



OHBC MEMORY VERSE – WEEK #49

THIS WEEK'S VERSE: EPHESIANS 3:20-21a

“Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages.”

Why Ephesians 3:20-21a?

Because it is such a weighted description of God's purpose for the church and of His power available to us in fulfilling that purpose!

Though God accomplishes many things through the church, His bottom line purpose is always the same: To bring Him glory! If His glory is the issue, this verse teaches that there is literally no limit to what God can and will do!

When God's glory is our aim, it is not that God MIGHT be able to do what we ask, but God “IS” able to do what we ask!

But He is not just able to do “SOME” things that we ask. He is able to do “ALL” that we ask!

And not just “ALL” that we ask, but “ABOVE all” that we ask!

And not just “ABOVE all” that we ask, but “ABUNDANTLY above all” that we ask!

And not just “ABUNDANTLY above all” that we ask, but “EXCEEDING abundantly above all” that we ask!

And not just “EXCEEDING abundantly above all” that we ask, but “exceeding abundantly above all that we ask OR THINK”!

And He does so, not just “OUT OF the power that worketh in us”, but “ACCORDING TO the power that worketh in us! (What's the difference? If God wrote you a check “OUT OF” His bank account that would be one thing. But it would be an entirely different animal if God would write you a check “ACCORDING TO” His bank account!) God's power is like His bank account. It is infinite! It is completely limitless!

As we hide these verses in our hearts, may they be a constant reminder to us that the real purpose of God for our lives and for our church is His glory, and may they fill us with absolute confidence and faith in God's all-powerful ability and all-consuming passion to do anything and everything to that end!

DAY 244

TODAY'S READING: II CORINTHIANS 8-13

OVERVIEW:

The grace of giving (chapters 8-9); Paul defends his ministry (chapter 10); the false religious system (chapter 11); Paul's final appeal to the Corinthians (chapters 12-13).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

Today's reading provides the clearest and most complete principles on giving in the entire New Testament (chapters 8-9). The Corinthians had committed to supplying funds to help the church in Jerusalem, but at this point, they had not yet followed through on their commitment. Paul writes to exhort them to fulfill their promise, and in the process, lays out the New Testament pattern for giving. Note some of the principles gleaned from these two chapters:

1. Giving should result from us already having given ourselves to the Lord. (8:5)
2. Jesus Christ is the ultimate picture of giving. We will never give more than our Lord has already given. (8:9)
3. We should be a generous giver. (9:6)
4. We should purpose in our hearts what we believe the Lord wants us to give. (9:7)

5. We should give cheerfully. In other words, not because we have to but because we want to. (9:7)
6. Giving is a proof of the sincerity of our love. (8:8)
7. It is the grace of God that allows us to give sacrificially.(8:1-3)
8. God's grace can meet any need we have. (9:8)

We also read the simplest explanation of God's grace in 8:9:

G God's
R Riches
A At
C Christ's
E Expense

The ultimate gift is the grace that God has bestowed upon us. Perhaps grace is best understood by comparing it to mercy. Grace is God GIVING us what we DID NOT deserve. Mercy is God NOT GIVING us what we DID deserve. Take a minute to meditate upon the truth of 8:9. Meditate upon the price that Christ paid to purchase our redemption. Are our lives living out this truth to the lost world around us? May we see giving, not as a burden, but as an opportunity to spread the grace of Christ to the lost world.

Chapter 10 show us that even though the majority of the church repented of the things Paul addressed in the first epistle, there appears to be some who still questioned Paul's authority to say these things. As Paul defends himself and his authority, he was able to keep in perspective who the real enemy was. This is the context for 10:3-5. It's easy for us to get to thinking that people are the enemy. We must remember that our warfare is not against flesh and blood. Our tendency is to begin to compare ourselves to the people we're ticked off at, or that did something to wrong us. However, 10:12 lets us know this isn't wise. That's how the world thinks. We need to remember that our standard is not a human standard, but rather, the Lord Jesus Christ and His Word. In the final analysis, it doesn't matter how many people commend you or don't commend you. What matters is whether the Lord commends you!

