

**The Agony of Victory – Part I**  
**Colossians 2:1-4**  
**Reality Carpinteria - Pastor Britt Merrick**  
**February 5, 2006**

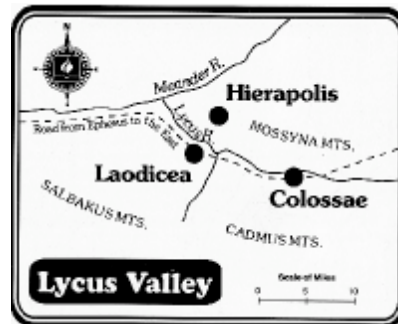
**Colossians 2:1-4**, “For I want you to know how great a struggle I have had on your behalf and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face, 2 that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God’s mystery, that is, Christ Himself, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. 4 I say this in order that no one may delude you with persuasive argument.”

**Pastor Britt’s Opening Prayer:**

Father, thank You this morning for Your word. We ask that this morning Holy Spirit, You would teach us and instruct us. That right now You would soften our hearts to hear from You. Lord, we ask that You would do a work in us that would be lasting, of eternal value, and that would be fruitful for the expansion of your kingdom; for the glory of Your name and for the furtherance of the gospel. We ask that this morning, Lord, by the work of Your Spirit, that You would cause us to be less selfish in who we are and more selfless. That You would impart to us a spirit of intercession and that You would teach us how to pray as a church and as individuals. That Holy Spirit, You would pour the love of the Father abroad here. That we’d fall more in love with You and subsequently more in love with one another. That You would work these deep things within us. Lord, we refuse to just do church this morning. We refuse to just go through the motions. We ask that Lord, You would make Your word living and active. That You would do radical things here. We believe You to change our individual little hearts. We believe You to change this coastline and this nation. We ask You to start right here, in our hearts, in Jesus’ name. Amen.

**Review:**

- Paul has never met the people he is writing to in Colossae and later in Laodicea. He’s never been to the city of Colossae, nor to Laodicea, which is about 12 miles from Colossae, which is about 100 miles inland or east of Ephesus in Asia Minor, which is in modern day Turkey.
  - The Lord had a great burden for these three cities in the Lycus Valley: Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis. He placed this burden for them on Paul’s heart.
    - Paul took this burden on and began to work on their behalf for their salvation and for their well being.



**Colossians 2:1**, “For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face. Verse 5, For even though I am absent in body, nevertheless I am with you in spirit.

- Paul had never been there and had never met them, yet he has an incredible heart, love and concern for them.
  - He is struggling on their behalf.
  - Though physically not with them, he is with them in spirit.
  - He is quite passionate about these people.
  - His love for God has overflowed in such a way that he loves God’s people. Even those he has never been with.
- The word “struggle” means conflict in the King James Version.
  - The word struggle in the Greek is the word *agon*.
    - Where we get the English word “agony”, which has a negative connotation.
    - The Greek word does not have a negative connotation. It is not talking about defeat or misery.
    - “Struggle” (*agon*) means strife, contention, a contest for victory or mastery.
      - Used in the Greek games of running, boxing, wrestling, etc.

- Paul was struggling like an athlete seeking to win. Like one running the race. Like a boxer fighting for his life. Like someone who is in a contest and second place is not an option.  
**The struggle or agony would bring about victory.**

The New Testament applies the word to the battle that takes place against the enemies of the Gospel.

- 1 Timothy 6:12**, Paul tells Timothy to "fight the good fight of faith".
- In **Ephesians 6:12**, we see a synonym, which carries the same idea. "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places."
  - Paul proclaims that he wrestles and fights a spiritual battle on behalf of these people that it is not against flesh and blood, but is against powers, principalities and demonic forces.
    - Usually what takes place in the spiritual realm manifests itself in the physical realm.
    - This is no ordinary battle.
    - This is a battle for the gospel.
      - There are missionaries battling in places where the gospel is forbidden.
  - The idea here is one where we struggle or battle in prayer.
    - Unfortunately not enough people within the church in America partake in this struggle.
      - Not enough of us know about battling, struggling in agony, competing for someone's soul in prayer.

