

With a Little Help from My Friends

Colossians 4:7-18

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Colossians chapter 4 verses 7 through 18, and this is the part of the epistle to the Colossians that nobody bothers to read. They read, basically, through verse 6 and then it's all sort of personal data thrown in at the end and it's easy to assume that this is the dull part of the book. That this is just the ending and a few little amenities that don't really have anything to do with us because we haven't got the faintest idea who that 'first guy is and we're not too sure it even matters. But it does matter.

What you have here at the close of Colossians is a group photograph, frankly. Paul signs his letter and it includes a group photograph. He has grouped together in one portrait at the end of this epistle, all of the people who helped him in his ministry while he was a prisoner in Rome.

And so we've called this section "With a little help from my friends." Because it expresses the very deep-down satisfaction in the life of the Apostle Paul that he is able to accomplish his ministry only because of the faithfulness of many dear friends who have stuck by him and who have been helpful to him in his ministry. And in order to use them as an encouragement to the Colossians and to all the churches that would read this letter, including Grace Community, he tells us a little bit about them. And it adds a very warm, personal touch to what is a very doctrinal letter. It also indicates to me something of the magnetism of his personality and the deep rich love of which he was capable because of the fact that he had so many of these people with him for so many years and they had such a deep loyalty for the man.

So to Paul these are indispensable folks. These are the folks who have been making his ministry possible. He couldn't do it by himself, nobody ever can. Not even the finest ... not even the Apostle Paul could do it alone, he had to have help from his friends. And they supported him. But it's always been that way.

Look with me for a moment at some of the greatest in the history of God's working. In Exodus chapter 17 and verse 8 we find Moses and it says in verse 8; "Came Amalek and fought with Israel in Rephidim. And Moses said to Joshua, Choose us out men and go out, fight with Amalek; tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in mine hand. So Joshua did as Moses said to him, fought with Amalek and Moses, Aaron and Hur went up to the top of the hill. And it came to pass when Moses held up his hand that Israel prevailed; when he let down his hand Amalek prevailed. But Moses' hands were heavy and they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it and Aaron and Hur held up his hands, one on the one side, the other on the other side and his hands were steady till the going down of the sun. And Joshua vanquished Amalek and his people with the edge of his sword."

Here you have the holding up of Moses' hands; with a little help from his friends Israel was able to win a great victory under his leadership.

Numbers chapter 11 indicates to us another similar incident. In Numbers 11 verse 14 Moses says to God; "I am not able to bear all this people alone because it is too heavy for me." I can't handle the responsibility of leadership, God, it's too much. "If Thou deal with us thus, kill me I pray Thee out of hand, if I have found favor in Thy sight let me not see my wretchedness." God, You have to do something or I'm going to die. "The Lord said to Moses gather unto thee seventy men of the elders of Israel whom thou knowest to be the elders of the people and officers over them and bring them unto the tabernacle of the congregation that they may stand there with thee."! And so again, with a little help from his friends God's leader was able to accomplish what he never ever could have accomplished by himself.

In Proverbs there are many, many statements about how important it is for a man to have companions. One significant one is Proverbs 27:17 which says; "Iron sharpens iron and so does a man sharpen the countenance of his friend." Men help men. They increase their effectiveness and as the case is indicated in Proverbs they increase even their satisfaction as it shows up on their countenance.

These kinds of thoughts are traced throughout all the Old and New Testament and you're familiar with them. But let me draw you to one other one, Jack mentioned this to us in our study on Wednesday night and it's a very appropriate text. Ecclesiastes chapter 4 verse 9, it says this; "Two are better than one because they have a good reward for their labor." In other words, two can work harder and earn more than one. "If they fall the one will lift up his fellow, but woe to him that is alone when he falls for he has not another to help him up. Again, if two lie together then they have heat, but how can one be warm alone." And, of course, in those days you got heated because of somebody's body lying next to you. Even when David was old and infirmed and was just a decrepit old man they had to find a young virgin to crawl in bed to keep him warm so he didn't die, just to make sure nobody thought there was anything going on it says - "And David knew her not." All he wanted at that point in life was a heater, frankly.

So Ecclesiastes 4:9...Ecclesiastes 4:9, 10 and 11 tell us two are better than one. If one prevail against him, two shall withstand him. And threefold cord is not quickly broken.

Now when you get into the New Testament you find this principle of two better than one, and three better than two illustrated in the life of the early church. For example, if you were to read in the 13th chapter of Acts about the first church outside the city of Jerusalem, the church in Antioch, you would find that they had five leaders. Five; Barnabas, Simeon, Niger, Lucius, Manaen and even Saul was brought into the situation. They ministered for the Lord. And when the Lord called out Saul to be a missionary, he didn't call him alone, he said; "Separate me Barnabas and Saul," and from the very beginning of Saul's ministry, at that point, he never spent any other part of his ministry alone. He always had companions. In fact, the only time you'll ever see him alone in the entire book of Acts is a brief period of time in Athens while he was waiting for his friends to arrive.

So the Apostle Paul has always been the kind of person who needed help from his friends. As great as he was he could never do it alone. And it's still true. We can't do it alone. We have to have each other. And that's the message of this text to us tonight.

Paul, as we look at Colossians 4, is a prisoner in the city of Rome. It is the first of two imprisonments.

The second one will issue in his death. During this imprisonment he has some friends with him. And he gives us a portrait of each one of them in a composite photograph. These are the friends who helped. Sometime during this two year imprisonment he wrote the letter to the Colossians, around 60 AD or so. And during that time these are the people who were very special people in his life. They are heroes of a sort because there was a price to pay to be associated with a prisoner. There was a certain social association that maybe didn't put you in the classiest group when you were attendant upon a prisoner. There was a certain element of looking down the nose of somebody like that and there was always the possibility that you could find yourself in the same fate as that prisoner, should the tide turn against him. So they were kind of heroes. They paid a price to associate themselves with Paul who was a prisoner in Rome. But they counted the cost, they made the commitment, they hung in there and Paul tells us about them in this tremendous passage.