Chapter 11 is a key chapter to understanding how our enemy operates in this world. What Satan attempts to do is the same thing he did against Eve. Satan wants to corrupt us from the simplicity in Christ. If you think about Adam and Eve, their "Bible" was pretty simple. In fact, it really only had two verses: "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth," and "don't eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." I mean how simple is that? Yet, Satan comes along, and by questioning the Word of God, is able to corrupt Eve from the simplicity of God's command. This is the same thing Satan wants to do to us. How does Satan do this? He sends people who preach "another Jesus", or try and get you to receive "another spirit", or preach "another gospel". We usually think Satan spends his time in the bars, crack houses, or other places we deem as wicked. God reveals in this chapter, however, that Satan spends most of his time at church! Satan's key work is within the sphere of religion. In fact, he still transforms himself into an angel of light. Satan's ministers (11:15) portray themselves as ministers of righteousness. They look good, they sound good, they're well-respected, but they proclaim a message that will not save, and they corrupt the simplicity found in Christ. A modern day example of such a minister is no doubt Robert Schueller. Now I'm sure he is a nice man. He looks good on television. He sounds genuine and sincere. He talks about the love of Jesus and the emptiness of life without Jesus. There's just one problem – he doesn't believe what the Bible says. He believes those that haven't heard the gospel can be saved by being a faithful follower of whatever it is that they believe. He believes sin is a bad self image. This is a man that looks like a minister of righteousness who is really a minister of Satan. We must judge every message and messenger, not by externals, but by the pure Word of God.

Chapter 12 faces us with a very sobering question: Do we really believe God's grace is sufficient for us? I mean, when really it comes right down to it and we're going through infirmities, reproaches, persecutions and distresses, do we really believe God's grace is sufficient, or do we really just want the bad stuff to stop? What if it is during the tough times that the life of Christ shines the brightest in you? Let's face it, we don't really want to have to say "for when I am weak, then am I strong." And yet, we can look around our own local church and see people that have had to go through infirmities, or reproaches, or persecutions, or distresses, and we have seen the life of Christ shine through them. Do we really want to say to God, "Lord, do whatever you want to do with my life so that Your glory may be revealed to those around me"? After all of these years, I still pray that prayer with fear and trembling. The things of this world still have an appeal to me even though I know they are vanity. Some may be able to say, "As long as my family has their health I don't care what else we have." However, what do you say when God says it's through your infirmity, or the infirmity of one of your loved ones, that I want to reveal Myself? And what do you say when it's through a loved ones death that God wants to shine through your life? Is His

grace still sufficient? May we seek to know Him so well, love Him so much, and be so desirous for His glory that we can honestly say, “Lord, your grace is sufficient for me.”

The parting words of the Apostle Paul to the Corinthians in chapter 13 should be something we try to remember to do each day: examine ourselves. How often do we really take stock of how we’re living our lives? It’s not enough to simply do it on Sundays. We need to be judging and examining ourselves on a daily basis. Am I ministering how God wants me to minister? What kind of ambassador of Christ was I today? Am I looking forward to His return? Do I love Him? Am I living proof that His grace is sufficient?

DAY 245

TODAY’S READING: GALATIANS 1-6

OVERVIEW:

The priority of grace in Paul’s message and life (chapter 1); the priority of grace in Paul’s ministry (chapter 2); the preeminence of grace over law (chapters 3 and 4); the priority of standing in liberty and walking in the Spirit in grace living (chapters 5 and 6).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

Understanding the key issues facing the churches in Galatia causes the six chapters of this Book to be some of the most practical in the entire New Testament. The fact is, the 1st century “Galatian” problem is alive/and well in Christianity in the 21st century!

Let’s begin with a little background information. Whereas the other letters written by Paul to local churches were addressed to one specific local church in one specific city (i.e. Rome, Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi, Colosse, and Thessalonica), this letter was written to a group of local churches in a particular region. That region, known to us as modern day Turkey, was known in the 1st century as Galatia. It was this area that was settled by the Gauls of France, and thus became known as Galatia, or “Gaulatia,” if you will. The local churches in this region were established by Paul and Barnabus on their first missionary journey. The specific churches were the churches in the cities of Derbe, Lystra, Iconium and Antioch (of Pisidia) – see Acts 13:14-14:23.

Obviously, these churches were comprised of Gentiles believers who had responded to Paul and Barnabus’ proclamation of the gospel which is received by grace through faith in Christ alone. After receiving Christ, Acts 14:22-23 lets us know that time was spent by Paul and Barnabus “confirming the souls of the disciples” in each of these churches, and making sure that “they had ordained them elders in every church.”

