

Paul's Supporting Cast

Col. 4:7-18

INTRODUCTION:

All Stand and Read Scripture

Colossians 4:7-18 (NASB)

⁷ As to all my affairs, Tychicus, *our* beloved brother and faithful servant and fellow bond-servant in the Lord, will bring you information. ⁸ *For* I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts; ⁹ and with him Onesimus, *our* faithful and beloved brother, who is one of your *number*. They will inform you about the whole situation here.

¹⁰ Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, sends you his greetings; and *also* Barnabas's cousin Mark (about whom you received instructions; if he comes to you, welcome him); ¹¹ and *also* Jesus who is called Justus; these are the only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are from the circumcision, and they have proved to be an encouragement to me.

¹² Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bonds slave of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God. ¹³ For I testify for him that he has a deep concern for you and for those who are in Laodicea and Hierapolis. ¹⁴ Luke, the beloved physician, sends you his greetings, and *also* Demas. ¹⁵ Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea and also Nympha and the church that is in her house. ¹⁶ When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter *that is coming* from Laodicea. ¹⁷ Say to Archippus, "Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it."

¹⁸ I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my imprisonment. Grace be with you.

Prayer

When you get to the end of one of Paul's epistles, does it not seem a bit like watching the credits at the end of a movie? You know, that big list of names that tell who put the movie together and all of the names of the entire cast of characters? After it gets past the main characters, it starts scrolling so fast that no normal person could read them all if they wanted to.

Although we do not know much about many of the people in minor roles, I am sure that if we were to research their lives, we would learn many interesting things about them. Maybe how long they tried to get in a movie. How much they had to sacrifice to even get that small role. Maybe they became successful actors and played much larger parts later in their lives.

When we reach the end of Paul's letters, it is tempting to rush past them as well. After all, for the most part, they are just a list of names that we know very little about. But perhaps we should look at them more closely, because it introduces us to people who were significant in the life of the first century church. Although we do not know a lot about them, there are things we can learn from them.

Paul ends his letter with greetings from the people who are with him in Rome. Paul often ended his letters with personal greetings. If you read through the book of Acts and the letters Paul wrote, you'd find that Paul mentions the names of over 100 Christians who worked with him in his missionary efforts. You see, Paul was more than a "soul-saver." Paul was also a "friend-maker."

Now, I admit that these are the kind of verses we tend to skim over. But to have your name mentioned in the Word of God is no small thing! I'm sure if MY name was written there I would frame it and put it in a prominent place where everyone could see it.

Let's see what we can learn about the 11 people mentioned in chapter 4 of Colossians.

This morning I am going to put all of these people in four categories:

1. The One Who Betrayed.
2. The Ones Who Stayed.
3. The One Who Prayed.
4. The One Who Strayed.

BODY:

I. The One Who Betrayed.

Colossians 4:7-9 (NASB)

⁷ As to all my affairs, Tychicus, *our* beloved brother and faithful servant and fellow bond-servant in the Lord, will bring you information. ⁸ For I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts; ⁹ and with him Onesimus, *our* faithful and beloved brother, who is one of your *number*. They will inform you about the whole situation here.

We will start with **Onesimus**. The name Onesimus means "useful". Although Onesimus gets a brief mention here, he is the subject of the entire book of Philemon. Paul wrote that letter to a slave owner by the name of Philemon because one of Philemon's slaves, a man named Onesimus, had run away from his master.

Philemon 10-18 (NASB)

¹⁰ I appeal to you for my child Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment, ¹¹ who formerly was useless to you, but now is useful both to you and to me. ¹² I have sent him back to you in person, that is, *sending* my very heart, ¹³ whom I wished to keep with me, so that on your behalf he might minister to me in my imprisonment for the gospel; ¹⁴ but without your consent I did not want to do anything, so that your goodness would not be, in effect, by compulsion but of your own free will. ¹⁵ For perhaps he was for this reason separated *from you* for a while, that you would have him back forever, ¹⁶ no longer as a

slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother, especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

¹⁷ If then you regard me a partner, accept him as *you would me*. ¹⁸ But if he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge that to my account;

The good news is that even though Onesimus ran away from Philemon as a slave, he is now identified as faithful and dear brother. He had stumbled into Paul and, in the process, had found a new Master in Jesus Christ.

