlarges our hearts causing us greater pain and greater joy that we ever thought possible, driv-

ing us forward to make a deep and lasting impact on our world that will echo into eternity; even if it is God's will that we do so in chains.