It was just that fact that so blew Paul away! Not long after Paul and Barnabus had grounded these churches in the truth, false teachers began infiltrating these churches with what Paul called “another gospel.” Much to Paul’s utter shock and dismay, the “disciples” (Acts 14:22) and “elders” (Acts 14:23) in these churches dropped Paul and his gospel like a hot potato, for a false, powerless, and even damnable “gospel” (Gal. 1:6-9). Paul, literally, could not believe it! He writes, (with his own hand by the way (6:11) – in other words, Paul didn’t dictate this letter for someone else to write as he usually did. He was so passionate about the content of this letter, he wanted to write it himself, in spite of his obvious eye problems – 4:15 c.f. 6:11), but he writes using some of the strongest language and rebuke found in any of his letters.

These false teachers are known historically as “Judaizers” or “legalizers.” They were Jews, who like Paul before his conversion, were incredibly zealous for Judaism, or Jewishness, and thus, the title, “Judaizers.” Their basic point of attack upon these Galatian believers, was that at Gentiles, if they really wanted to be saved, and/or really wanted to stay saved, and/or really wanted to be “spiritual,” they would have to “become like them.” In other words, they would have to first become a Jew, and live under the ramifications of the law (and thus, the title “legalizers” or “legalists” — “legal” having to do with the law). Their teaching is epitomized in the words of Acts 15:1 – “Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.”

Paul’s reaction to this false teaching is what prompted the writing of this scathing letter to those churches. Paul is absolutely livid with these false teachers, and the Galatian believers as well! He says that those who preach this false gospel give evidence that they are worthy of hell (1:8-9), and those who are swayed

by it give evidence that they have not only been misinformed or deceived, but actually, “BEWITCHED” (3:1)! They were acting as if they were under a Satanic spell.

The content of this letter is of utmost importance, because the Judaizers of the 1st century were not the last of those who propagate that there is SOMETHING MORE that you need to DO in order to BE saved (i.e. be baptized, take communion, etc.), STAY saved (i.e. “Be like us. Dress like this, not like that; wear your hair like this, not like that; listen to this kind of music, not that kind; you can go to these places, but not those; etc., etc., etc.”) Understanding Paul’s message is vital in keeping us off of the endless treadmill of legalism.

What the Galatians didn’t understand, as is the case with most believers today, is that they were already as SAVED as they would ever be, and already as SPIRITUAL as they would ever be, and it’s not because of what WE DO or DO NOT DO, it is based totally on WHO CHRIST IS, and what He has DONE! We were “made the righteousness of God in Him” the moment we were saved (II Cor. 5:21). It’s hard to get more righteous than that! We were made accepted with God the moment we were placed in Christ – as accepted as He accepts Christ, His beloved Son (Eph. 1:6). And it’s hard to be more accepted than that! And again, this is all totally apart from what WE DO or DO NOT DO!!! That lesson is foreign to most believers, and comes hard! The difference, however, is the difference between legalism and a life of flesh-walking, and true, genuine biblical Christianity and a life of walking in the Spirit!

The message of the Holy Spirit through Paul to the Galatian believers and to believers today is, Christ, through His death, set us free from the law! Paul asks in 3:2 and 3, “This is only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?” The obvious answer, is that it was through faith and by His Spirit that we were saved, and were placed on the road to maturity. Based on that reality, Paul admonishes us to first, learn to STAND — “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hat made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage” (5:1), so that we can learn to WALK — “Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh” (5:16).

Understanding the practical ramifications of the Book of Galatians for new believers cannot be overemphasized. It will literally save 20 years (conservative estimate) of frustration, as the flesh tenaciously seeks and strives to produce what can only be produced by the Spirit (5:22-23) through the faith of Christ (2:16, 20 – see also Phil. 3:9; Rom. 3:20-22). Pray that God will open your eyes to the wondrous truth (Psa. 119:18) in this incredible little Book of Galatians.

DAY 246

TODAY’S READING: EPHESIANS 1-6

OVERVIEW:

The believer’s position in Christ (chapter 1); the believer’s salvation by grace through faith (chapter 2); the revelation of the mystery of the church (chapter 3); the believer’s walk in the world (chapters 4-6).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

There are a zillion things that could be said about the Book of Ephesians and should be said, but there is simply not space to do so in this setting: We will only be able to establish the “big picture” at best. Perhaps the best way to see the big picture of this Book, is by applying it to one of the most controversial passages, not only in this Book, but the entire Bible. That passage is found in chapter one, verses 4 and 5: “According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.”