Let's meet them. The first one is a man name Tychicus, ch is pronounced like a k, Tychicus. I call him the man with a servant's heart. And each one of them has something unique about them and we'll just go through and look at them. It isn't really going to be like a sermon, too much, more like just a character study or two. Tychicus, the man with a servant's heart, verse 7 -- let's meet him. "All my state," or "All my condition," the situation I'm in at the present, "Shall Tychicus declare unto you who is a beloved brother and a faithful servant and a fellow slave in the Lord whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose that he might know your state and comfort your hearts." The name Tychicus means fortuitous or fortunate. And indeed he was fortunate. We don't know much about him. There isn't much said in the Bible, he's mentioned five times and every time it's very, very brief. But we know one thing; he lived up to his name because he was a fortunate man to be able to spend as much time, in fact, as many years as he did in the ministry with the Apostle Paul.

The first time we meet him is in the 20th chapter of Acts and the fourth verse. And in that chapter the Apostle Paul is at Ephesus. You don't need to turn to it, we'll just talk about it a minute. The Apostle Paul is at Ephesus. He's kind of winding down his third missionary journey. And he has a plan. His plan is to go to Macedonia. And over in Macedonia he wants to collect some money, you remember that? And he has in mind collecting from the Thessalonian church, the Philippian church and the Corinthian church which were the major churches of the area of Macedonia. He has the idea of collecting from those congregations money as a love gift to the saints in Jerusalem. He is going to return to Jerusalem because he wants to get there to conciliate with them the Gentile church. He realizes the Jews have one thing going, even the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians have their own thing going and he's fearful that they'll never be that unity that he really was really supposed to preach. After all he was the Apostle of the mystery of the unity of the Jew and the Gentile. So his great burden was to collect some money from the saints in the Gentile lands and to take that money to Jerusalem and give it to the saints there as a show of love from the Gentile to the Jew in hopes that it would kind of unite them together.

And not only did he want to take money, but he had in mind taking certain Gentile Christians. Some from each of those congregations. And if you were to read the 20th chapter of Acts and the fourth verse you would simply be reading the names of the people who accompanied him back to Jerusalem. The names of the Gentiles from the churches in Galatia, from the churches in Asia Minor and from the churches in Macedonia, there were certain Gentiles who went along with him on the journey to confirm their love to the Jerusalem Christians. One of those was Tychicus. And so he appears, first of all, as he joins the Apostle to go to Jerusalem.

Now this gives something of the indication of his spirit. He is a man with a servant's heart. He

realizes this is a long journey. He's leaving his home, his job, his friends, the fellow-ship of his church; he's going on a definite adventure. One step out of town with Paul was an adventure. One step into town was equally an adventure. Now he knew that this was going to be an adventure. He didn't know how long it was going to take. A journey in those days wasn't hopping on a jet, landing, turning around and hopping back. It was very arduous, very difficult and very long range. And yet he was willing to do it. And all along the way, you remember in the book of Acts as Paul goes, at every city somebody warns him what's going to happen when he gets to Jerusalem. And yet nobody, at least not recorded in the book of Acts, nobody bailed out. They stuck with him. So that when you get to Jerusalem it's obvious that Tychicus is still there. And already we begin to see his servant's heart. A lot of people gave money but a few people gave themselves, he was one of those.

And so now when we see him as Paul writes Colossians, he's still with Paul. He's still around. He's stuck by him for a long time now. He went to Jerusalem with him. It may be that he returned with him. He for sure is with him now in the imprisonment in Rome. And what is even more exciting is that later on Paul has another imprisonment, a second imprisonment in which his life was finally taken. And at the end of Titus, chapter 3 verse 12, he says; "When I shall send Artemas unto thee or Tychicus, be diligent to come to me to Nicopolis for I have determined to spend the winter there." In the second imprisonment of Paul, Tychicus is still there. Here's a loyal man. And you know what? He says - I'm going to send him, Titus, to take your place, either he or Artemas. We don't know which one he sent but it may well have been Tychicus.

Now what Paul wanted was -- Paul loved Titus. Titus was the pastor of the congregations in the island of Crete. And Paul wanted Titus to come and spend the winter with him. Paul knew it wasn't only the winter of the year but it was the winter of his life. And Paul wanted the fellowship and the love of Titus. And so he said to Titus - Look, if you'll come and meet me in Nicopolis and spend the winter with me, I will send this man Artemas -or this man Tychicus, to take care of your church.

Now it's kind of an interesting thing. Here is a man who started out as a messenger and wound up substituting for a very great man, the man by the name of Titus. The man with a servant's heart made himself available and God used him in ways, I'm sure, he never dreamed possible.

Now later on, I want you to notice something, Paul wrote the last letter that we believe he wrote II Timothy chapter 4 verse 12. And he says this, writing to Timothy; "And Tychicus have I sent to Ephesus. The cloak that I left at Troas." I'm glad he has that same problem that all of us have. He left his coat somewhere. "The cloak that I left at Troas with Carpos, when you come would you please bring it and my books and especially the parchments?" Good to know he's human, isn't it? He left almost everything there. So he says - When you come will you bring all that stuff I left over there? Now you see what he's saying here is Timothy, I want you to come and be with me. I need you.

And in order that you can come and be with me I know you'll have to leave your congregation in Ephesus so I'm going to send somebody to take your place. And who is it? Tychicus again. He's making a career out of being an interim pastor. And he's filling in for some pretty ... pretty high class men; Titus and Timothy. He would reflect to both of those congregations the character of Paul, the life of Paul, the ministry of Paul. And they would love him because he would bring Paul to them.

Now that's the kind of man he was. He was a messenger. He was a pastor. In fact, he was anything Paul wanted him to be. We never find any bit of argument. We never find any bit of anxiety. We only find Tychicus doing what Paul told him to do.

