

“Together In the Trenches”

Colossians 4:7-18

This morning we will be in the book of Colossians for one last time, and in a moment we will read the last few verses of chapter 4. Here we find a list of ten or so names of individuals who were near and dear to Paul’s heart. Some of these names are mentioned in other places in the New Testament, two are mentioned only here, and yet they represent those who serve the Lord faithfully behind the scenes. People who serve, not for the sake of recognition, but because of redemption. People like that make an impact. Those whose hearts are set on the things above, who seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. While they may not get noticed by the world, you can rest assured that Heaven pays attention.

This is the part of the letter to the Colossians that nobody bothers to read. It would be easy to read through verse 6, and then stop short of all Paul’s personal remarks which seem thrown in at the end. And we might assume that this is just the conclusion and a few little names that don’t really have anything to do with us. After all, we don’t have a clue who these people are, and we’re not sure it even matters.

When I come across a passage like this, two verses come to mind:

2 Timothy 3:16—“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”

Hebrews 4:12—“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

Those places in our Bibles where we would be tempted to skip, or to overlook, they too are inspired Scripture and are profitable for our lives. Who would have thought that as we end this study of the letter to the Colossians, we're given a list of names? But what we might be tempted to pass off as minor comments which are unrelated to us, upon closer inspection, are verses that yield some rich truth in subject of companionship and friendship. And I want to show you this morning that these final verses do in fact matter. It is a reminder that we're not alone in our Christian walk. (Read)

Think with me for a minute about those who represent your circle of friends. Think of it as a series of concentric circles with the outer circle representing those who could be called acquaintances, moving inward to a circle of those who are friends, and then to an inner circle representing those who are the closest companions you have in life. I imagine that there are several names in the outer circle, a bit less as we move inward, and finally only a few in what you would call your inner circle. In this text, Paul is letting us in on a few names of those who were in his 'inner circle.'

Whenever I think of the importance of friendship, I think of comfort afforded by companionship. This world would be a very lonely place if there were no friends with whom we can share our lives. When the world beats you down, God has a cure for that—godly friends. A godly friendship can change everything. The mathematics of friendship is such that it doubles our joy and divides our sorrow. Life is much more enjoyable with the presence of other people.

J.C. Ryle—“*This world is full of sorrow because it is full of sin. It is a dark place, a lonely place, a disappointing place. The brightest sunbeam in it is a friend. Friendship divides our troubles in half, while it multiplies by two our joys.*”

It is obvious to me that Paul recognized the value of friendship in his own life. Maybe you find it surprising that as we come to the end of this letter in which Paul has shared some wonderful truth about the sufficiency of Jesus, and how He is our all in all, he chooses to conclude this letter with some very personal remarks about those who were closest to him. His words in this passage are deeply personal and are a reminder of the value of people and how the gospel brings us into close relationship with one another. Paul expresses appreciation for his friends. It might surprise us to learn the fact that even a man like the apostle Paul needed the help and encouragement of other people. And when you study Paul's letters, you will discover the names of people who were greatly used of God in his life. Consider that in the last chapter of Romans alone, he mentions the names of 28 people. Paul valued friendship. Friendship is one of the most important and yet least thought about aspects of life, and it is also one of those things that we tend to take for granted.

One of the greatest definitions I've found for 'friendship' is that it is an affectionate bond forged between two people as they journey through life with openness and trust. Our Lord Jesus modeled this with His own disciples:

John 15:12-13—“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”

John 13:35—“By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another.”

As much as the apostle Paul was a trailblazer for the faith, he needed the presence of other people in his life. It would have been impossible for him to accomplish all the ministry that God had called him to without the presence of other believers who supported him in his efforts. And the same is true in our

lives. When the winds of life assail us, how wonderful it is to know that we're not alone. Perhaps one of the greatest gifts that God gives us is the gift of a friend. A friend is someone who knows you fully and still loves you anyway. The wisdom literature of the Old Testament says:

Proverbs 17:17—“A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.”

Proverbs 18:24—“A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.”

Proverbs 27:5-6—“Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend!”

Proverbs 27:17—“As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.”

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10—“Two are better than one because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up!”

