

Colossians 4:13

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[0 : 00] Colossians chapter 4 verse 13. For I bear him record that he hath a great zeal for you and for them that are in Laodicea and them in Hierapolis.

Who is Paul referring to what the previous chapter verse tells us? Epaphras, who is one of you a servant of Christ, saluted you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that he may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.

For I bear him, that is Epaphras, record that he hath a great zeal for you and for them that are in Laodicea and them in Hierapolis.

At the time of writing this letter, which of course is to the Colossians, Paul himself had never been to Colossae. We know that from chapter 2 verse 1 where we see, For I would that he knew what great conflict I have for you and for them at Laodicea and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh.

But it is entirely possible that he may have subsequently visited Colossae. Although the little postscripts at the end of some of the letters are not part of inspired scripture, you know, like we've got at the end of this one, at the end of Colossae, it says, written from Rome to the Colossae by Tychicus and Onesimus.

[1 : 23] That's not part of sacred scripture. It may be a little footnote somebody's added early on in the history of the development of God's word, as the letters were put together and put together into the canon of scripture.

And somebody may have said, oh yes, we know where this one came from. We know who was the bearer of this. We know who was the secretary to whom this was dictated. So they just added these wee bits at the end. So they're not inspired scripture, but they might be helpful in giving us wee bits of information.

And that being the case, at the end of 1 Timothy, we read in the little postscript, the first Timothy was written from Laodicea, which is the cheapest city of Phrygia, Paketiana.

Now, if Paul subsequently did go to Laodicea, and he mentions Laodicea in the same breath as Colossae and Hierapolis, and says they should swap letters from Colossae and the Laodiceans and read each other's letters.

If you had been to the one later on, it's entirely credible to believe he would be to the other one. Laodicea was only like 11 miles from Colossae. It's as though somebody, bearing in mind he's writing from Rome, it's like somebody writing either from, you know, deep south in the British mainland to, say, Shilobost, or even from the continent of Europe to Shilobost, and come all the way to, say, Tarbert, but not actually visit Shilobost, even though they've come all the way to there.

[2 : 53] You know, you just wouldn't do that. If you've come all the way from Rome and journeying around the Roman Empire, and you're visiting Laodicea, if he was, then, of course, you're going to visit Colossae as well.

And in all likelihood, he's going to visit Hierapolis, that's mentioned there at verse 13, which was even closer to Laodicea than Colossae was. Now, it's a fact often remarked upon, that none of the seven churches to whom John wrote in Revelation in the opening chapters exist anymore.

Not only do they not exist as churches, but the cities in which those churches were based don't exist for the most part anymore. There are one or two, sort of you could call, exceptions, where, like the little turkish town of Izmir is, you know, close to the ruins of ancient Smyrna.

But, you know, by and large, the cities don't exist anymore. Even Ephesus, that was the greatest of those cities, to which it was written, don't exist anymore. Laodicea certainly doesn't exist anymore. Colossae doesn't exist anymore, as we know. I could be wrong on that. Hierapolis certainly doesn't exist anymore. These are places which flourished for a time, but now they are gone.

[4 : 13] But for now, at the time Paul is writing, not only are they known, they are loved and laboured for in prayer, at the very least by Epaphras.

I bear him record that he hath a great zeal for you, and then that are in Laodicea, and then in Hierapolis. Labouring fervently, verse 12, for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete.

He is labouring fervently, not only for Colossae, but for Laodicea and for Hierapolis as well. We might describe this as a love for those passing by.

These are cities that no longer exist. These are places that are now just archaeological ruins. Now, okay, all of us, in one sense, were here today and gone tomorrow.

We last only a few decades, and then we're away. That's one thing we can come to terms with. But the idea that our flourishing communities, as we know them, might at one stage, in the perhaps not too distant future, perhaps a couple of centuries, hence be nothing more than ruins, that's a solemn thought to us.

[5 : 24] But it's by no means impossible or beyond the bounds that not only does it arise, that there's a place where no more Christians are, but no more people are. You know, we haven't said that, and everything killed that.

Yes, there's lots of visitors. Yes, the army's there, but people don't actually live there now, although they were fervently worshipping Christians there in those islands for many centuries.

Likewise, Scarpe. Many notable Christians came out of Scarpe. Nobody there now. Now, they're not in the same way as Hierapolis and Laodicea. Of course, these are comparatively sparsely inhabited islands.