Now let's back track a little bit and find him in Rome, in Colossians chapter 4. This is during the first imprisonment. We aren't as far as the Titus event or the Timothy event. That's yet in his future. And by the time Colossians is written, four years have passed since Tychicus joined Paul in the trip to Jerusalem. He's proven his loyalty. He's still available. He's still open to Paul. And this is a great thing, folks. You know, it isn't everybody who can keep somebody for four years. You know that. It isn't every great man who can keep people for four years, five years, six years, ten years like Paul did. But this is a faithful servant. He loves Paul. He's loyal. He'll be a messenger. He'll be a pastor. He'll be anything. And Paul here has in mind sending him with the letter to the Colossians. He isn't going to pastor; he's just going to be a delivery boy.

You say - Well, that's not too tough. Listen, if you knew what the trip was like from Rome to Laodicea and Colossae you might not say that. It's a long trip. A perilous trip. He had to cross Italy on foot. And then he had to sail the Adriatic. And then he had to cross Greece. And then he had to sail the Aegean. Then he had to walk, after he had landed at Miletus, up the steep Lycas River Valley to Laodicea and Colossae, and it wasn't easy. It was a very difficult journey. But Paul says - He's going to come and he's going to bring the letter. And you know something? He didn't just have the letter of Colossians, he had another letter too. You say - Well, what other letter did he have? Well, I believe, if you look at Ephesians 6:21 it says; "But that you also may know my affairs and how I do, Tychicus a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord shall make known to you all things whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose that you might know our affairs and that he might comfort your heart." You see, that's almost an exact quote out of Colossians. So, now we know he's... he doesn't have one letter, he's got two letters tucked somewhere in his robe is Colossians and Ephesians. And incidentally, the book of Ephesians, it was not just written to the Ephesians. In fact, we find many manuscripts and in the beginning of Ephesians there is a blank where it says; "Paul an Apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God to the saints who are at ... blank." You know why? This was a general letter to all the churches. It's just that one of the manuscripts we found happened to have Ephesus written in it. In the whole book of Ephesians there's not one allusion to a person in Ephesus. There's not one statement relative to the city of Ephesus. There's not one statement relative to an incident in Ephesus. It's a general letter. And we find that there could be any name stuck in. Maybe he was taking it to Colossae and Laodicea and Hierapolis and then to Ephesus and who knows where. But those are the two letters he had.

And just incidentally, that isn't all he had - he had another letter, Philemon. He had the letter to Philemon. And--look at verse 9 of Colossians 4. "And along with Tychicus I'm sending Onesimus." See? And Onesimus was the slave that was returning about whom the book of Philemon is written. And we'll see more about him in a minute.

So off goes Tychicus and he doesn't have too big a job, just deliver Philemon, Colossians and Ephesians. You say - Do you think Paul trusted him? I think Paul trusted him. That's a big assignment. For him it was a joyous mission.

And he says - When he gets there, he's not just a delivery boy, verse 7; "All my state shall he declare you." He's going to tell you all about me, and ease any anxiety. Verse 8 says; "I have sent him to you for that purpose that he might know your estate and comfort your hearts." He's going to tell you about me. He's going to find out about you. And he's going to add a personal word of comfort to this letter. He's an encourager.

Now here's a man who did whatever Paul told him to do. He saw himself as a servant. You know something? We don't find that he had any credentials. We don't find that he had any doctor's degrees. That he had any seminary. He had no particular heritage. He had no great sermons that he preached. We don't know anything he ever said. I'm sure he wasn't mute, but we don't have a word that he ever said. He didn't have any particular unique talent like Luke did or ability. But he was the personal envoy of the Apostle Paul. And Paul has three things to say about him. Let's see them very quickly.

Number one, verse 7, "Who is a beloved brother." I'll tell you if I could have the Apostle Paul say that about me I'd be a happy man, wouldn't you? If I could labor with Paul for four years and say - This man is a beloved brother - that would be the essence of commendation. He was a brother, one of the family. He was beloved. He had earned that designation. And I suppose it's the fulfillment of a man's life to know he's loved and how much fulfillment there must have been in knowing that he was loved by the most beloved of all human beings at that time, the beloved Apostle himself.

Second thing he says, and this gets us into the thought that he is a servant's heart, he is a faithful minister, verse 7, and the word is diakonos, or servant. He is a faithful servant. He never attained prominence, he just served. He was an invaluable liaison between Paul and the churches. And he was faithful. He stuck with it. He was one of those 1 Cor. 4 kind of stewards that was found faithful. He just did it, whatever it was. And you know something? There's no other way to get the work done, and Paul knew it. You've got to have people who have a servant's heart.

And further, look what it says, he not only was a faithful servant of Paul but he was a fellow slave in the Lord. The first phrase has to do with Paul. He is a faithful servant of mine and a fellow slave in the Lord. And Paul uses two different words. The first one is diakonos which just means servant. The second is sundoulos which means bond slave. He is not a bond slave to Paul, don't confuse it. He's a bond slave to Jesus; he's just a willing servant to Paul. The New Testament words are important.

So here we meet one of Paul's friends. An indispensable man. I'm glad for Tychicus, aren't you? I'm glad he was loyal. I'm glad he was faithful. Somebody stopped me in the patio this week and said - John, I want to tell you something. I've been listening to the studies on Ephesians and I want to tell you my life has been transformed. You know what I thought? Tychicus, wherever you are, thank you. He made it possible. It takes people like that. Got to have them, Tychicus - a man with a servant's heart.

Let's meet another man--looking back at our group photograph, the second man in line, second from the left -- Onesimus, the man with a sinful past.

We met the man with the servant's heart. Now let's meet the man with the sinful past. It's great, people, to know you can have a sinful past and still be useful. Isn't that great? This ties us to Philemon because Philemon is the book about Onesimus.

Now let me give you a little picture here. Colossians was written to the church at Colossae. Philemon was written to one family in that church. The family of a man named Philemon.

