

COLOSSIANS
Paul's Faithful Companions
Ephesians 4:7-11

INTRODUCTION

Hundreds of years ago Saint Augustine said, "Without God, we cannot; without us, God will not"! By this he meant that Christians can do absolutely nothing which will count for eternity without God's sovereign grace and power; however, God has chosen to release His grace and power through Christians who are vehicles, means, instruments for accomplishing God's sovereign purposes. All Christians are responsible to do God's will, to be active in Christ's service and involved in furthering the kingdom of God on earth.

The Apostle Paul saw himself as an instrument of God. ***"I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some."*** (I Cor. 9:22b). This is why Paul surrounded himself with faithful companions who would also extend the kingdom of God on this earth. What we have in Colossians 4:7-18 is a fascinating list of some of these fellow gospel companions of Paul. These were Paul's friends who stood by him and with him through thick and thin, through good times and hard times, through great moments of preaching and agonizing months in prison.

We need to grasp the circumstances under which Paul was writing this letter. Paul was in prison in Rome, and it was always dangerous to be a prisoner's friend, for it was guilt by association and could mean imprisonment for just being Paul's friend.

This morning we want to give a thumbnail sketch of five of these companions and tell why they were so dear to the Apostle Paul.

COMMENDING TWO MESSENGERS 4:7-9

Tychicus: The Man With A Message - Trustworthy (7,8): ***Tychicus will tell you all the news about me. He is a dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. I am sending him to you for the express purpose that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts.***

Tychicus had been a close associate of the Apostle Paul for many years. He was a native of the province of Asia and probably a citizen of Ephesus. Tychicus is first mentioned as one of the seven companions who accompanied Paul on his Third Missionary Journey. He was most likely the representative of his church in Ephesus to carry an offering to the poor Christians of Jerusalem (Acts 20:4). This man could be trusted with large sums of money. He was reliable and responsible and when he was asked to do something, he did it. Tychicus was also the messenger or bearer of the Letter to the Colossians and the Letter to the Ephesians (Eph. 6:21).

Paul entrusted these precious documents to this one man because he was trustworthy. To go from Rome to Asia was a long perilous journey. Yet, it was a glorious mission for he delivered two inspired letters by the Apostle Paul to their original destination. What would have happened if Tychicus quit, gave up and felt the letters were unimportant? We probably would not have these two inspired letters today. Thank God for trustworthy Christians!

Tychicus is called a “dear brother”. He was much loved by Paul. Some think Tychicus was a personal servant to Paul, a kind of valet, a reliable person ready to do any job or to run any errand for him. He is called a “faithful minister” in that he was a loyal servant of Christ and a loyal companion to Paul. He wasn’t always saying negative things about Paul or trying to oust the Apostle from his place of leadership. He was trustworthy. He could be trusted. He is also called a “fellow servant” or more literally a “fellow bondslave.” While Paul was famous, he viewed Tychicus as a fellow bondslave, never considering himself better than any other servant of God.

Notice Paul says he is sending Tychicus to the Colossian Christians to tell them how things are with Paul and what was happening in Rome. Everything was not written down in the letter. In the letter, matters of faith and doctrine were dealt with, but much was to be told by word of mouth. Paul also trusted Tychicus to tell the truth and not exaggerate or lie. From these things given by mouth came much oral tradition surrounding the life of Paul. Oral tradition while interesting is not inspired.

Tychicus was an insignificant man charged with a significant task - to deliver the Letter of Colossians. What seemed to be routine was monumental. God’s ways are not our ways. He chooses to use the most insignificant people to get His kingdom work done. ***“Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.”*** (I Cor. 1:26,27).

God chooses insignificant folks for salvation and to get His work done. He chooses a few powerful, a few royalty and a few wise but not many. God could choose mostly the Somebodies if He wanted to but He deliberately chooses to save and use mostly Nobodies.

