

## Epaphras the Beloved

Although we covered the first 4 verses of Colossians 1 last week, today I am going to begin my reading today in verse 3 and read through verse 8 because 3 through 8 is not only a single sentence, it's a complete paragraph.

***<sup>3</sup> We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, <sup>4</sup> since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints; <sup>5</sup> because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel <sup>6</sup> which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth; <sup>7</sup> just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf, <sup>8</sup> and he also informed us of your love in the Spirit. (Col. 1:3-8)***

*John Nelson Hyde was the son of a Presbyterian minister in Illinois. Early in his life he surrendered to the Lord and while in college sensed God calling him to go to India as a missionary.*

*In 1892 he left America to go to India as a missionary in the Punjab region.*

*One interesting note is that while he was traveling to India, he read a letter from a friend, and it that letter the friend wrote that he would ask God to fill John with the Holy Spirit.*

*Angry at the suggestion that he did not already have the Spirit, John Hyde threw the letter away. However, shortly he began to feel guilt at his reaction and so he humbled himself and prayed for God for help.*

*John Nelson Hyde was partially deaf, so he struggled to learn the native languages. Through those struggles he continued to focus his study on knowing Scriptures better.*

*At first, he gained a few converts but soon began to endure persecution for his faith. His response to his adversity was that he began to pray intensely.*

*By 1899 he was spending entire nights in prayer to God. In fact he formed a group he called “the Punjab Prayer Union” in which the members would set aside half an hour a day to pray for spiritual revival in the Punjab region of India.*

*In 1908 he spoke at the Sialkot Bible Convention in Calcutta and he told them his prayer for that year was that there would be 1 person coming to Christ every day.*

*... many people at the conference thought that was an impossible request. However, by the next year’s conference over 400 people had come to Christ.*

*Then, instead of praising God for the 400 and moving on to something else. He asked them to pray for 2 souls a day in the following year.*

*That year 800 people came to Christ.*

*That only increased John Hyde's courage in prayer.*

*At 1910 Sialkot Bible Convention in Calcutta those around Hyde marveled at his faith ...*

*... they were moved by his passionate cry "Give me souls, Oh God, or I die!"*

*In fact, before the meeting ended, John Hyde revealed that he was again doubling his goal for the coming year. Four souls a day, and nothing less.*

*During the next twelve months John Hyde's ministry took him throughout India and by then he was known to many as "Praying Hyde" ... traveling and praying at revival meetings in Calcutta, Bombay and other large cities.*

*If on any one day, he did not know of four people coming to Christ there would be such a weight on his heart that he could not eat or sleep until he prayed through to victory.*

*... as he continued to pray and minister the number of new believers continually grew and soon a wave of revival swept through the Punjab and the rest of India.*

*While in Calcutta John rapidly deteriorating health became inescapably obvious and after investigation it was revealed that he had developed a brain tumor.*

*He went to be with the Lord in February of 1912.*

*Through his prayers and missionary work in Sialkot, Pakistan, Calcutta, Bombay, and other part of India, millions of people accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior and the church of Jesus Christ grew by leaps and bounds.*

John Nelson Hyde is probably a name unfamiliar to most of us here today.

... some of you may have heard him referred to as “praying Hyde” but for the most part (though he is well known in glory) he is unknown to most of us.

That is the kind of man that Epaphras was.

... his name is only found three times in the New Testament.

But each mention gives us some detail about the character of this man Paul refers to in the letter to the Colossians.

## **1. Epaphras was FAITHFUL**

*just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bondservant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf, (Col. 1:7)*

Paul learned about the church in Colossae from Epaphras.

Paul commends them for their faith and love for one another and explains that

... their “faith and love” is a direct result of hearing from Epaphras’ preaching the Word of God,

... Epaphras is the one who told them about the hope that is laid up for them in heaven.

... And here in verse 7 Paul calls him a “beloved fellow bondservant.”

In those three words Paul is

- acknowledging his love for Epaphras,
- the reality that Paul and Epaphras are serving the same God,

Paul also says:

*is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf*

The word “servant” this is the word we get “deacon” from, it means “through the dust.”

Although churches have deacons, in truth, every believer should be this kind of Christian.

But (as the sham-wow commercial says) There’s More!

Listen again to what Paul writes about how Epaphras has “served Christ” on their behalf.

