

Colossians Chapter 4.

V 1 a continuation on the theme of bondservant but this time aimed at employers of bondservants. Can we draw from that, that God approves of what we would call power abusive relationships such as slavery, bondservants and concubines?

V 2 Praying earnestly suggests that sometimes prayer doesn't just flow off the tongue but that we should pray anyway, even when it seems like an effort. We should always season our prayers with plenty of praise and thanksgiving, even when you might not feel like thanking and praising God, eg, if you're feeling under the cosh, financially, health wise, fractured relationships, problems at work or unemployment or in Paul and Silas's case, when you're in prison for your faith. Acts 16:25.

When Paul mentions the mystery of God or Jesus, here he's talking about the personal and intimate relationship God has with His believers. In the Old Testament God was forced to be aloof from individuals and He could only speak to them through Godly leaders and prophets because of the barrier of sin. For the believer, sin is no longer a barrier to God because Jesus had conquered and overcome sin; it's no longer a barrier. That is the mystery that Paul wants to expose. Problem. He's stuck in jail. So Paul asks the Colossians to devote themselves to prayer and asks for prayer that he can get out of jail and get back to proclaiming the Gospel. He clearly believes that his release will happen, he has total faith that God will sort it, we know this because he's asking that when, not if he gets out of jail, he'll be clear in his message. Paul prays with faith and belief.

Walk in wisdom towards those who are outside (outside the faith). How? What does Paul mean when he says: 'Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone?' It's not about winning arguments, Paul learnt that in Acts 26:24-28. So what's the secret to winning souls rather than arguments?

Just read Colossians 4:7-14 and the list of the great and the good that were visiting Paul.

In 15 & 16 Paul's exhortation to the sister church in Laodicea. Look carefully at Archippus and his position in the sister church at Laodicea. Look at Philemon 1:2. It looks like the church at Laodicea was a house church that met in his house. Paul refers to a letter to the Laodicean church which never made it into the Bible and specifically asks that both churches exchange their respective letters. Maybe we can read into that, that there was a common thread or theme to these two letters. It's likely that the church at Laodicea was just as strong as the church at Colossae at that time.

However, churches don't generally stay static for long. There's a direction of travel, upwards or downwards and it seems in the case of the Laodiceans, it was downwards.

Let's have a look at John's letter to the church in Laodicea. Revelation 3:14-22. It tells us how a church has backslidden.

This is the last of 7 letters to various churches in Asia Minor. They were what we today call Performance Reports, something we're all familiar with, maybe with work, maybe the last one we had was in school but we've all been there. The difference between ours and this performance report, is that this one was written by Jesus.

Let's read the letter to the church in Laodicea but as we read it, just like any passage in

the Bible, if you think to yourself, this was written for 'N' down the road, then you've missed the whole point of the passage. No, it was written with you in mind, not him or her. To a greater or lesser extent that goes for the parables of the good Samaritan, the fool who built his house on sand and the rich farmer with the barns. If we're really honest with yourself you can relate to the bad and the stupid in all these parables. The same also applies to the 7 churches: if you're thinking as you read it, I know a church just like that, then you've probably missed the point. Look around you, it applies just as much to our church as any other.

In this letter to Laodicea, Jesus introduces Himself as good as any compère, He is perfection and all powerful. Then Jesus gets straight to the point. The church is lacklustre, mediocre or as Jesus puts it, lukewarm. To God, not very palatable. The crux of the problem: You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. Does that ring a bell from a previous Bible study?

"You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why?" declares the Lord Almighty. "Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with your own house. Haggai 1:9 NIV They were only interested in trying to build up their own personal wealth, now is not the right time to build the Temple, God will wait.

Maybe this church was content, they thought they were doing a good job. Have you ever had an assessment and you were expecting praise and a pat on the back or come out of an exam or test thinking it was a breeze and you've passed with ease, to find that you've flopped spectacularly?

It seems that a comfortable lifestyle and a meaningful relationship with God is almost incompatible. What does Jesus mean when he tells them: 'But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked?' If you feel that your income, nice house, investments, family, circle of friends covers all your needs, open your eyes, they are like the emperor's clothes. Comfort and complacency are the enemy here. This was a church stuffed full of Rich Young Rulers Matthew 19:16-24 and we know how Jesus dealt with him.

Jesus invites Laodiceans to buy gold from Him. 1 Peter 1:7-9. Faith is worth more than gold but at what cost? Isaiah 55:1, all this equals treasure in Heaven Matthew 6:19-21. Fine clothes Zechariah 3:3-5. Eye salve John 9:6-7. So what is Heavenly gold? Clothes and eye salve?

That said, can you spot the positives in this letter? Jesus almost apologises to the Laodiceans, He's almost saying, I'm sorry to hurt you but if I didn't love you, I wouldn't tell you.

Jesus tells the church, behold I stand at the door and knock... Jesus was not in this church, He was outside, wanting to come in. He wasn't waiting patiently for an invite, He was banging on the door! Note that His invite has switched from the church to any individual member that wants to accept; and just look at that reward!!

Lessons from the letter to Laodicea

We need to guard against complacency. The church in Laodicea looked in fine fettle when

Paul was writing to the Colossians but within a decade or two it had deteriorated to the point that God couldn't stomach it.

Has Jesus written the Laodiceans off? Absolutely not, just look at these rewards offered to this church if they manage to turn this ship around. Jesus is banging on the door of the church, He desperately wants to come in. In summary, this church was not doing anything dreadfully wrong, parts of other churches had serious morality problems and teaching heresy, but at the same time the Laodiceans weren't doing anything right either, lukewarm. It seems that the church was serving no useful purpose, neither worshipping or praising God nor witnessing to the wider community.

In light of Jesus's prediction that as we get towards the end times many Christians and presumably churches will grow cold Matthew 24:12-13, what steps can our church take to prevent it from growing lukewarm?

A few years after receiving this letter Laodicea was devastated by an earthquake, today all the remains of the city is an archaeological dig.

<https://www.imb.org/2018/06/01/what-happened-to-the-seven-churches-of-revelation/>