Notice that Tychicus was also to encourage the hearts of the Colossians. Apparently he was skilled in uplifting the spirits of others. The word “encourage” means “to put a fresh heart in you.” Tychicus was committed to building up and not tearing up the brethren. Remember the Colossian Christians were being bombarded by the legalistic, antichrist, angel worshipping heresy of the Gnostics. They needed encouragement.

Onesimus: The Man With A Past - Loyal (9): *He is coming Onesimus, our faithful and dear brother, who is one of you. They will tell you everything that is happening here.*

Onesimus was a slave who lived in Colosse. His slave master was Philemon, a wealthy member of the Church of Colosse. Onesimus robbed Philemon and escaped the city of Colosse and drifted to Rome. Undoubtedly Onesimus found himself living in the slums of Rome and involved in the grossest kinds of immorality. But the sovereign grace of God was after Onesimus. He was either brought to Paul or thrown in prison for some crime where he met Paul. The Apostle led him to Christ (Philemon 10). O what a glorious imprisonment! Paul then sent Onesimus as a Christian back to Philemon. Onesimus had to make restitution for stealing and turn himself in to Philemon in order to right his life before men, even though it had already been righted before God. This was dangerous business because Philemon could mete out terrible punishment or even death to Onesimus. Onesimus had to trust God. This is why the Letter to Philemon was written. Paul appeals to Philemon to accept Onesimus as a brother in Christ. Apparently Onesimus was the bearer of the letter to Philemon.

Paul sent Tychicus with Onesimus to assure that Onesimus would not get cold feet and turn back. Onesimus was accountable to Tychicus to make sure he humbled himself before Philemon.

In the Book of Philemon, Paul mentions Onesimus' crime, but in the Colossian Letter he calls him "our faithful and dear brother." Surely Onesimus had become a voluntary slave to Christ and had a servant's heart towards Paul. He was a loyal man to Christ and to the Apostle, and desired once again to be loyal to Philemon his slavemaster.

GREETINGS FROM THREE JEWISH CHRISTIANS 4:10,11

Aristarchus: The Man With A Heart - Devoted (4: Ida): *My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you greetings...*

Aristarchus was a Macedonian from Thessalonica (Acts 20:4). We catch only a few glimpses of this man's relationship to Paul. He was there when the people of Ephesus rioted in the Temple of Diana and was so much in the forefront that he was captured by the mob (Acts 19:29). He was imprisoned but Paul escaped. Later we find Aristarchus setting sail with the prisoner Paul on the journey from Caesarea to Rome (Acts 27:2), a very dangerous sea voyage. Such sharing of stormy experiences must have drawn these two men close together. Aristarchus was a man who was beside Paul when things were at their grimmest. Whenever Paul was in trouble Aristarchus was there. He was no "fair weather" Christian or a "fly by night" friend to Paul. This was truly a devoted companion to Paul and his ministry.

Aristarchus is called “my fellow prisoner.” This may mean that Aristarchus had been thrown in prison as was Paul for the cause of Christ. However, it may mean that he was such a devoted servant of Paul that he voluntarily made himself a prisoner so he could take care of the needs of the Apostle Paul. What devotion! What sacrificial love! ***“Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.”*** (Gal. 6:2).

Mark: The Man Who Came Back - Useful (10b): ***As does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas (You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you welcome him.)***