It's more like saying, you know, think of somewhere like Dundee. Imagine Dundee, or perhaps the sign of Edinburgh, Glasgow, but Perth, or something like that, you know, becoming simply an archaeological ruin, becoming simply a wasteland with nobody in it, let alone no Christians.

That's the sort of scale we're looking at. Flourishing cities, reduced to nothing. And yet, for now, once Paul is writing, not only are they flourishing and growing, they are beloved, and the Christians within them have those who love them and pray for them and have a fervent zeal for them.

[6 : 46] I want us to think, although we're mentioning Laodicea and Colossae as well, and Colossae, Colossae is the letter to which we are preparing, and it's been written to them, and Colossae.

The little city that's mentioned, well, not little city, as if it's mentioned here, verse 30, Hierapolis. I'd like us to think on that just for a wee minute, because this is the only place in Scripture where it is mentioned.

Laodicea is mentioned in the subsequent verses, it's mentioned in Revelation, we know quite a bit about Laodicea because of these things. But Hierapolis, it's not mentioned anywhere else in Scripture, except here.

And you could say that we know about it, and it exists in the inspired Word of God only because Epaphras so loved the Christians in it.

He loved the believers there, he labored fervently for them in prayer, he had great zeal for them, as well as those in Laodicea and Colossae, all that part of what was called Phrygia in those days.

[7 : 47] He has a great zeal and desire for it. And because of his love and his prayers for it, Paul takes note of his fervent zeal and prayerfulness for them, he writes it down and because he wrote it down in this letter, and he's probably sending off two or three letters at the same time, Colossians bears huge similarities to the latter part of Ephesians, so almost certainly they were written at much the same time and very similar material, putting the same, in them both as they went off to their respective locations.

And Philemon almost certainly was written to be in a package with the Colossian letter, reference to Onesimus there, verse 9, and he is the subject, of course, of the letter to Philemon.

So at least three letters going out from Paul at the same time with very similar content in at least two of them. So he's busy there, he's including all this, but this is unique, reference to, not Laodicea necessarily, which is not unique, it's a revelation, but Hierapolis.

What is Hierapolis? It was a city that was close to Laodicea. It had begun because of the hot springs that were there, not so much springs but a kind of underground river that was there of hot water.

It was not a very old city, not in terms of the ancient world. It had only been founded in the second century BC, so in the 100 and somethings BC.

[9 : 14] And the name literally means holy city or sacred city. And it would have taken that name almost certainly because a temple to one of the ancient pagan gods, probably Pluto or those associated with Pluto who was an underworld god, was built deliberately over a geological fault where you had this gushing water in an underground sort of cavern to which you would sort of make a descent from a sort of cave going down into this and this gushing water over the rock but maybe because of the mineral content of the rock produced huge amounts of carbon dioxide which meant it was noxious.

You know, it was not quite poisonous but people passed out with the fumes and it was dangerous to them. Sometimes it was fatal if they were in it for too long. except that the priests of the goddess Sibeli or whatever who was meant to be sort of meeting with Pluto there and that kind of underground sort of entrance to the underworld.

The priests that she had as goddess were eunuchs and they were meant to have found a way to exist in these noxious fumes. Probably they crawled along looking for pockets of air holding their breath and so on and then came out and said, oh look we're immune to these noxious fumes and so on.

But this was the worship in this false god's temple that was built there and the city grew up round about it. It was troubled over the years being on a geological fault it was troubled over the centuries by earthquake after earthquake after earthquake and every time that happened it would then be rebuilt at huge expense and then we'd have another earthquake so they'd rebuild and clean away some of the old buildings and build again.

But it happened a lot over the centuries. Earthquakes and hassles and invasions and so on so it was a lot of difficulty with Hierapolis. But the number of Christians there obviously increased gradually until it became not only a bishopric for that area but after the Byzantine emperors you know after the Roman Empire officially adopted Christianity and then the Eastern Empire kind of broke away but it was the only one left that was based at Constantinople they raised Hierapolis to an archbishopric so it was this sort of bishopric in charge of all the other bishoprics round about.

[11 : 37] Now why not Laodicea? You know well when it says when you go back to 1 Timothy when it says you know it was written from Laodicea which it says is the chiefest city of Phrygia so the chief city of that area you would expect the archbishop to be based in the chiefest city.