We all have an Onesimus in our life that is running away from God (their master). It may be a husband or a wife, a brother or a sister, a son or a daughter, or someone else that you care deeply about. We have great concern for them and wish somehow someone could reach them and bring them to Christ. Onesimus is an example of how God works to lead someone to Him. Onesimus did not flee to Rome to meet Paul, nor did Paul summon him to come to him, God led him to Paul and Paul was able to lead him to Christ.

Paul is now pleading with Philemon to accept Philemon, not as a slave, but as a fellow brother in Christ.

II. The Ones Who Stayed.

There's a great value to just BEING THERE. That's what these men and women did. They stuck with Paul through thick and thin. They didn't give up and quit.

Tychicus and Onesimus were sent to the Colossian congregation to give a report. Someone had to go in Paul's behalf because Paul was stuck in a Roman prison. These men were Paul's spokesmen in Rome --- and now they would carry his report to the Colossians.

Next, Paul mentions 3 Jewish brothers who stayed with him in his time of need.

Colossians 4:10-11 (NASB)

¹⁰ **Aristarchus**, my fellow prisoner, sends you his greetings; and *also Barnabas's* cousin **Mark** (about whom you received instructions; if he comes to you, welcome him); ¹¹ and *also Jesus who is called Justus*; these are the only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are from the circumcision, and they have proved to be an encouragement to me.

We first meet Aristarchus in Acts 19 when in the midst of a riot in the city of Ephesus, Aristarchus was one of the companions of Paul who was seized and who was in peril for his life. In the next chapter of Acts, Aristarchus was traveling with Paul on his mission to tell the world about Jesus but by Acts 27, he is traveling with Paul toward a Roman prison and is shipwrecked en route. As Acts closes, Aristarchus is with Paul, who is under arrest. Aristarchus proved himself faithful in suffering.

The Aristachus's in the church are those who remain faithful to the Lord and faithful to the church in spite of trials, tribulations, troubles and turmoil.

Paul and Barnabas were a ministry team. On one of their missionary journeys, Barnabas persuaded Paul to take his cousin, John Mark, with them as a helper. But John Mark must have got homesick because by the time they got to Pamphylia, Mark left them and went back home to Jerusalem.

Paul and Barnabas completed that mission and prepared for another journey. Barnabas wanted to take John Mark with them again but Paul refused because Mark had deserted them in Pamphylia.

I don't know exactly what was said between Paul and Barnabas but it must have been a sharp and heated exchange. In the end, the differences between them became so great that Paul and Barnabas had to split company and go their separate ways. Paul chose Silas to accompany him on his mission trip and Barnabas took John Mark with him and went a separate way.

But by the end of Colossians, twelve years have passed and Paul notes that Mark is with him and sends his greetings to the Colossian Christians. We have the story of the disagreement and the division between Paul and Barnabas over John Mark. We don't have the story of their reconciliation. The details do not appear anywhere in Scripture but we know it happened because of these lines at the end of Colossians.

Paul, Mark and, probably Barnabas extended forgiveness to one another and they were working together again. They are an example to us on how to forgive and restore relationships.

This is the only place where we meet a man named Jesus who is also known as Justus. So we do not know any more about him.

Notice that Paul specifically says they were a comfort to him. These men shared his Heritage as a JEW, and now they shared his Commitment to the Messiah. They must have felt like family to Paul.

Paul also sent greetings FROM **Luke**, the doctor, and greetings TO **Nympha** and the church in her house.

Colossians 4:14-15 (NASB)

¹⁴ Luke, the beloved physician, sends you his greetings, and *also* Demas. ¹⁵ Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea and also Nympha and the church that is in her house.

Luke and Nympha were probably more financially stable than others who worked with Paul. They were willing to share their wealth as well as their time and talents. Luke helped Paul with physical ailments and --- as a well educated and a gifted writer --- he wrote the books of LUKE and ACTS. Nympha provided her home as a place for the Church to meet. This was probably a large Estate that could accommodate a sizeable Congregation.

Well, we've looked at several who STAYED with Paul. Now we'll look at one who PRAYED.