We need the presence of faithful, godly friends in our lives who spur us on toward Christlikeness. And in the verses, we learn some valuable truth about what it truly means to serve together in the ministry trenches. If you go through the passage, pay attention to the adjectives which Paul uses to describe the ministry partners who are listed—faithful, beloved, fellow. Christianity is not a solo venture but is more like a team sport. The mission of the church is a community project, not something we pursue in isolation. There are ten names in this list, and I want to organize them into three groups. Paul tells us that the first two individuals who are mentioned are:

1—Faithful companions who SERVE in ministry (4:7-9)

“Tychicus will tell you all about my activities. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts, and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you of everything that has taken place here.”

When the Lord called out Saul to be a missionary, He didn't intend for him to go at it alone. In fact, it was in a prayer meeting in the church at Antioch that the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” So that even from the beginning of his ministry, the apostle Paul never spent any of his life alone. He always had trusted companions. As great a missionary and preacher he was, he could never do it alone. And it's still true for us. We can't go at life alone, for we need each other. Paul is writing Colossians from imprisonment, and yet he has some companions with him. He mentions them by name for us. They were some very special people in his life. Rather than leaving him high and dry, they paid a price to associate themselves with Paul the prisoner. They hung in there with him, and he has something to say about these faithful companions who serve with him in the ministry.

The first couple of names mentioned here are those who carried Paul's heart, message, and burden.

Tychicus—a servant's heart

The first friend that Paul mentions is a fellow by the name of Tychicus. Verse 7 says, “Tychicus will tell you all about my activities. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord.” Tychicus is mentioned five times in the New Testament and in each reference he is portrayed as a trusted

coworker of the apostle Paul, a man who could be entrusted with an assignment. For instance:

- In Acts 20:4, Tychicus is listed as one of Paul's close companions during his third missionary journey who travels with him through Macedonia.
- In Ephesians 6:21-22, Paul calls Tychicus "a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord." He's sent to inform the Ephesians about Paul's circumstances and to encourage their hearts.
- In 2 Timothy 4:12, Paul tells Timothy that he has sent Tychicus to Ephesus, again suggesting he could be trusted with leadership and oversight.
- In Titus 3:12, Paul considers sending Tychicus to Crete to help Titus, showing that he was capable of significant ministry responsibility.

And here in Colossians 4, Paul describes Tychicus as "a beloved brother, faithful minister, and fellow servant in the Lord." And pay attention to those three descriptors that are applied to him—beloved brother, faithful minister, fellow servant. He is someone whom Paul could trust to relay a message. In fact, it will be Tychicus who carries the letters known as Colossians and Ephesians to their intended audience. Could you imagine being entrusted with a task like carrying a letter inspired by the Holy Spirit? We ought to all thank Tychicus when we get to Heaven because he saw to it that the mail was delivered. Paul says in verse 8, "I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts."

Isaiah 52:7—“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns.’”

That same verse is quoted in Romans 10:15 and used in reference to those who are sent out to proclaim the news of salvation in Jesus Christ. Tychicus was a herald of good news, a man with a servant's heart who was willing to go the distance with a message of hope and salvation. Those who have a servant's heart—who roll up their sleeves and go to work, who can be entrusted with responsibility—they are to others what Tychicus was to Paul. And notice that Paul also mentions a man named:

Onesimus—a sinful past

Paul is sending Tychicus to Colossae, and verse 9 says, “and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you of everything that has taken place here.” Together, these two are being sent out by Paul to give an update to the Colossian congregation. And if Tychicus is a someone with a servant's heart, then what do we know about Onesimus? He is someone with a sinful past. You might be familiar with his name if you are familiar with the letter of Philemon.

Now let me give you a little background here. Colossians was written to the church at Colossae, while Philemon was written to one man in that church. He was one of the pillars of the Colossian church. Philemon loved the Lord, and it's likely based on what we read in the letter to Philemon that the church met in his house. It says Philemon 2, “The church in your house.” And we know that Philemon was a convert of the apostle Paul. He's a very wealthy man, and one of his servants was this man named Onesimus. But Onesimus ran away. Under Roman law, if a runaway slave was found, he was executed. And so he ran all the way to Rome. But you know what happened? He ran right into the apostle Paul! And just like the apostle Paul had led Philemon to Christ, Paul led Philemon's runaway slave to Christ. Out of two million people in Rome, think of

the odds of this happening. It wasn't a chance encounter, but by the hand of providence.