Why not in Laodicea? Why make it Hierapolis which was a lesser city? Well by the time that happened which was about 531 AD that the archbishopric was raised up in Hierapolis it's probable that you know the scriptures New Testament scriptures had already been put together by then in about the 360s so about 150 years earlier for about 150 years we had the complete Old and New Testament in people's hands.

So in other words already people knew what St John had said or Jesus had said through St John in Revelation about Laodicea I spew thee out of my mouth they probably thought we don't actually want the archbishopric to be based in a place where people are going to be spewed out of the Lord's mouth so that's probably a reason behind it they made this letter city Hierapolis into the archbishopric and for about 100 years it continued to flourish on and on after that remember at 531 AD St Columba is only 10 years old at that point so the evangelisation of Scotland hasn't started yet you know we still haven't really got much of the gospel except St. Minion and we're down in Whithorn and what's left over from the Romans we're still without the gospel properly and Hierapolis there is sort of reaching its peak and about to start going down because within 100 years the Persians invaded and then the Muslims after that and earthquakes kept happening and then the crusaders took it back briefly in the Middle Ages for about 100 years then the Muslims took it back again and then by about the 14th century the fort that they had built there they abandoned that too I suspect too many earthquakes too many things going wrong and the empire the Turkish empire was secure by then they didn't need forts they didn't need castles they didn't need these hot springs they didn't need all the things that the city had grown up for and it just became abandoned it passed away and yet at this time that's still a long way away that's still a thousand years away a thousand years we think oh ages yet but to the Lord it's like a watch into that Hyattapolis peaked just about the time that Scotland was about to start receiving the gospel from then on it was all decline after that part of its growth undoubtedly was due to the fact that Philip who they claim was one of the apostles was meant to have been based there but they say it was Philip the apostle it's more likely

in my humble opinion to have been Philip the evangelist who's mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles one of the six the seven who was appointed in Acts chapter 6 verse 5 remember with the dispute between the Hebrews and the Grecians about the distribution of help to the widows and they prayed about it they fasted and they appointed seven one of whom was Stephen one of whom was Philip the evangelist and in chapter 8 he goes down to Simeon and he meets with Simon the magician and so on and then the apostles come as well then he baptizes the Ethiopian eunuch and he keeps on preaching the gospel all the way up from Asadus up to Caesarea where he is clearly based because in Acts 21 we read at verses 8 and 9 the next day we that were of Paul's company departed and came unto Caesarea and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist which was one of the seven and abode with him and the same man had four daughters virgins which did prophesy now that's an important detail there because the Philip who later is said by tradition to have settled in Hierapolis and to have ended his life there to have been martyred there had reputedly four elderly by then virgin daughters who prophesied now they later on said oh no it was Philip the apostle you know one of the twelve who was based there people did that they sort of sought to upgrade their city status and say oh no it's the apostle that was here it wasn't just the evangelist it wasn't just the guy with the four daughters but if there is the tradition not only of this [16:05] Philip a notable early Christian with his four virgin daughters who prophesied and so on being based there the apostle Philip we don't read that he had that we don't read that he had these distinctive four daughters who prophesied and the gift of prophecy from the Lord and so on it is likely to have been the evangelist it is less likely to have been the apostle though everybody claimed it was the apostle and sought to bump it up that adds to a city's status it increases its power because everybody reckons our strength is the big one and especially as the middle ages came on then they'd want people coming to the shrines or the site of their martyrdom or whatever because it made money and the worst of the middle ages sought to abuse that Annapolis itself then it rose it peaked and it fell away to nothing its entire lifespan was about 1500 years from start to finish so it had a beginning it had a peak it had an end it was peaking just when we first really received the proper gospel from Columba and the other

Celtic missionaries and so on it is a place then that passed by I don't want to say passed away as we associate with death but it was there and then it was they passed by now all of us are passing by but the places in which we live may also be passing by we have not only no promise of tomorrow but we have no promise of permanence there's nothing to say that where we dwell the Lord owes it to us that there will always be a presence always be believers there and so on we think oh there's been believers here for hundreds of years that may be so but we have no guarantee of how long it may continue we have here in these verses a statement of a love for those passing by Epaphras who is one of you a servant of Christ saluted you always laboring fervently for you in prayers that ye may stand perfect and complete in the will of God for I bear him record that he had a great zeal for you and them that are in