III. The One Who Prayed.

Colossians 4:12-13 (NASB)

¹² **Epaphras**, who is one of your number, a bonds slave of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God. ¹³ For I testify for him that he has a deep concern for you and for those who are in Laodicea and Hierapolis.

Epaphras is mentioned in Col. 1:7 as probably being the one who started the church in Colossae. He is also mentioned in Philemon verse 27 as being in prison with Paul. He is now with Paul either in prison or staying in Rome to support him.

I don't think you can over-emphasize the importance of PRAYER in the Church.

Prayer is not just "one of the things we do at Church." Prayer is the MAIN thing we do. If you think about it, no other organization on earth has been given the responsibility to PRAY. If we DON'T pray as a Church, I'm convinced that we hold God back from doing what he WANTS to do through His Church. Everything we accomplish grows out of our PRAYERS.

Epaphras is a good reminder that we are to spend much time in prayer with God.

How can you ever expect to have a relationship with God if you RARELY or NEVER talk to Him?

Whenever we find ourselves in some kind of trouble, we are quick to pray. That is good! But we need to be devoted to prayer all the time! Not just for ourselves, but especially for others.

Knowing that someone is praying for you faithfully every day is a positive influence on you and others. Everyone needs prayer support!

Prayer is a powerful tool in the life of the Christian. That is because God is all-powerful. He can do things we cannot do and He will listen when we ask Him in faith.

IV. The One Who Strayed.

Colossians 4:14 (NASB)

¹⁴ Luke, the beloved physician, sends you his greetings, and *also Demas.*

The last person we're going to look at is a man named **Demas**. All Paul had to say about him in Colossians was "*Demas sends greetings*".

We wouldn't have much to say about Demas either if this was the only mention of him. But Demas is actually mentioned 3 times in the New Testament. And those 3 references tell a sad story. In verse 24 of Philemon he is called, "*Demas ... my fellow laborer.*"

In the passage we just read out of Colossians --- nothing is said about him either good or bad. But the third reference tells what became of Demas. Paul wrote these sad words to his dear friend Timothy in his last letter:

2 Timothy 4:10 (NASB)

¹⁰ for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica;

We don't know exactly what it was that tripped Demas up. Was it materialism --- did he get too interested in making money and getting "stuff"? Did he fall into sexual temptation? Did he have a falling out with someone in the Ministry Team? Did he become proud and think he was too good to associate with a Prisoner like Paul? Whatever it was, Demas took his focus off of Christ, and returned to "*loving this present world*".

Friends, whatever else can be said about our life and work in the Church, we need to face this truth: many start well, but far too many fall away.

What good is it to serve God for a few years --- or even for many years --- if in the end we fizzle out?

Demas stands as a warning to all of us that it's not enough to START well. We need to keep serving with LOVE and GRACE until the end. When the record of your life is opened and read, what words will be said of you? Will your record read, "... dear friend --- faithful minister -- fellow servant --- one who STAYED and who constantly PRAYED"? Or will it read, "**One who has forsaken me, having loved this present world**"?

CONCLUSION:

So what is it that we are to take from this message this morning?

It is the fact that Paul was successful in his ministry, not **just** because of **his** dedication to the Lord, but also because of all the supporting people around him.

From them he was able to have encouragement and help carrying out his ministry.

Everyone of us has a purpose in God's plan. Some of us will be very visible and stand in the lime lights and others of us will work in the background. One job is not more important than the other. The important part is that we each do what God has set in front of us to do to support this ministry. We are to be like Epaphras and **pray** and we are to be like Paul's supporters and **stay** faithful.

There's one final name in this list. We find it in verse 17.

Colossians 4:17 (NASB)

¹⁷ Say to Archippus, "Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it."

That is an appropriate charge for every Christian. What is the work YOU have received from God? Let me tell you, whatever your work assignment, it won't be complete until you leave this world to be with the Lord.

So, until that day, will you faithfully keep doing the work God has given you to do --- This year --- This month --- This week --- Today?

If you do not know Christ as your Lord and Savior, I invite you to come. Don't wait until you have cleaned up your life. **You don't clean yourself up to come to the Christ; you surrender yourself to Christ, to let Him clean you up!**

He Is Lord!

He is Lord, He is Lord. He has risen from the dead and He is Lord.
Every knee shall bow, every tongue confess, That Jesus Christ is Lord.