**Paul had never seen the Colossians, but he was battling for them in prayer.**

**Is there anyone you are passionate about and battling for in your prayer life?**

Paul was passionate for people he knew as well as those he didn't know. Paul had three things that made him struggle in the spirit for others:

- He had a great love for God
- He loved God's Truth
- He understood the power of prayer

### **1. Paul's Love for God**

- Your primary concern as a Christian ought to be: to know and experience the love of God.
  - In this, God is glorified.
  - Everything exists by Him and for Him.

**The salvation of man is not the end of theology or the work of God. We are a subset of that. The end of theology, the end of the work of God is the glory of God.**

\* It is to His glory that sinners like us are saved.

\* It is for His glory that God so loved the world that He gave it His only begotten Son.

\* It's for His glory that God demonstrated His love in that while we were yet sinners He gave Christ to die for us.

\* It's for His glory that the Lord is seated in the heavenlies in a high and lofty place, yet He is near to the broken-hearted, the lowly and the contrite.

\* It's to His glory that He saves sinners.

\* It is not merely for the sinner's sake.

\* It's the glory of God.

- The goal of the Christian life is for the glory of God.
  - A subset of this goal is to know and experience in a real and tangible way, the love of God.
    - In **Ephesians 3:14-19**, Paul writes about his prayer life for the church in Ephesus, "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, 16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, (the love of God) 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God."

### Is Christ dwelling richly in your heart?

- Your heart is the seat of emotions at the core of your being.
- There ought to be a sense in your life of the richness that is in Christ, the fullness of Christ, the presence of Christ, the power of Christ. His life manifested in your life.
  - **Galatians 2:20**, It is no longer you who live, but Christ who lives in you. And the life you live, you live by faith in Him.
- There ought to be a sense of awe and of being consumed in Him and in His glory.
- He wants them to be able to comprehend this love of Christ, but it's beyond all knowledge.
  - The thrust of the Bible, the heart of Christianity, is not what can you do for God, but what God has done for you!
- Part of your goal as a Christian is to keep yourself in the love of God.
  - **Romans 8** says that *nothing* can separate us from the love of God.
    - The only thing that can do that is you.
  - Sometimes we remove ourselves from a place of experiencing this love.
  - Sometimes we remove ourselves from the place of blessing.
    - The Lord guides us and directs us not to curse us but to bless us.
      - No matter what you may have heard or been taught, God does not want to bum out your gig, or mess with your happiness.
        - This is not biblical.
  - God **wants** to bless us. **James 1:17**, every good and perfect gift comes from Him.

God wants to bless you more than you are willing to receive it. He guides and directs us that we might be **within** the parameters of where His blessings lie. We step over those parameters and then cry for God's blessings. God can only bless us when we are standing within His parameters.

God cannot bless that which He has already condemned in His character, His Word, and His holiness. If you are walking in disobedience, He can't bless that. And, whom the Lord loves, He disciplines. He will correct you and when necessary, He will reprimand you.

YES, there is freedom in Christ, but don't misunderstand this freedom. It is not a license to do whatever you want.

We are free **from** sin, not free **to** sin!

There is a vast difference. We are free from the power of sin that we might walk in the Spirit of God and receive the fullness of His blessings.

- Part of the goal of the Christian life is to experience, to know, and to walk in that love for God.
  - **1 John 4:19**, we love Him because He first loved us.
  - In **Luke 7:47**, Jesus said regarding the woman who worshipped Him by washing His feet with her tears and drying them with her hair, "her **sins**, which are many, are **forgiven**, for she loved **much**. But to whom little is **forgiven**, the same loves little."
    - She loved much because she had received much love and forgiveness from God.