Now, based on where you land on the interpretation of these verses (and verses such as these), you are labeled a “Calvinist” or an “Arminian.” Several hundred years ago, one position was popularized by John Calvin, and the other by Jacob Arminius. The basic Arminian position when it is used today, is that in terms of salvation, “whosoever will may come” (Rev. 22:17). The basic Calvinist position as it is expressed today, is that only the quote – unquote “elect,” will be saved; meaning that in eternity past, God chose, according to His sovereign grace, those who will be saved” – and in the final analysis, those are the only ones who will be saved! (Most who hold to this position would rather say they believe in the doctrine of “Sovereign Grace” or “Sovereign Election,” than to say they believe in Calvinism. Okay, we’ll go with it.)

There are many others, who if they were asked if they were an Arminian or a Calvinist, would answer “yes,” meaning that they believe both. Their reasoning is, that there is no doubt about it, the Bible teaches that “whosoever will may come”, and yet, that there is no doubt about the fact that the Bible also teaches that believers are “chosen in him before the foundation of the world.” When asked how they reconcile the two seemingly contradictory statements, they may answer, as did Spurgeon, “Friends don’t need to be reconciled!” They believe God put both in the Bible, so they both must be equally true, and though they don’t come together in the human mind, they do come together in the mind of God, so rather than force them to come together, let God be God, because after all, His ways are not our ways, and His thoughts are far above our thoughts, and the secret things belong to the Lord, so just accept it, and go on! This reasoning is usually followed with the illustration that goes something like, as we approach the gates of heaven there’s a sign over the top that says, “whosoever will my come.” As you walk through the gates on into heaven, and you look back above them, however, the sign says, “Chosen before the foundation of the world.”

That “middle-of-the-road” approach is rather convincing, and sounds pretty spiritual, and even humble, but none of those things are the real issue! The issue is always the same: Is it BIBLICAL?

So we come to verse 4 of Ephesians 1, and what does it say? “According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world.” Someone says, I mean, how clear can it be? My goodness, just let the Bible be the Bible! Okay! Let’s!

First of all, if this verse is teaching that sometime before the foundation of the world, God had already chosen each of us who know Him, the verse is actually teaching that we were “in Christ” before the foundation of the world. Now that poses a huge problem! Because the Bible clearly states that prior to our salvation, we were:

“IN ADAM”! (I Cor. 15:22)

“IN TRESPASSES AND SINS”! (Eph. 2:1)

“IN THE LUSTS OF OUR FLESH”! (Eph. 2:3)

“IN THE WORLD”! (Eph. 2:12)

Are we to believe that in eternity past (“before the foundation of the world”), God chose us “in Christ,” and then somehow we came out of Christ, and were found “IN ADAM, IN TRESPASSES AND SINS, IN THE LUSTS OF OUR FLESH, and IN THE WORLD,” so the He could put us back “IN CHRIST” again? That just doesn’t make any sense, y’all!

The fact is folks, Ephesians 1:4-5 must be understood within the very first principle of Bible study: CONTEXT!

Most people come to these verses and read “He hath chosen US in him,” and assume that the “US” means “individuals chosen to salvation.” In the context of the Book of Ephesians, that “US” is “the Church” in a collective sense, “the Body of Christ”! That’s what the whole Book of Ephesians is about and why it is placed in the Bible! To teach us that the Church is the Body of Christ!

Notice verse 10 of chapter one: “That in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things IN CHRIST.” And to what time period is that referring? The church age, right?

Yes, Ephesians 1:4 teaches that God made a very definite decision before the foundation of the world. But what was He actually “CHOOSING”? Individuals to salvation? Absolutely not! Before the foundation of the world, God chose that the church, the Body of Christ (all of “US” who exercised our will and by faith, called upon Him to save us) would be different than any people who ever lived. God chose that our salvation would place us “IN CHRIST.”

Do you realize that the only people who have ever been “IN CHRIST,” are the people saved in the church age?

Do you realize that as smooth as Noah, Daniel and Job were (Ez. 14:20), they were never “IN CHRIST” a day in their lives?! That was something God decreed before the foundation of the world that would be totally unique to believers in the church age!

Read carefully in Ephesians 3:1-12, and you will see that “the eternal purpose which he purposed IN CHRIST Jesus our Lord” (3:11), was that it would be the “CHURCH” that would know “the manifold wisdom of God,” having been placed “IN CHRIST.”