John MacArthur — “*We have a letter written by Ignatius, one of the early church fathers, a few years after the New Testament era, who writes these words to the church in Colossae: ‘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.’*”

In other words, it is very likely that Onesimus eventually became the pastor of the Colossians congregation. This man who had a sinful past, meets up with Paul, who then leads him to faith in Christ. And he sends him back as a restored brother in the Lord. And this same man ends up becoming the pastor of the church.

I'm so glad God can use people with a past. Aren't you?

Once a worthless slave, but now he's one of Paul's trusted companions. All of us have things in our past that we are ashamed of. Ways we used to live before we met Jesus, things that we blush about when they come back to flood our memory. But if they're under the blood of Jesus, they are forgiven! Erased from God's memory!

Hebrews 8:12 — “**For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.**”

And if God no longer holds our sin over our heads, who are we to do so toward someone else? And so we learn from both Tychicus and Onesimus that God advances His work through trusted messengers and transformed lives. These

are faithful companions who serve in the ministry. Then we notice how Paul goes on to mention some:

2—Beloved partners who STRENGTHEN the work (4:10-14)

“Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, welcome him), and Jesus who is called Justus. These are the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me. Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God. For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis. Luke the beloved physician greets you, as does Demas.”

Paul sends Tychicus and Onesimus to Colossae, but there are others who are standing with him to strengthen him as beloved partners in the work. You'll notice six more names that are mentioned, friends who stood with the apostle Paul through labor, prayer, and hardship.

Aristarchus—a sympathetic spirit

All that verse 10 says about him is this: “Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you.” The word there was used to describe a fellow captive in war. He appears elsewhere in the New Testament. Acts 19 says that he was with Paul at Ephesus during the three years he ministered there. And when a riot broke out, Aristarchus was one of those seized by the mob. They recognized him as one of Paul's friends, and so they seized him. And later when Paul decides to go to Jerusalem, he takes Aristarchus along. Paul gets on a boat. You will remember he was captured as a prisoner in Jerusalem, then he was moved to Caesarea

Maritima on the coast where he stayed as a prisoner. And then finally, in Acts 27, he's put on board a ship headed to Rome to be tried. Acts 27:2 tells us that Aristarchus was with him. That's why Paul refers to him here in verse 10 as his 'fellow war captive.' It is possible that Aristarchus had been with Paul through all the imprisonment. Which means he willingly stayed beside Paul in the very worst conditions. He had subjected himself to the same imprisonment so that Paul would not be alone, putting his own life at risk.

There are people within the church who aren't necessarily in leadership, or they don't speak out or have any visible platform, and they're not prominent in the church, and yet perhaps they're the most beloved of all, because they are the burden-bearers. Sympathetic people who show up at just the right time in your life. Is there anyone like that in your life?

By the way, do you know what I've learned you need if you're a leader in the church? You'll need some people who will help to bear your burdens. You need some burden-bearers. People who don't have an agenda, they're not out for themselves, they just care. And you've got to have these people in your life. But that's true for all of us, no matter who you are. We all need those in our lives who just know when to show up. And we're all called to be that kind of person to others. The Bible says in:

Galatians 6:2—“Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”

Mark—a second chance

Paul gives a word of greeting from Aristarchus, and then he also says in verse 10, “and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, welcome him).” Since we're going to go to the

gospel of Mark next week, I won't say too much here as I'll save it for then. But suffice it to say that Mark is a young man who was given a second chance in life.

We're first introduced to him as 'John Mark' in Acts 12. He had accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their first journey, but he left them high and dry and went back home. When the next missionary journey came around at the end of Acts 15, Barnabas wanted to take Mark but Paul didn't because of how he had abandoned them.

Acts 15:39-40—“And there arose a sharp disagreement so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and departed.”

Perhaps Paul had the mentality, "Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me." It is obvious that the 'type-A' personality of Paul was ready to move on, and yet Barnabas wasn't ready to give up on his young cousin. He was an encourager, the kind of man that wanted to see the best in people. And after some years go by, we learn that his persistence paid off. Mark had come full circle and had learned from his previous mistakes. And he was given a second chance at things, so that Paul himself would later acknowledge Mark's usefulness.