**If you're beginning to go dry in your walk with the Lord; if things are starting to stagnate a little, or if your life's not what you'd like it to be, then listen:**

**Get yourself back in the love of God.**

**Take stock of your life. Is there some area where you are being disobedient? Have you removed yourself from that place of blessing and intimate presence with the Lord?**

**Get back in that place of blessing!**

**Let God shower you with His love, and the next outflow will be "I love you, Lord!" The natural outflow of this is: "Lord, I love Your people."**

- The first and greatest commandment is you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.
- The second great commandment is you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

**Loving others is always the outflow of loving God.**

- **1 John 4:20**, "If you say you love God and hate your brother, you are a liar and the love of God is not in you."
    - It's amazing whom you can love, when you're in love with the Lord.
  - Paul's love for people also affected the Church at Laodicea. They are mentioned in verse one, and they come up again at the end of the Bible in the Book of Revelation. This church is the only one that Jesus had nothing good to say about in His letters to the Seven Churches.
    - **Revelation 3:14-20**, Jesus says, **14 "To the angel (pastor, leader, messenger) of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this:**
      - Jesus introduced Himself as the Amen, or "So be it". He is communicating the Sovereignty of God.
      - Jesus is faithful even when we are unfaithful.
        - **John 14:6**, Jesus said, **"I am the Way, the Truth and the Life."**
      - Jesus is the beginning of the creation. Not the first to be created, as the Jehovah Witnesses would have you believe. This is not biblical! **Jesus is the origin and source of creation.**
        - Recall that earlier in our study of Colossians, it states that Jesus created all things.
    - **Revelation 3: 15** 'I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. **16** 'So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth.
      - Still visible today near the ruins of Laodicea are remnants from an ancient siphon, or water transport system that brought water to the city. They brought cold water from Colossae and thermal water from hot springs from nearby Denizli.
        - Cold and hot water are useful to those in that city as it is for us today.
      - There was a problem in the transport of this water. It was difficult to keep the cold water separated from the hot water.
        - Both waters were good and useful. The cold water was refreshing. The hot water was used for cleansing and cooking. But, if during the transportation of the hot or the cold water it became tepid (lukewarm) before it reached them, then it became useless and no longer good for its intended purposes.
      - The Lord refers to their siphons to explain that their spiritual state had become "tepid". It was neither hot nor cold. It was useless.
        - Our goal is to be useful to the Lord! Hot or cold. Whatever the Lord has called us to be.
        - The Lord is not saying that He wants you to be on fire (hot) or against Him (cold). He's saying that He wants us to be useful, in the manner that He had ordained and intended for us to be. He's warning us not to grow tepid or lukewarm- - useless! Or, He will spit us out of His mouth.
          - Not sure what this means (spitting out), but it is a horrifying picture!
      - This church had lost its usefulness and potency. It had lost its fervency.
      - **Matthew 5:13**, Jesus said that we are to be the salt of the earth.
        - Sodium chloride is a relatively stable chemical compound. Left to itself, it doesn't lose its saltiness. But Jesus said there is a time when salt loses its saltiness, when it is no longer useful and it should be thrown out and trampled under the feet of men. This is when it becomes contaminated with another chemical or substance that reacts with it in such a way that it loses its salty characteristics.
          - **James 1:27**, **"This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained from the world."**
- We're passing through the world.**  
**We are to be in the world, but not of the world.**  
**Our every touch upon the world should be light.**  
**Our grip upon it should be easy.**
- Jesus explained in **John 17**, that we are in the world, but we are not of the world.
  - We must keep ourselves unstained or we will lose our usefulness to the Lord. We will grow lukewarm. We'll lose our saltiness. We'll become good for nothing but to be trampled underground or spewed out of the mouth of the Lord!

**Christian, keep yourself in the love of God.  
Remain in that place where you are cool and refreshing and hot and fiery - -  
STAY USEFUL FOR THE LORD!**

Boats are great and fun, Put a boat in the water and they are useful in many ways. But when the water gets in the boat, you have a problem.

**The boat should be in the water, but the water is never to be in the boat!**

**Christian, be in the world, but don't let the world get in you!**

- **Revelation 3:17** 'Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked. . . ."
  - We do know that that region of Laodicea was very wealthy.
    - After the time of Jesus, there were a lot of earthquakes in this valley. The Roman government funded their rebuilding efforts. By AD 60, they were destroyed by another earthquake but they had become so wealthy that they were easily able to rebuild. It had become an affluent area.
  - Jesus tells them that they are living in affluence and in need of nothing.
    - This was true of them then and it is true of us today. All of us haven't need of anything. Materially, we are so blessed.
  - Jesus tells them that spiritually they are wretched and miserable, poor, blind and naked.
  - They were lukewarm and their affluence had blinded them to their condition.