Those of “US” who are believers in the church age are the only ones who have had the distinct privilege of being “holy and without blame before him in love” (1:4)! Is that because we’re so much more holy and blameless and loveable than Old Testament saints? No! It’s because we have been placed “IN HIM”!

Do you realize that the only ones who have been “predestinated unto the adoption of children” (1:5), are those of “US” who are believers in the church age?

And do you see now why it is that believers in the church age are eternally secure, and why that was not true for Old Testament saints, and will not be true for Tribulation saints (Matt. 24:13)? It is because we are the only ones who are placed “IN HIM,” and our righteousness and acceptance with God is not based on what we do, but in Who Christ is (II Cor. 5:21; Eph. 1:6)!

This is really very simple when you simply place the verses in their context, and stop reading into them things that aren’t there!

DAY 247

TODAY’S READING: PHILIPPIANS 1-4

OVERVIEW:

Christ our LIFE (chapter 1); Christ our PATTERN (chapter 2); Christ our RIGHTEOUSNESS (chapter 3); Christ our SUFFICIENCY (chapter 4).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

As we get started in the Book of Philippians, let’s take a few minutes to talk about the THEME of the Book. What is this Book really about? What was God’s purpose in putting the Book of Philippians into the canon of scripture? And how are we to determine that?

One of the best pieces of advice I’ve ever received in terms of Bible study is, “Learn to emphasize what God emphasizes.” You see, God doesn’t have a volume control on His voice (i.e. Word), and He didn’t use a highlighter to accentuate His major themes when He was inspiring the men who actually wrote it down. What He uses to make His point is repetition. That’s how God emphasizes His point. It is amazing the things that can be gleaned by simply observing the repeated words, phrases, ideas and concepts in a Book of the Bible. For example:

In the Book of Philippians, the word “rejoice” (or some form of the word – rejoice, rejoiced, rejoicing), is found 12 times, and the word “joy” is found six times. This is an incredibly positive Book! It is obvious that Paul had an extremely positive attitude when he wrote this letter. In fact, so positive that you might get the idea that he’s in about the third month of a six month sabbatical, and he’s just chillin’ out in some incredible five-star oceanfront condo in some resort city along the Mediterranean coastline – the sun is shining, and he’s sipping Frappucinos and eating pistachio nuts out of a hammock, and life is just good!

But there’s another word that keeps popping up in this Book that lets you know that that isn’t the case, it’s the word “bonds.” Paul keeps talking about “my bonds.” In fact, he talks about them four times in chapter one alone! And what he’s referring to is the fact that far from being in some resort Mediterranean city on the beach, he’s actually in prison, in “bonds,” or in other words, chained to a Roman guard! And what’s interesting about this “sunny disposition” that shines all the way through this Book, is that he was not in prison for doing something wrong, so that Paul could just come to grips with the fact that his being there was the due consequence of what he had done and he would just have to make the best of it. No, the fact is, he hadn’t done anything wrong, and was actually there because of a false charge!

And it wasn’t that he was able to keep his positive attitude because he had only been there a couple of days, and so he was still able to keep himself psyched up, because after all, this would be a cool story for his monthly missionary letter and all. No, check this out. By the time of the writing of this letter he had been in prison for five years!

And it wasn't that Paul was over-the-hill, and had already passed his window of effectiveness anyway. No! When he was cast into prison his ministry was at its absolute pinnacle! These five years he had been in prison should have been the best, most productive years of his entire ministry! And yet rather, day after day he's in bonds, chained to a Roman guard. And it wasn't that he was in prison because that dirty, nasty devil had caused lost people to lie about Paul, and orchestrate some devious plot to have him cast into prison. Do you know why he's there? He's there because of gossip that began and spread amongst Christians! (You can read all about it in Acts 21.) He is in prison because of a rumor that was being spread by believing Jews, who were still hanging on to and were zealous for the law. That's why he's there! And I'm going through all of these things so you will understand that there was absolutely no human explanation for Paul to have the attitude of rejoicing that he has as he's writing this letter! He has every right humanly to be bitter, angry, disillusioned, frustrated, depressed and worried. And that's important to note, because chances are real good, that in some way, shape, or form, every one of us feels, at least to some degree, that we're in a prison. Not a prison with bars, as in Paul's case, but a "prison" nonetheless. Perhaps there are things that have taken place in your life that have left you feeling that you are "locked in." They've "hindered" you, or "restricted" you in some way. They've "tied" your hands, so to speak. The bars are invisible; the chains can't be seen with physical eyes, but they're just as real as the ones that were restricting Paul!