Now Philemon was one of the pillars of the Colossian church. He loved the Lord. His family was very involved. It's most likely if you were to look at Philemon and read it, it's most likely that the church

met in Philemon's house. It says in verse 2 of Philemon; "The church in your house." Now Philemon was a convert of the Apostle Paul. Verse 19 of Philemon he says that a ... "You owe to me your own self." So he was a convert of Paul and he's a very wealthy man. He owns some slaves. One of the slaves Philemon owned was a man named Onesimus, this man. But Onesimus didn't like living in Philemon's house and he didn't like being a slave so he ran away. And you know what a slave was to do when he ran away if he was caught? He was to give his life. He was executed. Runaway slaves were executed.

But this one was willing to make the gamble and he ran away and he ran all the way to Rome. And you know what happened? Amazing thing... he ran right into the Apostle Paul. And you know something? Just as the Apostle Paul had led Philemon to Christ, the Apostle Paul led Philemon's runaway slave to Christ. Isn't that amazing when you think there were two million people in Rome? Not so amazing when you see what God had in mind.

And so Philemon also owed Paul his life. Now Paul writes a letter, the letter of Philemon. And sends Onesimus back and the letter says--Say, Philemon, I know he ran away but don't kill him, he may have gone away a slave, he's coming back a brother and he's willing to serve you as a slave and a brother in Christ. So open your arms of love and take him, will you? And so here's Tychicus with Philemon, the letter in his pocket, and Onesimus the slave walking beside him. Paul writes the letter to establish in Philemon's heart acceptance for a returning slave whose now a brother. Think of it. When he left Colossae he must have been shrinking from his master with stolen property in his clothes and that vice burning in his heart, sensualities, the carnality that was driving him to the excitement of Rome and he gets there and he meets Paul and when he comes back all he desires is holiness, all he desires is to be a servant to his master that he left. All he wants is the light of the knowledge of the pure God in his soul. And so the two go off with the message.

And what does Paul say about Onesimus? Look at it. "Onesimus, a runaway slave." No. "A faithful, beloved brother who is one of you." You want to hear something great? Christ makes sure a man with a past has a past that's passed. He says to the Corinthians; "And such were," what? "Some of you." He says to the Ephesians, "And you were once dead in trespasses and sins but Christ has made you alive." Man, I'm telling you it's exciting to know that in Christ people with a past have a past that's passed.

And in Galatians 3:28 Paul said; "There is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male nor female, you're one in Christ." He's a brother now, Philemon. Take him in. You see, Christianity ultimately destroys slavery because it breaks the caste system and makes everybody brothers. That's one reason in America they stopped educating the slaves was because when the slaves got educated they started to read and when they read they read the Bible and when they read the Bible they got converted and when they started getting converted they could see the end of the slave trade so they stopped teaching them to read.

He calls him a brother then notice he calls him beloved, he calls him faithful. And in the letter to Philemon he says; "Onesimus is," and I love this, "is my very heart." "Onesimus is my very heart." I love this man, this once slave now brother. You know I think one reason why Paul loved this man was because he was just another illustration of the principle that moved Paul. "If any man be in Christ he is," what? "A new creature. Old things are passed away behold all things are become new." I just think having Onesimus around was just another great testimony to what God's transforming power can do in a life. And Paul loved to see the past in the past.

So Paul saw a man with a past and he saw Christ make him a man with a past that was a past. I'm so glad God can use people with a past. Aren't you? You know something? Paul was a man with a past. A sinful past, wasn't he? I'm sure he identified with Onesimus. You want to hear something kind of interesting? We have found a letter written by Ignatius, one of the early church fathers ... a few years after the New Testament era. And in that letter Ignatius, who is a pastor of the Smyrna church writes these words:

"Since then in the name of God I received your entire congregation," he's writing to the Colossians, "Since then in the name of God I received your entire congregation in the person of Onesimus, a man of inexpressible love and your pastor, I beseech you in Christ Jesus to love him and all who are like him."

The statement of Ignatius may mean that Onesimus actually became the pastor of the Colossian church. It's a great ending to a story, isn't it? It tells us whether Philemon took him back or not. He became his pastor. Ha-ha--terrific. From runaway slave to pastor and only Christianity is going to do that.

So what do we find? We take a look at the picture; we see a man with a servant's heart and a man with a sinful past. Let's look at the third man, Aristarchus, verse 10. Aristarchus is the man with a sympathetic heart, the man with a sympathetic heart. You know what you need if you're a leader, if you're in the Lord's work? You need some people who are just around to feel your burdens with you. You need some burden-bearers. They aren't whirlwinds at anything, they just care. You know, they don't put on great programs and do great things and astounding prominent out-front things, they just care. And you've got to have them and Aristarchus was one of those people with a sympathetic heart.

Verse 10; "Aristarchus my," now here it comes, "my fellow prisoner greets you." Those are deep words. Aristarchus is a Jew with a Greek name which was common in the dispersion. When the Jews were scattered they often took Greek names. So he says Aristarchus sends his love and his blessing, he greets you.

Now Aristarchus' name appears elsewhere in the New Testament in association with the town of Thessalonica, It's very likely that he came from that town. And at Ephesus, you remember Paul ministered at Ephesus for three years, and during those three years Aristarchus was with him. And you remember when finally in Ephesus the riot broke out? When the riot broke out Aristarchus and Gaius were seized by the mob and Aristarchus found out what it was to be a prisoner. They recognized him as one of Paul's companions. And so they seized him. Now that's in chapter 19.

Now Paul decides to go to Jerusalem. You know what happens? He takes Aristarchus along. So he goes on that trip. Paul gets on the boat. You remember he was captured as a prisoner in Jerusalem and then he was moved to Caesarea on the coast? Where he stayed as a prisoner? And then finally in Acts 27 he gets on a boat to go to Rome to be tried in Rome and he's a prisoner on the ship and Acts 27:2 says when he got on the boat Aristarchus was with him. Had Aristarchus been with him through all the imprisonment? Very possible. Very possible since the time he identified with Paul in the city of Ephesus and escaped from the riot and went to Jerusalem from that time till now he has stayed with Paul as a prisoner in Jerusalem he hung around. Caesarea -- he may have hung around.

