

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

## The Long Goodbye Colossians 4:7-9

**Intro:** Paul is bringing his letter to a close and, as it takes up 11 of the 18 verses in ch4, you could say it is a long goodbye. In his conclusion, while Paul addresses many different individuals and commends a quite few of them, he will also show his driving concern for the advancement of the gospel throughout the world. But, before we dive into this closing, it's important that we make a brief summary of the letter to remind us why it was written in the first place.

As we've seen, the Colossian church was a healthy congregation. Paul assures them, and all believers, that they have been translated from one kingdom to another – from a land where the sun never shines to a land that is ruled by the Son of God's love. What a blessing it is to be ruled by a lover rather than a tyrant! Yes, the Colossian church was a healthy church, but they were hassled by heresy! False teachers were trying to push their false doctrines on the believers there. We know their doctrines were false because through them, they denied the deity of Christ, just like every other cult that has come along since.

Paul refutes this nonsense by declaring that Jesus Christ is the very image of God. He's not just a reflection of God but the very substance of God. Paul then calls Jesus the firstborn over all creation – a title of preeminence. He is the Creator, Sustainer and the Head of the church and as such, Christ in us is the hope of glory. Furthermore, Paul says that God has placed the fullness of the Father in Jesus and all who trust in Him are also complete in Him. The false teachers insisted that legalistic practices and spiritual experiences brought a person closer to God but Paul did not agree. Since a believer is complete in Christ, nothing needs to be added to gain God's favor. Our standing with God cannot be improved upon. The OT regulations were given to point us to Jesus. Now that they've accomplished their purpose, they only get in the way when we try to observe them. The cross of Christ not only ended slavery to sin, it ended slavery to the law as well.

In ch3 Paul says that the Christian life is a hidden life. In Christ we enjoy delights that are invisible to the world. We are an enigma to our lost family

members, friends and co-workers. Our entire life is wrapped up in a Person that is impossible for the eye to see. Since that is the case, our job today is to make an outward display of our true inner life. So, the hidden life becomes a holy life. We put to death our old habits and we put on Christ. We live out the changes Jesus has made in our hearts. God's love for us is translated into tender mercies extended towards others. The gentleness of Jesus is reflected in our meekness. His patience motivates us to cut others some slack. Jesus has forgiven me freely and fully, so how can I hold a grudge against someone else?

We're to let the peace of God rule in our hearts and allow the Word of God to set the rules in our lives. Since Jesus has forgiven whatever we have done in the past, we should seek to glorify Him in whatever we do in the present. What we do is not as important to God as who we try to please when we do it. To the Christian a job becomes just another way to serve Jesus. Your career is not just a climb up the corporate ladder; it's a labor of love for the Lord!

Finally, in ch4, Paul instructs us to be both persistent and passionate in prayer. He doesn't command us to pray because that is assumed, but he does want us to fan the flames of our prayer life and keep fueling the fire. For himself, Paul only asks that they will pray for him to have open doors, clear communication and appropriate answers for all questions that the gospel message might produce in the minds of the lost. Little time is left for the lost. In fact, the clock is winding down for all of us so we need to make every minute count for Christ.

As we move into Paul's long goodbye, we will learn some things about the early church as well as a few things about the apostle Paul. We know Paul wore many hats: he was an apostle, missionary, a pastor and an evangelist and, on occasion, a tent-maker. But above all else, Paul was a friend. Paul was a great soul-winner because he was a great friend maker. People matter to Paul, and as a result, Paul mattered to people. You know the phrase "friends in high places." You may have even heard the Garth Brooks song, "Friends in low places." But as far as Paul was concerned, he had friends in all places – from slaves to officials to even those of Caesar's household. Paul didn't just share the gospel, he lived it, he advanced it and he suffered for it and he did it all with out a complaint.

7- As he often does at the end of his letters, Paul singles out for special mention some of the individuals who are with him and who are being sent to the letter's destination to tell the Christians there more about his circumstances. We might wish that Paul had elaborated just a little on his circumstances at this point in the letter but there are a few possible reasons why he didn't. 1) Paul may have judged it too risky to share any information about his circumstance in this letter that might jeopardize his case before Caesar. 2) He had never met any of the Colossians personally so he may have been hesitant to share too much personal information. 3) Paul wasn't the kind of leader who believed everything revolved around him. So, he doesn't readily share any personal information about himself in any of his letters unless it directly relates to the issues in the letter.