**Do you know that the church in China prays that you would be on fire for the Lord!**

We pray for China, but they pray for the church in America! Why?

They have nothing.

They must meet in underground places to worship and pray.

Husbands, wives and children are beaten for their faith in Jesus.

They have to struggle to own a Bible.

They have nothing in the material realm. But, they are spiritually rich and wealthy.

They look at America and see that we have *everything* materially, but we're *poor spiritually*.

**How humbling is that!**

- **Revelation 3:18** I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. 19 'Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent. 20'Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.
  - Gold refined by fire speaks of spiritual riches not worldly ones.
    - **Matthew 6:19-21**, 19 "Don't lay up treasures for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 "But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; 21 for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."
      - It is not wrong to own things. God has blessed many people with material things. The issue is not *things*, it's your *heart*. Whatever is most important to you belies what is in your heart. If the things of God are most valuable to you, then your heart will remain steadfast in the things of the Lord.

**What distracts you from the things of the Lord?**

- **Psalm 19:7-11** states, The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. 8 The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment

of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. 9 The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of the LORD are true; they are righteous altogether. 10 They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb. 11 Moreover, by them Your servant is warned; In keeping them there is great reward.

- God's Word, His precepts, His testimony are more valuable than gold!
- **Proverbs 3:13-18** speaks about true wealth, true riches. 13 How blessed is the man who finds wisdom and the man who gains understanding. 14 For her profit is better than the profit of silver and her gain better than fine gold. 15 She is more precious than jewels; and nothing you desire compares with her. 16 Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. 17 Her ways are pleasant ways and all her paths are peace. 18 She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, and happy are all who hold her fast.
  - Here we have wisdom personified. Wisdom that is from above. The wisdom of God. Throughout the Book of Proverbs we are told to seek wisdom, seek understanding and to go after it.

**As opposed to the Laodiceans, who were accumulating for themselves material things and neglecting the spiritual things of God and growing lukewarm, How are you cultivating the things of God?**

**Are you going after spiritual wisdom?**

**The Lord says you will find Him when you seek Him with all of your heart.**

- **Proverbs 8:10-21**, Solomon writes, 10 "Take my instruction and not silver, And knowledge rather than choicest gold. 11 For wisdom is better than jewels; And all desirable things cannot compare with her. 12 "I, wisdom, dwell with prudence, And I find knowledge and discretion. 13 The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverted mouth, I hate. 14 Counsel is mine and sound wisdom; I am understanding, power is mine. 15 By me kings reign, and rulers decree justice. 16 By me princes rule, and nobles, All who judge rightly. 17 I love those who love me; and those who diligently seek me will find me. 18 Riches and honor are with me. Enduring wealth and righteousness. 19 My fruit is better than gold, even pure gold, and my yield better than choicest silver. 20 I walk in the way of righteousness, In the midst of the paths of justice, 21 To endow those who love me with wealth, That I may fill their treasuries.
- The Laodiceans got this letter from Paul after the church of Colossae read it. But, thirty years later the **Lord** is rebuking them: "You've gone lukewarm. In your affluence you've neglected the spiritual things and you need to buy from Me gold refined with fire."

## **2. Paul's Love for God's Truth**

- This love for God's truth caused Paul to battle on behalf of others and labor in prayer for God's people.
  - He knew the value of the Truth of the Word of God and the commandments of God.
  - It came from his genuine love for God.
  - This was exactly what the church in Laodicea and Colossae needed.
    - Colossae was experiencing false teachers.
    - Laodicea was experiencing a false sense of security.

**Revelation 3:18**, I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself,

- When the Lord speaks, He speaks directly to the context of what is occurring in your life.
  - God made a reference to their hot and cold siphons by directing them not to become lukewarm or useless. Now, acknowledging their wealth and affluence, He tells them to buy gold and white garments from Him.