On the ship, and you remember what a ride that was -read Acts 27 again. I mean, that was something exciting and he was there. Now here he is back in Rome and guess who is there? Aristarchus and Paul calls him my fellow prisoner. The guy hasn't committed a crime he just hangs around with criminals. So he spends his time in jail.

Now the word fellow prisoner is a beautiful word; aikmalotos. You know what it means? It means one caught with a spear. Literally it means a war captive or a prisoner. Aristarchus is a captive like me. You say - well why did they capture him? They never did.

Well, why did they put him in prison? They never did. But why does he call him that? Because he just spent his time with a prisoner, he might as well have been a prisoner. He is chosen to be beside Paul. If Paul's in prison, he's in prison. That's his choice. It's unlikely that he actually became a prisoner in Rome. More likely that he chose to make Paul's lifestyle his lifestyle. Because he was sympathetic, because he cared, because he loved, because he knew Paul needed him. He was a man with a sympathetic heart.

Listen, as I said, there are people who can't lead a meeting and they can't speak and they can't be prominent in the church and maybe they're the most beloved of all because they're the burden-bearers. And you know, we don't know what Aristarchus did, it doesn't tell us. It doesn't tell us he delivered anything or did anything but you know something? We know that whatever he did he gave up his freedom to do it...to be a prisoner with Paul. And I'll tell you something. The Lord's work would never be done if it weren't for people like this who are willing to give up their liberty to be a prisoner to accomplish what God wants to be accomplished. Here's a sympathetic man. I call him the man for all seasons, the bad weather friend. Thank God for men who stick with you when it's hard because all of them won't. When it gets rough and really rough and Paul says - Who will volunteer? Aristarchus - the first one with his hand up. Me, Paul. Where we going? To what prison? Yeah, true greatness for those who help, believe me.

So Paul's special friends; a man with a servant's heart, a man with a sinful past, a man with a sympathetic heart. Fourth, Mark, verse 10, the man with a surprising future, the man with a surprising future.

Verse 10, in the middle; "And Mark, sister's son to Barnabas." He's a cousin of Barnabas. "Concerning whom you received commandments, if he come unto you, receive him." Mark sends his greeting along. Now maybe we shouldn't call him Mark - the man with a surprising future, maybe we ought to call him Mark - the man with a second chance. You remember about Mark? Early on in the story of the book of Acts as the Apostle Paul is moving into the excitement of the ministry as God has called him to the ministry, he decides to take this marvelous young man along. Saul and Barnabas are separated to the work of the Holy Spirit calls them in Acts 13 and verse 5 says; "And when they were at Salamis, they preached the Word of God in the synagogues of the Jews and they also had John as their helper." And it's John Mark...hey, we've got this young helper along. Paul always took somebody, he was always discipling somebody. He took this young man along. You say - Boy, it's great for him. Ohhhhh, fantastic, just fantastic.

But in verse 13 of Acts 13 it says; "Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia." Now that was going to be the dangerous part of the trip. They had to cross those dangerous mountains to get up into Galatia. They were full of robbers and brigands and you were taking your life in your hands. And it says; "And John departing from them returned to

Jerusalem." When the going got rough, Mark bailed out. He can't hack it. If it was easy, smooth sailing, he was gung-ho. They hit the tough part and he caught the quickest ship back to Mother. And Mother's house was the center of the Jerusalem church, remember? And later on he caused a problem because of this.

In Acts 15:37, they're going to go on their second missionary journey. And Barnabas says to Paul - Let's take Mark. And Paul goes - You've got to be kidding--no deal. "Paul thought it not good to take him with them who departed from them from Pamphylia and went not with them to the work." I don't want a guy like that along, Paul says. And the fight was so sharp between them... and the reason Barnabas was championing his cause, now we find out in Colossians, is because he was his cousin, he was a blood tie, see. So they started the big fight and they split and Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus and Paul chose Silas and departed." And there was the split between Paul and Barnabas. And Mark was the point of contention.

You say - Well, obviously, since then between then and now something happened to Mark. Right. That's what I said - He's the man with the surprising future. He began as a wash-out. I'm glad the Lord can use people with a sinful past and I'm glad the Lord can use people who failed at it once, who blew it.

And he says in verse 10; "Concerning whom you receive commandments, if he come to you, receive him." You know why they normally wouldn't receive him? He had the reputation of being a failure. He had the reputation of being a wash-out. And so they were commanded... now we don't know whether Peter wrote that, Barnabas wrote that, Paul wrote that or whoever wrote that ... but he told them, somebody had spread the word around the Asian churches if Mark shows up he's reformed, you can receive him. He's all right guy. He's come around.

So Mark sends his greeting, you know Mark, the one you're supposed to receive if he comes. Mark is changed. Oh, it's good to know. Eleven -twelve years later, Mark has been restored to a place of usefulness. I mean this guy was really useful.

Philemon 24; He names Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow workers. Hey, he was a fellow-worker. This guy was in it with Paul. He was doing... you say - Well, what turned him around? Well, I personally believe it probably was the ministry of Peter in his life. Somehow Peter got a hold of this guy. In I Peter 5:13; "The church at Babylon elected together with you, greet you and so does Mark, my son," says Peter. What happened was - Peter was use to failure. He knew how to handle it. So somewhere along the line he ran into Mark. And he said - Guy, I know the route, come along, I'll help you. And so he calls him his son. So what happened was no question about it in my mind, Peter took on a restoration project in Mark, it worked and then he turned him back over to Paul. Hey, that says something about being able to use your past to help somebody, doesn't it? Peter, no doubt, was the influence.

And Mark had a part. Hey, you want to know something exciting? Mark got the wonderful privilege that belonged only to four men in the whole history of humanity, to write one of the gospels--the gospel of Mark.