The first person we meet is Tychicus. Apparently, he was unknown to the Colossian Christians but it was he who would be carrying Paul's letter to them. Although Tychicus was a stranger to the Colossians, he shouldn't be a stranger to anyone who studies the Bible. We first meet him in [Acts 20:4](#). He is mentioned as one of a group of men who accompanied Paul to the Roman province of Asia (Turkey). Of that group, only he and Trophimus were actually from Asia. We see him again in [Eph 6:21](#) and he is the one who carries that letter back to the church at Ephesus. He is mentioned by Paul a couple of more times in his later letters ([II Tim 4:12](#); [Titus 3:12](#)), in each case, he's assisting Paul by traveling to other churches.

As designated bearer and declarer of the letter to the Colossians, Paul's obviously concerned with establishing the "bona fides" of Tychicus so that they will give him a respectful hearing when he arrives. In doing so, Paul offers him the highest praise any Christian can ever receive: a beloved brother, faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. Tychicus was dear to Paul, willing to stay with him even though the situation was difficult. By no modern Christian indices did Paul's circumstances equate to living his best life or being a successful minister. Paul was in prison and he was just as likely to face execution as he was acquittal, and yet, Tychicus remain by his side. How encouraging it must have been to Paul to have a beloved brother at his side when everything seemed to be against him!

Tychicus not only proved himself to be a faithful companion but also a trustworthy and reliable minister, like Paul himself. His love for the Lord and for Paul revealed itself in action. He ministered to Paul and he also

ministered for

Paul by assisting him in his many obligations. Someone has rightly pointed out that the greatest ability in the world is dependability, and this is true. Paul could depend on Tychicus to get the job done. Not only does he carry this letter to Colosse and Paul's letter to Ephesus, He was also on a short list to replace Titus in Crete and he later ministered at the Ephesian church.

Finally, Paul calls him a fellow servant. Though he wasn't an apostle himself, he was assisting Paul in his apostolic ministry. The literal translation of servant is slave. Just like Paul, Tychicus belongs to Christ lock, stock and barrel – bought and paid for by the blood of Jesus Christ. He is a slave in the Lord, meaning in the Lord's work. He was a sharer in the task of bringing the gospel to the Gentiles. These accolades suggest that Tychicus was Paul's right-hand man at that time.

What are considered the highest accolades in the modern church? With what do we equate success or winning in a modern day ministry? Is it the size of the building, the attendance, the multitude of ministries engaged in over the course of a week or the size of the number of people on staff? Is it the amount of decisions made for Christ, the number of baptism performed or the number of missionaries supported by the church? Understand, none of these things are bad or even wrong. In fact, we want to see more of them, not less. But, at the same time, none of these are listed on the Biblical index of successful ministry. In **1 Cor 4:2**, Paul states that it is required in stewards that they be found faithful. The modern church might not see faithfulness as being the highest goal of a minister but at the same time, what every believer wants to hear when they pass over into eternity and stand before Christ for the first time are those glorious words coming out of His mouth, "Well done, good and faithful servant (**Mt 25:23**). There can be no higher praise for the Christian to receive from their Lord and Savior!

Tychicus would not only read and explain Paul's letter to the church, he'd also supply them with the full particulars of the news about Paul. Although the church had never met Paul, they still knew of him from the testimony of Epaphras and so they loved him and were interested in hearing how he was faring. Tychicus was perfect for this task as he had shared Paul's imprisonment for some time. Understand, it wasn't easy for Tychicus to be associated with Paul the prisoner for Paul had many enemies. Nor was it easy for him to travel as he did, assisting Paul in his various tasks. Travel in

that day was still somewhat dangerous (despite Pax Romana); it was arduous (not on a ship=walking) and it was expensive (food, lodging, passage). Tychicus didn't take the easy way, he took the right way. The modern church could use a few more members like Tychicus willing to go the extra mile to advance the gospel.

8- Paul wasn't just concerned with the Colossians knowing his circumstances; he's sending Tychicus to them to find out their circumstances and to encourage their hearts. Paul knows they have been harassed for some time by these false teachers and they have been holding onto their faith and probably taking both a theological and a social beating for it. Paul wants to comfort their hearts and how will he do this? He's literally sending them God's Word! Now, not every letter of Paul's has made it into the canon of Scripture but this letter did! Paul knows that what he has written was guided by and accomplished through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The information Paul was sending them was direct communication from God and God's Word will always comfort the heart of the true believer. **Ps 119:50**, "This is my comfort in my affliction, for Your word has given me life." **Ps 119:76**, "Let, I pray, Your merciful kindness be for my comfort, According to Your word to Your servant." **Romans 15:4**, "For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." God's Word does more than instruct us about God; it comforts our hearts in the midst of an uncomfortable world.