Perhaps you're in a job you absolutely hate, but you see no other options, and it's a ball and chain to you every weekday of your life. Or maybe you don't have a job at all, and feel that you're in a prison of a dull, unfulfilled life. Or maybe yours is a prison of loneliness. You feel imprisoned because you're single; or maybe you feel imprisoned because you're married! Or maybe like Paul, you have been the victim of gossip, and the hurt you have inside of you has left you feeling that your freedom has been taken away, and it's bound you up by your own emotions. Or perhaps you've been the victim of some injustice, and your mind keeps you behind bars because you can't stop thinking about it.

I don't know what kind of prison you may be in with its invisible bars, but both the human writer and the divine Author of the Book of Philippians want to let you know that it is possible to be in a prison, and find freedom, and joy in life and ministry, regardless of your circumstances, and no matter who was responsible for making them that way – and even if they never change!

And the key to living in that kind of victory is the other key point of emphasis God makes in this Book: our attitude! The word "mind" is found 10 times in this little Book. The word "think" is found five times, and the word "remember" is found once. In all, 16 times God is trying to get us to see that joy is a choice we make because of right thinking. And that's the theme of this Book.

Some of you have faced circumstances in your life liked we mentioned above that have left you discouraged, depressed and/or imprisoned. In chapter one he tells us, we can find joy in our CIRCUMSTANCES because Christ is our LIFE. And the key verse in the chapter is verse 21 where Paul says, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

Some of you have had people who have injured you in some way, and you wrestle with bitterness and anger. In chapter two he says, we can find joy in our RELATIONSHIPS because Christ is our PATTERN. And the key verse in chapter two is in verse 5 which says, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

Some of you wrestle with your flesh – worldliness on one hand, and good deeds on the other, but both driven by the same carnal source: the flesh! And in chapter three Paul says, we can find joy in our WALK because Christ is our RIGHTEOUSNESS. And the key verse in this chapter is verse 9 where Paul says, "[That I may (v.8)] be found in him, not having mine OWN righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith."

And bless your hearts, some of you are gripped by worry and fear. In chapter four Paul says, we can find joy in our ADVERSITIES because Christ is our SUFFICIENCY. And the key verse in chapter four is verse 13 where Paul says, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

As you can see, the Book of Philippians is an extremely practical Book that addresses real-life issues, and points us toward the joy that is found in and through Christ alone.

DAY 248

TODAY'S READING: COLOSSIANS 1-4

OVERVIEW:

The preeminence of Christ (chapter 1); four warnings (chapter 2); putting off and putting on (chapter 3); real relationships (chapter 4).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

Our Lord dictated a letter to the Apostle John addressed to the church of the Laodiceans in approximately 96 A.D. giving them one of the sternest condemnations found in the Word of God. The rebuke is found in Revelation 3:14-22. This church actually made the Lord Jesus Christ want to throw up (Rev. 3:16). Within our Lord's sharp words we find the phrase "and knowest not." Not only did the church at Laodicea fail to measure up to God's standard, they weren't even aware they had any problems, and actually felt like they were exactly what they needed to be. You have to wonder how many churches in America today feel that they are doing just fine, when in reality, they, like the Laodiceans, are "wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked"? How many individuals have deceived themselves into believing that they are living the "Christian life", when in reality they need to cleanse themselves of all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God (II Cor. 7:1).

More than 30 years earlier God had sent a letter to this church in Laodicea. In 62 A.D., the Apostle Paul wrote four letters from a Roman prison (Ephesians, Philippians, Philemon, Colossians). The letter to the Colossians was to be carried by Tychicus and Onesimus (4:7-9). Within this letter we find the key to preventing Laodicean Christianity. The church in Colossae was instructed to have their letter read to the church in Laodicea. It is obvious that though the church at Laodicea may have read the letter, they certainly did not heed the warnings contained in it. Within 35 years the Laodiceans would come to represent an arrogant church that had literally locked Jesus outside (Rev. 3:20).

Every church is one generation from becoming lukewarm. However, those who heed Paul's instruction to the Colossians will find Christ preeminent within their congregation (1:18), rather than knocking on the door from the outside (Rev. 3:20).