And listen to this; I love it, II Timothy 4:11. Paul's writing, closing out his life, he says to Timothy - "Take ... only Luke is with me, only Luke is left, take Mark and bring him with you for he's profitable to

me for the ministry." Isn't that good? Hey, Timothy, when you come I just want you to bring one guy, I want you to bring Mark. You know, the former wash-out. Bring him along because he's profitable to me in the ministry. Paul never ever thought he was going to quit ministering, I don't think. He said - Listen, in effect, you, Timothy, and me and Mark, I mean, we can get it rolling again. Bring him along. You see, something had happened in Mark's life from the time that Paul said I don't want him with me till the time that Paul is dying at the end of his life and says if there is anybody I want here to minister with me in my last days it's Mark. And so you look at the picture of Mark and you say - Hey, there's a man with a surprising future.

A few years after this, maybe six at the most, he sat down under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and wrote the gospel of Mark. I've often thought - I imagine what he was thinking in his heart when he was writing the gospel of Mark and the Holy Spirit said this to him; "And when He had called the people unto Him with the disciples also He said to them, Whosoever will come after Me let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. Whosoever shall save his life shall lose it. Whosoever shall lose his life for My sake and the gospel, the same shall find it. What shall it profit a man if he gained the whole world and lose his soul or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" I can imagine that Mark would have understood a little bit about what it was to deny self and die daily for the cause of Jesus Christ. He learned the hard way.

Beloved, there's a second chance. There's a future for failures. Paul had one and he had a great future. Great future. Praise God for restoration.

And so Paul's friends; a man with a servant's heart, a man with a sinful past, a man with a sympathetic heart, a man with a surprising future. What a team! I'm going to introduce you to another one here, are you ready for this? The man with a strong commitment - Jesus Justus. You say - I never heard of him. You're about to. Jesus Justus - you say, That's a great name. Yeah, but it's tough to live up to. You say, Well, what was his name? Well, look at it in verse 11; "And Jesus, who is called Justus." You know why they called him Justus? To distinguish him. Jesus Justus ... to start with his name Jesus was special. Jesus-- Joshua in Hebrew, Savior. That's a tough name to live up to. You want to know another tough name to live up to? Christian, that's a tough one. It means little Christ. How are you doing? How would you like to be named Jesus?

You say - Well, did he live up to it? Listen to this; "Jesus who is called Justus." You know what that meant? The righteous. Apparently he was doing all right. Because they called him Jesus the righteous. Boy, that's some name. And we don't know anything more about him. Jesus the righteous.

And it says in verse 11; "Aristarchus, Mark and Jesus Justus are of the circumcision." They're Jews. "And these," watch this, "These only are my fellow-workers for the kingdom of God who have been a comfort unto me." You say - Wait a minute - what happened to Tychicus and Onesimus? No-no, you misunderstood. These are the only Jewish fellow-workers who were a comfort to Paul. Isn't that sad? Do you know that the Jews for the most part in Jerusalem had rejected him? Except for Aristarchus and he had been around for a long time. And Mark, and he had been around for a long time too. And then this new one, Jesus Justus. He was a man with a strong commitment; I know that, because he had to step out from his people.

You know, in Acts chapter 28 when the Apostle Paul arrived in Jerusalem the first thing he did was begin with Jewish evangelism. And he started to preach to the Jews. And some believed ... that's true, verse 24 of Acts 28 ... some believed that things were spoken but some believed not. "And

when they agreed not among themselves, they departed." And even the ones that believed, apparently, never got behind Paul. They just got into an argument with their own people ... and Paul says - "Well spoke the Holy Spirit by Isaiah saying, Go to this people and say, Hearing you shall hear and not understand, seeing you shall see and not perceive for the heart of this people has become obtuse (or fat), their ears are dull of hearing, their eyes have they closed lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and be converted and I should heal them. Be it known, therefore, unto you that the salvation of God is sent to the Gentiles and they will hear it and when he had said these words the Jews departed and had great arguments among themselves." Even the ones that believed apparently never made a commitment to Paul, only three, only three Jewish fellow-workers stuck by him.

Two of them have been around a long time but this one, Jesus Justus, just may have been won right out of that Roman group. And so I call him the man with the strong commitment because he paid a big price, didn't he? He walked right out of his own people. It's hard to believe the pettiness that occurred in the life of Paul. But it did. He calls him a fellow-worker, a fellow-worker for the kingdom, sunergos, co-laborer. And notice this beautiful statement about Jesus Justus, it says; "These have been a comfort to me." Have you ever heard of ... of the medical word paregoric? It's from the Greek word paregoria--paregoria, and it means comfort, a paregoric medically means something that is a medicine that lessens pain. It's a soothing thing. It's a balm, it's a comfort. And so he says These are the ones who have soothed me. These are the ones who have comforted me. It's interesting that the same word is found on gravestones where words of comfort are written about people who have died.

So here was a man who was a source of comfort, a source of soothing because he had a strong commitment, he was willing to pay a price, he was willing to walk away from the opinions of people and take a stand with Jesus Christ no matter what it costs. That's the kind of man it takes.

So we meet Paul's friends; a man with a strong commitment, man with a surprising future, a man with a sympathetic heart, man with a sinful past and a man with a servant's heart. Let's go to the next one quickly. Look at verse 12, here's one you might remember. We call him Epaphras or if you really wanted the Greek pronunciation Epa-phras but Epaph-ras sounds nicer. This I call the man with the single passion. I love this man. I am going to get a corner in heaven with him and talk to him. Because he's a man after my own heart. If I could pick a pastor out of the New Testament and go be in his church, I'd pick this guy.

Verse 12; "Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ." And incidentally, he was the founder of the Colossian church and most likely its pastor. "Greet you." And you say - What was he doing there if he was the pastor of the Colossian church, why was he in Rome? Because he had come to Rome to tell Paul the trouble that the errorists and the false teachers had brought to the Colossians. And Paul is writing this letter to the

Colossians in answer to what Epaphras has told him. And he wants to stay a while, spend more time with Paul. So Paul says he sends his greeting. Now listen to this, "He is always laboring fervently for you in prayers that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God and I bear him witness that he has a great zeal for you and them that are in Laodicea and in

Hierapolis." Those are the two cities within a ten mile radius of Colossae. He's one of you. He's your pastor, your founder. What a man. It says he's a servant of Christ, doulos again, a slave.

