

Wednesday in the Word

Digging Deeper

October 7, 2020

Colossians 1:3-8

What's in a Name?

Today we are reading through verses 3-8 of Colossians 1. Look carefully. There is one period at the end of verse 8. At least in the King James. My English teacher would have colored my paper red if I'd done such a thing. Did Paul use bad sentence structure? Was penmanship different 2000 years ago? Between commas, colons and semicolons this is a true run on sentence. Poor Miss Mangold. She would have a fit. Allowing for a different place and time, we can see that the integrity of this sentence demands constant flow and connection as it includes thanks, prayer, faith, love, hope, heaven, truth, the gospel, fruit, grace, faithful ministry and love in the Spirit. Excuse me. I'm out of breath. Ok, that was long. Sorry Miss Mangold.

Paul's opening statement in this letter serves to edify the Colossians and inspire and reassure them to continue on in their faith in Christ as well as their fruit of love. Hopefully this can apply to us as well. Is your Christian love of such intensity as to be mentioned by others in their correspondence? Messages I have witnessed and shared often have included such accolades and I am proud to associate with so many loving, Godly people. Don't get swelled heads. Just keep it going. Bless God and others because it's right and it's our duty.

Today we can focus in on our dear brother Epaphras. Who was he? What do we know? Jumping ahead to 4:12-13 we find he lived among these believers, served Christ and was seriously prayerful for the good of others. Are you? He also reached out to the cities around him and even is believed by many to have first established the church here in Colosse. His reputation is even sweetened a bit by the imprisoned Paul in his letter to Philemon, a Colossian believer, when in verse 23 he alludes to Epaphras' prison time as well. Was he a criminal or yet another Christian punished for his faith? This dilemma haunts our brothers and sisters around the world today. Is it far from us? Count the cost of following Christ. Luke 14:26-35. In verses 4 and 8 of today's text we see that Epaphras is the one who informed Paul of the faith and love and some of the troubles of the Colossian church. As we chase down his name we find that Epaphras was an altered branch from the name of Aphrodite who was the goddess of love in Greek mythology. Interestingly his name means "lovely". We can't know how so many parents could so aptly name their children in a prophetic sense but we can know that God was certainly very careful as he dictated the lives of people from His lofty vantage point outside of time. Explore the meaning of your own name to see if God's hand was in it. Remember too that Jesus will rename you according to your character as He did with many of His followers. Revelation 2:17. Note the deeply personal nature of this new name. Again, don't get too proud. It is really His name on us that truly empowers us. Matthew 16:17-19 gives us some insight and some serious warning, which quickly follows in verse 23. If Jesus renames you, please be humble about it.

Paul also mentions Timotheus in verse 1 as well as in 2 Corinthians, Philippians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians and Philemon. Timothy often traveled with and assisted the Apostle Paul. His name means "dear to God". You are too by the way. He loves us all equally and that can't be

challenged. Live in response to that great love by sharing it. That would affect more hearts while sharing our faith than any other facet of witnessing.

Let's now dig in to the name Paul. He was referred to with his Hebrew name of Saul all through the book of Acts especially as we read about the events surrounding his conversion. See especially, chapters 7-9. Jesus was seeking Saul, the chief of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15) to become His greatest Apostle. Roman's 1:1. He opens nearly every one of his letters similarly. The name Saul, pronounced Sha'ul means 'desired or sought after'. Jesus sought him because of his great zeal for God even though that zeal sent him in the wrong direction. When he met the Lord he was knocked down and spun around to redirect his efforts to the very one he opposed. His Messiah. Our Saviour. If you are unfamiliar with this wonderful conversion please read his story in the book of Acts. As the church and his letters progressed Saul was referred to as Paul. Note in Acts 13:9 the great event that changed it all for him. The same event that changed all for you and I. Paul's name comes to us from the Latin and it's meaning is 'small or little'. How interesting that this proud, arrogant man who consented to murdering Christians had been humbled by the Glory of Jesus Christ and been made small in the light of Him. As we watch the progression of Paul's letters we can sense the humbling of a man whom God sought out.

Let's make this personal. Looking at the name Epaphras, are you lovely? As you interact with others are you displaying the love and grace of Jesus Christ? Do people see the beauty of God's character in you? When we consider Timothy we must consider ourselves. We stated earlier that we know we are dear to God. He sent Jesus Christ His Son to die to bring us into eternity with him. When we are that close to anyone we seek to please them and retain our beautiful fellowship. Does God ask you to do things and call upon you in such a way that you respond to that closeness? Are you begging to find ways to thank God by adjusting your behavior to to be a blessing to Him? Do you understand that others are dear to Him as well? The kind of love we are to have for one another should be without judgement, partiality or restraint. Finally is God seeking you, as he sought Saul, calling you to some special purpose to align with His will? Is He seeking you to put you to work, to change your life or the life of another? If so have you allowed Him to humble you, as He did Paul, so that you may serve Him with a right spirit? What is he asking you to do that brings you outside of that place where you feel secure in yourself and are now open to finding all your security in him?

Will you change the world? Will you change your neighbor? Your family? Your friend? Yourself? Humility would be a great place to start. Read Matthew 5:3-15. Does humility fill this blessed sermon? It does.