In chapter 1, Paul begins his letter by commending the Colossians on their faith and love (1:4). We live in a day when many churches are known for buildings and programs. However, it should be faith and love that defines our reputation. Upon hearing of this love, Paul prays. In verses 9-12, he gives a prayer that any believer could pray for another believer. He prays for their:

*Mind (that they would have knowledge, wisdom, and understanding). *Feet (that they would walk worthy of the Lord). *Muscles (that they would be strengthened spiritually). *Hearts (that they would be thankful).

This is a prayer that every parent should pray for their children. It is a prayer that we can pray for each other within the body of Christ.

Paul then turns his attention to Christ. Colossians 1:13-29 contains the theme and foundation of the letter. It is Christ alone Who should come first (have preeminence) in everything (1:18). The church of Laodicea focuses on themselves (or their rights). It is only when we focus on Christ and understand Who He is that we find our purpose in life. Paul ends the chapter by revealing an awesome mystery to the Colossians. This preeminent Christ now dwells in them (1:27)! The physical temple of Christ's body had been destroyed. However, through His death God has raised up temples all over this earth. Each temple containing the resurrected Christ and demonstrating God's glory to the world.

Chapter 2 contains four warnings to the Colossians (2:4, 8,16,18). It will be the world's philosophy (love of knowledge) and legalism (a system that finds God's favor in human merit) that will cause a church to stop focusing on Christ. Paul tells these believers that they are complete in Christ alone (2:10) and instructs them to walk in faith (2:6-7).

The failure of Laodicean Christianity isn't that we DENY Christ, but that we DE-EMPHASIZE Him! The enemy wants us to believe that Christ is insufficient, and we are in need of philosophy, religion, psychology, etc. In Chapter 2 Paul is warning believers not to fall prey to this deception.

Paul deals with how to practically walk in faith in chapter 3. The believer is commanded to set his affection on things above, and to then put off the old man with his deeds (3:1-10). He is then commanded to renew his mind (3:10), and put on the new man, which is Christ (3:15). This is the process by which a believer is to continually live. After talking about our relationship with the Lord in 3:1-17, our relationship with those within our family in 3:18-21, our relationship with those with whom we work in 3:22-4:1, in 4:2-6 he talks about our relationship with the lost world, and then in 4:7-18 he talks about our relationship with those within the body of Christ. If you run that through your mind, you'll find that that covers every relationship we have in life! The whole point is, now that we've been risen with Christ (i.e. have been saved), the Lord Jesus Christ is to have preeminence in every relationship in our lives. Does He in yours?

DAY 249

TODAY'S READING: I THESSALONIANS 1 – II THESSALONIANS 3

OVERVIEW: A model church (I Thess. 1); a model of discipleship (I Thess. 2); a model of faith (I Thess. 3); a model walk (I Thess. 4-5); comfort in tribulation (II Thess. 1); clarification in teaching (II Thess. 2); content on various topics (II Thess. 3).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

In Revelation 2 and 3, our Lord dictated to the Apostle John seven letters to seven churches in Asia Minor. They were seven churches that actually existed historically at the time of the writing of the Revelation, and addressed actual situations that these churches were facing at that time. But students of the Bible have noted for centuries that beyond just the historical aspect of these letters, there is also a prophetic aspect. When placed into the context of the whole of the Book of Revelation, the seven letters also provide for us a panoramic view of the seven stages of church history that basically picks up where the Book of Acts leaves off in the history of the early church, and takes you all the way up to the Rapture of the church, which coincidentally enough is found in the Book of Revelation immediately following the conclusion of the seventh and final letter to the churches (see Rev. 4:1). But there is another amazing coincidence that should be noted. Not only did our Lord write letters to the seven churches, but the Apostle Paul also wrote letters to seven churches, or groups of churches (to the church of the Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and the Thessalonians). And what's even more coincidental is that if you were to take the letters to the seven churches to whom our Lord wrote, and lay them next to the letters to the seven churches to whom Paul wrote, you would find an amazing similarity of context. Certainly the most obvious connection would be our Lord's letter to the Laodiceans, and Paul's letter to the Colossians. In fact, the only time other than Revelation 3:14-22 that the word Laodicea is found in the Bible is the Book of Colossians, where it just happens to be found five times! The thing to take away from that observation is that though the Book of Colossians was written to address specific situations taking place in that church when the Spirit of God inspired Paul to write it, and has certainly had application for every local church in every period of church history, there is also a very specific application of that letter to the church of Jesus Christ in the Laodicean Church Period (approximately 1901 to the Rapture).