**9-** Tychicus will be traveling to Colosse, but he won't be traveling alone. Onesimus, the same runaway slave who is the subject of Paul's brief letter to Philemon, will be accompanying him on this trip. Onesimus will be carrying that personal note to his master but, since that is a private matter, Paul doesn't mention it here. What Paul does make public is the good news of Onesimus' conversion. Paul refers to him as a faithful and beloved brother. He is not yet a faithful minister and fellow servant as Tychicus is, but he is a Christian. This is his new identity in Christ. He is no longer merely a slave of Philemon; as a faithful brother of Paul he is now also a faithful brother to Philemon.

Paul also includes the phrase who is one of you about Onesimus. This

description now carries a dual meaning for him and the Colossian church. Clearly, Onesimus was known to the church because he was from Colosse, but he's no longer just from the same locality, he's now a member of the spiritual community of the church. Paul's failure to list him as a faithful minister probably means that Onesimus, being so new to the faith, was not a part of Paul's ministry team. Paul's failure to refer to him as a fellow servant may be a bit more calculated.

The word servant is actually slave in the original and it is exactly Onesimus' status as a slave that is the issue of the letter to Philemon. No where in the NT is any individual identified specifically as anyone else's slave, except where Paul calls himself a slave of Christ or a slave of God. Even the discussion of Onesimus in the letter to Philemon is ambiguous enough for some to argue that he wasn't Philemon's slave at all but had some other relation to him. At the same time, Paul doesn't hurt Onesimus' case by introducing him in these terms. Philemon would be less likely to have a rough welcome waiting for his runaway slave if his fellow Christians had heard him publicly commended by Paul. Although Onesimus wasn't officially on Paul's ministry team, he was also tasked with sharing the news about Paul and his prison ministry team with the Colossian church.

This is as far as time will allow us to get to today but before we close, I want to highlight 3 things that this long goodbye teaches us about Paul's ministry and the situation of the early church. 1) Clearly, Paul's ministry was a team effort. He couldn't possibly do all the things he did without the help and support of others and he's not stingy in giving them credit and thanks. It's striking to see, as we make our way through the rest of this conclusion, that 2 of the people on the list, Mark and Luke, were authors of 2 Gospels.

2) It's plain to see that Paul inspired love and loyalty. Any picture of Paul as an embattled and embittered loner is sorely mistaken. Many times, people who are driven by a burning conviction and sense of destiny can be a real drag to be around. They can be uncomfortable companions. Some people may harbor the suspicion that Paul was just such a person. But the long list of his coworkers suggest that he was evidently able to both "cool his own jets" as well as inspire tremendous loyalty and commitment on the part of others. When Paul met with the elders from the church in Ephesus and told them it was the last time they would see his face, the Bible says they all wept freely, and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him ([Acts 20:37](#)). Those are



the actions of people who love someone dearly.

3) The early church relied heavily on a network of friends. Without the support of friends and partners throughout the Roman Empire, Christians could have never succeeded in advancing the gospel across national barriers. Despite the benefits of modern technology and ease of travel, this is no less true for Christians today. Yes, you can listen to wonderful praise and worship music on YouTube. You might even find a decent message delivered on Facebook. But the truth of the matter is that all Christians need a community of friends and fellow workers that only the physical church can provide. God's people are meant to fellowship with each other.

In Paul's day, the church wasn't divided by denominations or statements of faith or styles of worship. If you named the name of Jesus Christ, you were a member of the same family. Maintaining such a network across the empire required much time-consuming, costly and dangerous travel but many were willing to do it and most of them are unnamed in the Bible. We don't know the names or trials of all those who were used by God to advance the kingdom in the first Century but God knows them and will reward them accordingly. The real question for believers today is: are we willing to do something similar? Are we willing to risk something to see the gospel carried to all parts of the globe?

The eclectic makeup of Grace Chapel is not just a blessing from God; it's a real opportunity for us as Americans to expand our concept of the worldwide need for the gospel and to focus on living the truth of the gospel here at home and working diligently to send the truth of the gospel out into the uttermost parts of the earth. It will require much effort and most of that effort will be expended in prayer.

Paul requested prayer for open doors of opportunity. I pray that we will not fail to recognize and employ every open door that God sends our way. ☺