<sup>3</sup> We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you,<sup>4</sup> since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints;<sup>5</sup> **because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel** <sup>6</sup> which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth; (Col. 1:3-6)

Epaphras is not only a servant.

- **Epaphras was a faithful PASTOR**

Just as Paul is a pastor/elder/bishop, Epaphras is a pastor/elder/bishop

Colossae is the kind of church it is, because of the shepherding of Epaphras!

... and that was a good thing.

Look again at verse 6.

<sup>6</sup> **which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth**

“bearing fruit” is the word *karpophoroumenon*

“increasing” is the word *auxanomenon*

These two words are somewhat similar, and this is what is called a “periphrastic construction”

What that means in these words are put together to illustrate the continuity of process ... or progress.

The first one happens which causes the second one to occur.

The “bearing fruit” resulted in “increasing.”

AND ... the first word refers to an INWARD working while the second word refers to an OUTWARD expression.

In fact, the Greek (these 2 words are in the middle passive tense)

...

... because they are middle passive it means this is an action done TO them not BY them.

In simple terms the “bearing fruit” and “increasing” was initiated in them from some outside force.

... Amen!

In spite of all the crazy teachings of the TV evangelist about human potential and positive mental attitudes ...

... and how you need to “take control of your life” and “increase your faith”

... “name it and claim it”

... “seize your destiny”

... “Claim your victory”

This is simply NOT what the early Christians believed.

The New Testament Christians did not speak our **POWER** ... it spoke of God’s **EMPOWERMENT!**

Yes, we see miracles in the book of Acts but the Apostles and disciples never asserted that this power was of their doing.

There is never any insistence in the scripture that believers are supposed to seek after power they do not have.

According to the NT God’s power is the past and present reality for all believers.

Verse 6 is very clear ... something or someone outside of these Colossians has deposited INWARD fruit that is OUTWARDLY increasing!



Who or what has done this?

*“as many as received him to them gave he the power to become the children of God”*

This is the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

Paul says this is the case of these believers in the church at Colossae.

- **Epaphras is a FRUITFUL pastor**

When the Word of God is faithfully preached, faithfully taught, and faithfully lived ... there is outward INCREASING evidence!

A gospel that makes no changes in the life of those who believe it, is NO GODPEL at all!

## **2. Epaphras was TRUE**

*Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you,  
(Phlm. 1:23)*

Why was Epaphras a “fellow prisoner” with Paul?

... because he was guilty of the same crime at the same time.

What was that crime?

- He **STOOD** for Christ
- He **SACRIFICED** for Christ

Anybody can raise the white flag of surrender, but it takes commitment to continue to stand when trouble and conflict arises.

Epaphras and Paul are not in prison for feeding too many hungry people, building houses for the homeless, or giving water the thirsty people.

... and all of those things are good—nothing wrong with them.

... the world will let you and encourage you to do all the humanitarian work you want to do.

Those things only become problematic when you stand for the truth.

That is why Paul and Epaphras are in prison ... they stood for the truth and declared the gospel!

But they didn't just stand ... they stood to the end and sacrificed their very lives.

Bible historians tell us that both Epaphras and Paul were put to death for the cause of Christ!

Remember the path of Christianity does not lead through the soup kitchen or the homeless shelter ...

... it leads through an empty cross.

Their ultimate sacrifice calls for us to examine ourselves and the true depth of our commitment to Christ.

- Is there anything we would not do for Jesus?
- Is there any price we are unwilling to pay?
- Is there anything that would keep us from being true to our Lord?

### 3. Epaphras PRAYED

*<sup>12</sup> Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bonds slave of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God. (Col. 4:12)*

I know in Matthew 6 Jesus rebukes the Pharisees for their prayers and says and tells them to go into their prayer closet and pray in secret.

... but you can't do that in jail.

Paul observed Epaphras' prayer life and he tells us he saw three things.

Epaphras

- ALWAYS LABORED EARNESTLY
- for YOU

- that YOU MAY STAND PERFECT AND FULLY ASSURED

There are three words that characterized Epaphras' prayerlife.

- **Passionate**
- **Personal**
- **Particular**

These are three things that should also characterize our prayer lives.

... **Passionate prayer** is consistent prayer.

... **Personal**, he didn't pray just about the world at large, I believe he called out the believers by name.

... **Particular**, he didn't merely say "bless" or "help them" he was specific ... "that they would stand perfect and assured (complete) in the will of God."