But verse 13 says; "I bear him witness, he has a zeal." The word zeal incidentally should be translated pain p-a-i-n; he has great pain for you. In fact in Revelation 16:10 and 11 and Revelation 21:4 the word is used to speak of intense pain. The man is in intense pain over you. He hurts for you. I'll tell you, people, that's a pastor's heart. He hurts.

You say - Well, what can he do so far away if he hurts so much? I'll tell you what he can do. He's always laboring fervently for you - how? In prayer. The word laboring fervently, I want to hit this because it reiterates what I told you about chapter 4 verse 2 - about perseverance. Listen, laboring fervently is the word to agonize. He was on his knees agonizing in a prolonged, intense, effectual, fervent prayer. It says always laboring...working at it, agonizing in prayer. This is what we've been talking about. Prayer is not simply flipping up little thoughts to God, it is agonizing, it is struggling, it is wrestling with God like Jacob and saying - I'm not going to let go until You bless me, God. It is the word used in I Corinthians 9 of an athlete who runs a long race and beats his body to make it go - drives it, agonizes it.

You want to hear something interesting? This same word in John 18:36 is translated - fight. He fights for you in his prayers. He wrestles with God for you. He persistently struggles with God for your blessing.

In Romans 15:30 Paul says - "I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake for the love of the Spirit that you fight together with me in your prayers to God for me." Again he uses the same word.

In Luke 22 the same word appears in verse 44, I think it is. You can see the meaning of it there comparatively. "And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly and his sweat was (as it were) great drops of blood falling to the ground." Jesus prayed with such agony and such strain and such persistence that He began to ooze blood.

Epaphras prayed like that. He prayed in an intense, spiritual wrestling with God. And when it says in Acts 6:4 that the Apostles gave themselves continually to prayer and the ministry of the Word, that's what it was. They were like Epaphras they prayed and they wrestled with God for the lives of people. I think we give up too easy. I don't think we know the meaning of that. We say Ahh, I've worked on so-and-so, they don't come around. Maybe we've never known what it is to pray the way they prayed.

And you say - Well, what is he praying for? "That you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God." He wants you mature. He wants you telios, complete, mature, filled-out, fully developed, fully convinced. Incidentally, the second word, the word complete is an interesting verb that means fully assured. He wants you mature and confident that the truth is the truth and not having your minds messed up by false teachers. He wants your doctrine to be mature and he wants your behavior to be mature.

Now this guy's got the view of the ministry. This is it right on the nose, man. Every pastor in the world should have this same desire that his people be mature and convinced in their mind and assured that this is the truth. And only when they're mature will they be assured because Paul says in Ephesians 4 - "It's spiritual babes and children that are knocked to and fro about with every wind of doctrine."

And so Epaphras had one desire - I want to make them mature so that when they're mature they'll be fully assured of the truth and these false teachers won't have an affect. How do you make them mature? "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable that the man of God may be mature, thoroughly furnished to all good works." It is the Word that brings maturity. Epaphras, I know from that, believed in teaching God's truth. He wanted his people mature. He wasn't satisfied that they were there, he wanted them grown-up. He wasn't satisfied that they gave their money; he wanted them assured that the truth was the truth so they wouldn't fall into error because he cared, because he loved them. What a man. I call him Epaphras - the man with a single passion. Epaphras - the man with a single passion ... that his people be mature. He was right on - Ephesians 4 - "And he gave some apostles and prophets and evangelists and teaching pastors for the maturing of the saints for the work of the ministry." He was a prayer warrior and he had a single passion - that the people be mature.

You can imagine what a blessing he was to Paul. Can you imagine what an encouragement he was to all the other guys working with Paul to see this guy praying like that, day after day after day and to see Paul praying day after day after day night after night after night - can you imagine the impact that the lives of those two men had on everybody else? And he knew what he was praying for ... for the maturity of the saints. You know something? Somewhere along the line we've got to get past-their broken legs and their bodily diseases and get praying for what really matters - you know that? It's fine to pray for physical things but sometimes that's an excuse, I think, almost a cop-out for not really laboring about people's spiritual welfare. I know I feel guilty about a failure to do that. I don't know why it is but it's so easy not to do that.

Let's meet another one. Luke - Luke, I call him the man with a specialized talent, the man with the specialized talent. You know what it was. Verse 14; "Luke the beloved physician and Demas greet you."

What was Luke? He was a doctor. I don't think he was a phony, I think he was the best kind you could have in that day. He was a physician. You can see that in the New Testament many places. For example, Mark will say about someone, about the lady with an issue of blood, she suffered many things at the hands of many physicians. But you won't find that in the book of Luke. Luke talks about the same incident, leaves that part out. We know he's a physician. And you know what he was? He was Paul's personal physician. I love this. This just thrills me. Here was a man who had a specialized talent. He was a doctor. That's what he did. But it's interesting to note that on Paul's first missionary journey he was sick all the time. And it's interesting to note that when he went on his second journey he took Luke. He felt the need of a personal doctor. So he took him along. God's work needs specialists, folks. Everybody doesn't have to go to seminary. There are some people who can do something else and fit in. And you say - Yeah, but you might get stuck doing that all the time. Listen, I don't know what he gave up. He may have given up a lucrative practice if practices were lucrative in that day. I don't know. But he must have been kind of fun for Paul to have along because he was an educated man, a cultured man, so was Paul and they must have had some great inner-action. I'll bet they were just bosom-buddies because when Paul was dying in II Timothy, he says - And only Luke is with me. I mean, they were close. He knew every pain and every sear on the body of Paul. He was his pal, and his doctor. And he calls him beloved physician. I like that.