All of that is important to recognize because there is at least one other unbelievable coincidence and connection that needs to be observed. Immediately following the Book of Colossians (again, the letter with specific application to the church in the Laodicean Age), comes the letters to the Thessalonians. And do you know what these two letters address specifically? The Rapture and the Second Coming! And again, in the Book of Revelation, as soon as you close chapter 3 with the letter to the Laodiceans, you begin chapter four, and immediately, heaven opens, there is a sound of a trumpet, a voice saying "Come up hither," and John (who, as we saw several weeks ago, is the disciple who pictures what God intends for a believer in Christ to be) is caught up into heaven to see the raptured church in heaven (Rev. 4 and 5), and to witness four accounts of the Second Coming (Rev. 6-19).

What that shows us is that the Books of I and II Thessalonians are the letters written to teach the church about HOW TO BE PREPARED FOR THE LAST DAYS. In fact, notice that each of the five chapters of I Thessalonians ends talking about the coming of the Lord (1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:13-17; 5:23).

But what becomes very clear as you read through the content of these letters is that though they deal with the PROPHETIC concerning the last days, Paul wants to be sure that we don't approach the Rapture and Second coming as doctrines we sit around and contemplate, talk about, or read novels about, but as doctrines to be LIVED! He wants to be sure that we got these events out of the PROPHETIC and into the

PRACTICAL! These Books are really a “How To” manual about how to prepare for the last days: what things we need to emphasize in these last days; how we are to go about the Lord’s work in these last days so that we can be as effective as possible.

It is also worth noting that whereas each chapter of I Thessalonians ends with a reference concerning the Lord’s coming, each chapter of II Thessalonians ends with a reference concerning grace (1:12; 2:16; 3:18). Obviously, as we labor in these dark last days prior to our Lord’s coming, we will need to be sure that we apply and rely upon the grace of God that He promised would be “sufficient” through “infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, [and] in distresses” (II Cor. 12:9-10).

Two other things worth noting from the biblical context of these Books and God’s points of emphasis through-out, have to do with:

1. The Philosophy of Leadership. It is interesting that the letters written to teach the church about effective ministry in the last days as we prepare for the Lord’s coming just happen to be the only letters in the New Testament written as a team effort. I and II Thessalonians are the only letters written by three authors: Paul, Silvanus (Silas) and Timotheous (Timothy).

In Paul’s other letters, he mentions those who are with him in his greeting, but he immediately kicks in to the first person singular, “I.” And as you read through I and II Thessalonians, there’s no getting around the fact that it is the writing style of Paul. They definitely reflect his personality and vocabulary, but what is interesting is that he consistently writes in the first person plural. He talks in terms of “we” and “us.” There are a few places where his apostolic authority surfaces and he uses the word “I,” but by in large, all throughout I and II Thessalonians, he models for us what is to be our PHILOSOPHY of LEADERSHIP in the last days, and that is, it must be a TEAM EFFORT! Paul, Silas and Timothy were a unit. They were committed to teamwork. What we need to learn from their example is that if we’re going to be effective in carrying out the job the Lord has for us in the last days through our local churches, we must work together as a team, and that must flow out of the leadership. Much more needs to be said about that, but space will not permit.

2. The Priority of Lordship. I and II Thessalonians begin very similarly: “Paul and Silvanus, and Timotheous, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the LORD JESUS CHRIST” (I Thess. 1:1; II Thess. 1:1). Now, certainly the phrase “the LORD JESUS CHRIST” is not an unfamiliar phrase, or a phrase that is unique to I and II Thessalonians. In fact, the phrase is used 81 times in the New Testament. What is unique, however, is that 20 out of the 81 times that this title is used in reference to Jesus, it is in the Books of I and II Thessalonians. 20 times! By far, more than any other Book of the New Testament, or pair of Books in the New Testament. Almost 25% of the time the phrase is found, it is found in these eight chapters!

Now, from the historical context, Acts 17:7 makes clear why Paul so emphasizes this phrase. Jesus being the “Lord,” or “King” was the issue that got the city so stirred up in the first place! But in the biblical context, remembering that these are the Books that tell us about how to be prepared for the last days, I think God is trying to let us know that it is more important than ever that people understand Who Jesus Christ is, and the position He wants to have in His church as LORD! Revelation 3:14-22 lets us know that His Lordship in the church in the last days is so far from a reality that He is actually standing at the door knocking, wanting to be invited to come in to take His place of preeminence.

Does your life reflect Christ’s LORDSHIP, and are you a part of the ministry TEAM of your local church?