Mark, the writer of the Gospel of Mark, was with Paul in Rome. This is quite amazing because there was a time twelve years before when Paul thought Mark was a deserter from the Christian Faith. On Paul’s First Missionary Journey, Paul and Barnabas had taken Mark, a very young man, with them to be their secretary (Acts 13:5). But in the middle of the journey, when things got difficult, Mark quit and went home. We don’t know why he left. Perhaps he was a coward; he may have been a mama’s boy and become homesick; he may have burned out or even had a lapse of faith. Whatever, he deserted the Christian cause. When Paul and Barnabas were about to start out on the Second Missionary Journey, Barnabas wanted to take Mark with them. Paul refused to take the quitter again, even though Mark apparently had genuinely repented. Paul and Barnabas had a huge argument over Mark, and on this issue they split up and never worked together again. ***“Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, ‘Let us go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing.’ Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.”*** (Acts 15:36-40). Barnabas took Mark to Cyprus with him and Paul continued on the Second Missionary Journey. Paul had a hard time forgiving Mark but some where along the line Paul had a change of heart. There were probably three factors which shaped up Mark. First, he had a close relationship with the Apostle Peter (I Pet. 5:13) and Peter knew what it was like to forsake the Lord, and he was able to encourage young Mark back to true commitment to Christ. Second, Barnabas, Mark’s uncle, was named “the son of encouragement” and surely he worked with young Mark and disciplined him. Third, Paul’s stern attitude towards Mark probably shook him to the reality of the seriousness of the Christian life. Whatever, Mark got back into good graces with Paul so that Paul in his second imprisonment could actually say that Mark was useful to him in the ministry. ***“Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful (useful) to me in my ministry”*** (II Tim. 4:11).

We might say that Mark got a second chance and he didn’t blow it. He made a serious mistake as a Christian but he came back. He seemed to have a terrible past but repented and had a glorious future. In fact, God chose Mark to be the writer of the Gospel Mark.

Paul tells the Colossians to receive Mark. Undoubtedly his reputation as a deserter spread throughout the Christian community. Apparently Paul was planning to send Mark to the Colossian Church and wanted them to receive him as a forgiven brother as Paul had done.

Mark is a classic example of how God can use a Christian after he has seriously sinned. Mark was a back slider but he changed his mind and heart and came back to Christ. God in His grace used Mark more after his sin than before it. Mark's example put to rest the wrong thinking that a Christian is washed up forever if he has done some serious sin, and God will never use him again. When a Christian sins, it is serious; but if he truly repents, he can find God's forgiveness and be used of God again; perhaps even greater than before the sin. It may take a while for the Christian community to forgive and forget, but they will, and the person may have a greater ministry than ever.

Jesus Justus: The Man With A Name But No Fame - Comforting (11): *Jesus who is called Justus, also sends greetings. These are the only Jews among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have proved a comfort to me.*

Jesus Justus is only mentioned here in all the Bible. We know nothing about him except that he was able to comfort Paul. The word "comfort" is that from which we get our English word "paregoric." Justus had been like a tonic to Paul.

This man Justus was a nobody but he got his name in inspired scripture because he knew how to comfort people.

Aristarchus, Mark and Justus were Christian Jews. Apparently, these three men alone of all the Christian Jewish leaders in Rome stood with Paul. All the others wanted nothing to do with the jailbird, trouble making, Paul. Paul must have been lonely but he had three good Jewish Christian brothers who were a tonic to him.

CONCLUSION

Saved

Paul was an Apostle and God put good men around him to help him accomplish the ministry. Paul knew that without a good support team he could not get the job done for Christ.

As your Pastor, I appeal to you for your help. I cannot do this ministry at HBF alone. I need trustworthy, loyal, devoted, useful and comforting elders and deacons to surround me, love me, encourage me and hold me accountable. I need a congregation who will help me in my weaknesses and who will supplement my shortcomings. Above all I need each of you to pray for me and help me become a more godly man. Let's not forget the words of Augustine: "Without God, we cannot; without us, God will not"!

Unsaved

This morning we heard of Onesimus and Mark who sinned horribly before a holy God, but they both found forgiveness through Christ.

Do you want forgiveness? Have you sinned so terribly that you feel God would never forgive you? Are you so burdened with guilt because of sin that you think that God would never accept you, forgive you or love you? I have good news for you. The Bible says, "In Him (Christ) we have redemption through the blood, the forgiveness of sins..."

Come to Christ and He will forgive you for every sin you have ever committed or ever will commit. He will wipe the slate clean. He will make you as pure as the driven snow. Only Christ can take a sinful person and give him or her forgiveness, a new heart and a new life. Accept Christ today as your Savior for sin!