Luke is a great illustration of a man who had a specialty to offer. Now watch...and he gave his specialty to God and God took his specialty and gave him back a privilege he never dreamed would

even happen. Do you realize that Luke wrote fifty-two of the chapters of the New Testament? I'd say that's significant. Wouldn't you? Hate to do without them. The whole book of Acts and the gospel of Luke.

You say - How did he get to do that? How did he get such a glorious task? Because he had a specialty and he gave it to God and God took him where he was and used him where he never dreamed he could be used. He is living proof of Ephesians 3:20; "Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all we could ask or think according to the power that works in us." God takes people with special talent and gives them the ability to do things they never dreamed they could do and that's the way He works.

Let's look at the last in the portrait. This is the fly in the ointment. "And Demas greet you." I call Demas the man with a sad future. This is the last man in the photograph and he's a sad man. Oh here it isn't sad, he says - Demas' greets you. And at the end of the book of Philemon it talks about Demas. "My fellow worker." Man it sounds good, good old Demas, hanging in there. He's been around. I think he was around at least two years. I do know that he was with Paul in both imprisonments. That's ... that's substantial commitment. But there's a sad thing about him. Because it says in II Timothy 4:9, Paul says to Timothy, listen to this; "Do your diligence to come shortly to me," now listen, "For Demas has forsaken me having loved this present world and is departed to Thessalonica." Isn't that sad?

Yeah, he says - Demas was around the first imprisonment, Demas was around the second imprisonment, my fellow worker. But he left me because he loved the present system. So he went to Thessalonica. He abandoned Paul because he fell in love with the world. You know something? There are some of those kind in everybody's ministry. That's right. Jesus had His Judas and Paul had his Demas and all of us have the same kind. They're all there ... somewhere. And they show up and it's sad. And what's so sad about it is the privilege and the opportunity and the learning, the exposure that they had somehow never caught. And those are the people I know in my own life, those Demas' that have been in my life, those are the people that haunt me because I don't understand it.

But it's comforting to know that you can't be a winner all the time. That even the best are going to have those that fail. And like Paul's heart, they'll break our hearts. And we'll never forget and the scars will be deep and the questions will always be there.

Well, that's the picture, A man with a sad future, a man with specialized ministry, a man with a strong commitment, a man with surprising future, a man with a sympathetic heart, a man with a sinful past, and a man with a servant's heart. Quite a team, isn't it? That's the Pauline Evangelistic Association, headquarters - jail, Rome. A great bunch.

Let me help you draw this together by closing with the book in verse 15. Listen to what he says, this his final words - "Greet the brothers who are in Laodicea," incidentally the letter was going to Colossae to he just says - say hi to everybody at Laodicea. "And Nymphas, and the church which is in his (or her) house," not too sure which, but either a man or a woman which would be rather obvious. "Greet the brethren in Laodicea" and the church in Laodicea met in the house of Nymphas. It's interesting that the churches in those days met in houses. It wasn't until sometime later, third century, the church buildings developed. So he says - Say hi to everybody. "And when this epistle is read among you," and that's the way they did it, it's good insight into how these epistles were dealt

with, they were read publicly. "Cause also that it be read in the church of the Laodiceans," and watch this, "And you also read the epistle from Laodicea." So after you've read it, pass it to Laodicea. And here's another indication that when these letters were written they weren't ever intended for one congregation, they became circular letters. They went all through the church.

You say - What is the epistle from Laodicea? I'll tell you what I believe it is ... the book of Ephesians. It's highly likely that the book of Ephesians was delivered to Laodicea by Tychicus and the book of Colossians was delivered to Colossae and then they switched. The book of Ephesians was a circular letter and passed around. Very likely. He's saying - Swap letters. I want you to get all the information.

And you know what they would do when they got a letter? They would copy it so they would have an abiding copy and then they would send it on.

And then I want to sum it up with verse 17. "And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfillit." Well, when I read that, it just knocked me over. You know why it knocked me over? Because I had just heard about a whole bunch of people who were so faithful to fill out their ministry. And I think Paul has just put a whole pile of illustrations right on the back of the neck of Archippus. And said - Say, by the way, Archippus, take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord and fulfill it. Tychicus has. Onesimus has. Aristarchus has. Mark has. Jesus Justus has. Epaphras has. Luke has. I'd like you to.

That's the exhortation to you tonight. I've showed you a portrait of men. All but one have been faithful. And it all comes down to this. You've been given a ministry. I don't know what it is or in some cases I do know what it is. God knows what it is. You received it, notice, in the Lord, it's a divine thing - fulfill it. Listen, the Word can't be accomplished in the world. The kingdom can't be advanced without a little help from our friends. Without you. Whatever your area of ministry - got to have it. Got to be done. Got to be faithful. Got to fulfill it.

And then he closes. "The salutation by my hand, Paul." I'm writing my own name now, folks. He dictated the letters and somebody else wrote them but he signed them so they would be known to be authentic. "Remember my bonds." Don't forget me, I'm in jail still. Just because things are successful it doesn't mean it isn't hard. You pray. "Grace with you. Amen."

What does it say to you tonight? It says to me this - MacArthur, you've just seen a portrait of some people who made the ministry possible. Are you doing your part? You're Archippus. You've just seen all the examples. Now fulfill your part that the kingdom may be advanced. I hope it says that to you. Let's pray.

Thank You, Father, for giving us the time tonight to share in this. Thank You for the patience of the folks as we finish the book. Lord God, we see again tonight the wonder of your working in the lives of people. We anticipate it in our own lives with great joy as we are faithful to fulfill our ministry and to know that with our help the work can be done. Caesar's household was being saved because Paul had some help from his friends. This valley can be reached, this state, our country and the world if we just have some help from the people around us. Or, we're going to have Demas' but in spite of them the work can go on if we're faithful. May we, like Archippus, take heed to the ministry that we received in the Lord and fulfill it. In Jesus' name - Amen.

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