Laodicea and them in Hierapolis this is a love for those passing by it is not the church that is gone from Hierapolis it is all the people it's just archaeological ruins now the people for a time or Christians for a time then their time passes we've mentioned Scarp and St Kilda large tracts of Sutherland and other parts of the highlands that were once quite densely populated and now they're empty wastelands the Christians have gone because the people have gone and the places are empty but that does not mean that the saints in Hierapolis are not loved in Paul's day at the time he is writing this is recorded for posterity that this is a people who were loved and prayed for and longed for by Epaphras and because he loved them Hierapolis has a place in scripture it is mentioned uniquely here in scripture this is its only mention but it's only mentioned here at all because

Epaphras loved them and prayed for them now only eternity will testify that how many of us perhaps will have a place not in scripture but in heaven because somebody faithful loved us and laboured fervently for us in prayer we can't even know that ourselves we don't know how long or how much when we were in the womb when our mothers first joyfully announced to the rest of their family that they were expecting that maybe there were godly relatives who began to pray for the unborn child in the womb who prayed when we were born who prayed at our baptisms who prayed throughout the years for us as wider parts of their family none of us knows or can testify how much we owe to those who loved us and laboured fervently for us in prayer and how much that will have contributed under god to the fact that we will have a place perhaps not just in scripture but in heaven because

we who are passing by and passing away were loved and laboured for in prayer and likewise nobody knows nobody on earth knows what others may likewise have such a place in heaven because we perhaps who are passing by and passing away loved them and laboured for them in prayer we should never grow weary in well doing never grow weary in praying and laboured in prayer for those who may as yet want nothing to do with the

Lord those who may as yet be known to us be dear to us be beloved to us and yet have no thought of the Lord we should never give up on man because clearly there were those before in our time who never gave up on us there is a love in these verses for those passing by for I bear him record that he hath a great zeal for you and for them that are in Laodicea and for them in Hierapolis places that lasted filled with the lives and loves and work and faith of Christians for generations for centuries and then no more they passed by Hierapolis is no more but there will almost certainly be saints in heaven now who counted at their home when they were upon earth who were able to say yes sir

[22 : 14] I believe I was in Hierapolis when I was upon earth I was part of the church there I benefited so much from the sound of the godly bishop and the prayers of these godly women and men who were there and I grew up in the church there and I loved the lord and served the lord and their high happiness was my home upon earth of course this is my real home now in heaven but the testimony and the witness of what was their home perhaps their birthplace their life their love because others because others labored for them there will be saints in glory as we speak for my appellation because others labored for them and name it with thankfulness as their home because that was where they came to faith that was where they lived out their witness because other saints loved them and labored fervently for them in prayer when you think on the brevity of time and how swiftly the decades pass and the passing nature of this life and the longing and the urgency to pray think on

Hierapolis when we think of those we love who are likewise passing by when we think of ourselves and the debt that we owe to those who have labored fervently for us in prayer think on Epaphras and think on Hierapolis the only mention we have here in scripture in this one solitary verse not because Paul said he was a great lover of them but because he noted a mention of the epaphras we don't think he's mentioned in many other places in scripture he's mentioned here in Colossians he may be mentioned it by leman I haven't got the time to check just now but he doesn't appear much he's a minor player as far as the new testament is concerned but a minor player whose love and his fervency in prayer literally puts fire up of us on the map scripturally speaking now wouldn't it be a great thing if we could consider that our love and fervency of prayer for our island and for these wider western isles may be that which contributed to putting it spiritually on the map of heaven to being able to recognize this soul was brought because that person prayed for them this soul ended up being born again under god humanly speaking because this one prayed fervently for them loved them labored for them long after them wouldn't rest content until they had spent themselves to pray this one into the kingdom to the glory of their native land their native place that puts it spiritually if not spiritually on the map I bear him record that he had a great zeal for you and them that are in Laodicea and them in

Hyalurus who yes the time would come when their place was no more than archaeological ruins but for now they live they labor they love they serve and they are themselves who love and pray for fervently when we think on those who know on those who love perhaps as yet outside of the kingdom or those in the kingdom whom we love because they are brothers and sisters in Christ labor fervently for them in prayer consider the urgency to pray consider them by name in your hearts and consider that only eternity will tell the effect the benefit the blessing that your prayers or mine may have had on this or that individual and if they end up lost it will not be because we did not love enough or because we did not pray enough but because these things are beyond our knowledge or strength and these things which are here for a time are yet passing by this is a verse filled with love and longing and fervency and prayer for those passing by such as Hierapolis such as the likes of us let us pray as said it eternally we have to