- Laodiceans were known for the beautiful black cotton garments they made from the wool of their black sheep. People from all over the world came to them to buy these black garments. The Lord tells the Laodiceans **they** should be coming to God to buy beautiful white garments from Him.
- The white garments represent the righteousness of God.
  - **2 Corinthians 5:21** God made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.
    - We need to be seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.
  - **Revelation 19** speaks of the Second Coming of the Lord and the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. 7 "Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready." 8 It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints."
  - We are to be clothed in the righteousness of God because of the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. And there should be an outflow of that righteousness given to us in righteous acts because of our love for God.
    - In **James 2:18**, James writes, **demonstrate to me your faith through works**. Faith without works is dead.
- Jesus is telling the Church at Laodicea that they should to be mindful of heavenly things.
  - They need to be clothed in righteous acts, as opposed to naked, lukewarm and useless.

**Revelation 3:18b** "...and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see."

- At that time in Laodicea, there was school of medicine. They produced an eye salve that was used for all sorts of eye ailments.
- God wanted to give them a different salve made for internal use. God wants to heal our spiritual sight. He wants our eyes to be opened to the spiritual reality of our lives.

**Wake up and loosen the grip on the things of this world.  
Be clothed in the righteousness of God and in the outflow of your faith.  
Be hot, be cold, be useful, and be on fire!  
Be alert to spiritual things!**

**Revelation 3:19a**, "Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline;

- God is not saying these things because He hates us. He disciplines us because He loves us.

**Revelation 3:19b**, therefore be zealous and repent.

- When the Lord speaks to you, react and repent.
- Good things come when we repent.
  - Peter told the nation of Israel, in **Acts 3:19**, "Repent, therefore, that times of refreshing may come from being in the presence of the Lord."
  - When we repent, God immediately receives us into His presence.

**Revelation 3:21** 'He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. 22 'He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'"

- He, who overcomes and repents, and who hears what the Spirit says to the Church, the Lord will receive him back again.
- **Psalms 32**, the psalmist said that his life was wasting away because of the weight of his sin. And then he repented and the Lord surrounded him with songs of deliverance.
- The Lord is so good to receive us right back.
- When the prodigal son returned home to repent, his father saw him from a distance and ran to him.
  - It is the only time in the Bible where God pictures Himself in a hurry, as He runs to the sinner who is repenting. When He reached His son, He kissed him on his neck over and over.
  - Like the prodigal son, we are clothed in righteousness. We have been bought with the precious blood of the Lamb and we are free in Christ Jesus.
    - We are free from sin, not free to sin.

**Revelation 3:20** 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.

- This passage is often used for evangelism, but it's a misapplication of the passage because the Lord is talking to the Church here and not non-believers.

- By the end of the first century, by the time the Church was established, Jesus already felt like He was on the outside! He says, "I'm standing on the **outside** of the Church! There is no knob on the outside. You have to open the door from the inside to let Me in. If you do, I will restore intimacy in our relationship."

**You were created to experience God's love and intimacy with Him.**

**Receive it!**

**Will you open your heart today?**

**Will you hear what He is saying to the church at Laodicea?**

**Is there something you need to buy from the Lord, today? Perhaps gold refined in fire or other spiritual things?**

**Does the righteous robe need to be placed upon you today as a prodigal?**

**Does the Lord need to open your eyes or put the sandals of freedom on your feet?**

**Today is the day to repent!**

**What has God revealed to you? "With knowledge comes responsibility."**

**Pastor Britt's Closing Prayer:**

Thank You Lord, that You've spoken to me and to others. Thank You Lord, that whom You love, You discipline. You never gave up on the Laodiceans. You told Paul to pray for them and in the Book of Revelation, You told John to write to them. Lord, You are so good to pursue us. I pray that Holy Spirit You would pursue us passionately. That You would draw us to repentance by Your loving kindness.

Worship the Lord and meditate on Him. If you need prayer, ask for prayer. James 5:16 says, confess your sins to one another that you might pray for one another and be healed. The prayer of a righteous man accomplishes much.

Join me and come and get on your face before the Lord today. Get your heart clean before Him. Get right with Him. Be concerned with the spiritual things instead of with the worldly stuff.

Pray with one another. Grab someone and tell them what is going on in your life and how you need help. Or, grab someone and tell him or her how they need help in their life.

Do business with the Lord that times of refreshing might come from being in His presence. Amen! Thank You, Lord.