2 Timothy 4:11—“Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry.”

It would be this same Mark who would go on to write one of the four gospels, and the eyewitness account of Peter as his main source. Friends, failure is never final. God has a way of picking up the broken pieces of the mess that we've made in life and uses it to grow us to maturity.

Lamentations 3:22-24—“The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. The Lord is my portion, says my soul, therefore I will hope in Him.”

God is patient with us through our failures. Therefore, we mustn't be too hasty to quit on people who disappoint us.

Jesus (Justus)—a significant name

The one thing I'll mention about 'J.J.' is that he has a highly significant name. His name is 'Jesus.' How would you like to have the same name as the Lord? Jesus is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew name 'Joshua.' And it means the Lord is salvation. Outside of this passage, there is nothing else we know about this man. Yet he meant something to the apostle Paul, which says a lot about Justus. He was a man who served in the shadows, but he had a great name.

Our name may be obscure to the rest of the world, and outside of a just a few people in our circle, the rest of the world may not know who in the world we are. Yet our God knows us and calls us by name! What's important is that each of us who profess faith in Jesus also bear His name.

Epaphras—a selfless priority

We've met Epaphras back in chapter 1. He had been the pastor of the church, burdened over the condition of the church, and so he finds Paul and tells him what had been going on. And now in verses 12-13, Paul wants them to know about him, "Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God. For I bear him witness that he has worked

hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis.” Epaphras is a man with a selfless priority who is always looking out for the spiritual well-being of others. He is what we would call a ‘prayer warrior.’ Do you know anyone like that in your own life?

(Illus. of Marjie Jiles)

Anybody can be a prayer-warrior. It doesn’t require any special skills, or a specific calling. The way one grows in prayer is through praying. You can start now, start small, and be specific. The key is consistency. Epaphras was a living example of what Paul described back up in verses 2-6. He was faithful and fervent in prayer.

James 5:16—“The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails for much.

Luke—a skillful hand

Verse 14 says, “Luke the beloved physician greets you.” Church historians often refer to him as ‘Dr. Luke.’ To say that he was a ‘beloved physician’ shows just how much he meant to the apostle Paul. He became a very loyal and close companion, joining Paul’s missionary team in Acts 16 and staying with him during his imprisonment. And given all that Paul experienced by way of physical suffering for the gospel, it was a good thing to have a doctor present!

We know that Luke was with Paul for his final voyage to Rome, for Paul writes, “Only Luke is with me,” in 2 Timothy 4:11 just before his martyrdom. He was also a historian for Paul’s ministry, and was responsible for writing the gospel account which bears his name as well his follow up volume in the book of Acts. That constitutes some 27% of the New Testament in terms of word count. Some even

speculate that he possibly wrote the book of Hebrews, which would make his contribution to the New Testament even more significant.

Luke is a great illustration of those who have gifts and skills that are devoted to God. I'm talking about men and women who use their profession as a gospel platform. The talents and abilities that God has blessed them with are put to use for the sake His kingdom and ministry to others. Friends, it doesn't require a seminary degree to make a significant contribution to the kingdom of God. Simple faithfulness!

Demas—a selfish mentality

Notice in verse 14 that Paul mentions another man named Demas. Unlike Luke, “the beloved physician,” you will see that Demas receives no praise. And this silence is notable, especially in a passage where others are described with warmth and affirmation. What do we know about Demas?

He was present during Paul’s first Roman imprisonment. His later failure casts a shadow backward. In 2 Timothy 4:10, Paul later writes that “Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica.” While Colossians 4:14 does not suggest unfaithfulness, the later reference shows us that present involvement in ministry doesn’t guarantee future perseverance. With heartbreak, Paul says, “Demas was around the first imprisonment, he was around the second imprisonment, as 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, a man with a selfish mentality.

Here’s the thing—there are those kinds of people in every ministry. David had his Absalom, Jesus had His Judas, and Paul had his Demas. There will always be those who betray you, who disappoint you, who walk away from you. But

friends, Jesus never will! And so don't put your hopes in people who are sure to let you down. If someone has let you down, don't get so jaded that you can't trust anyone.

At this point, Demas appears faithful and useful, but his story ultimately warns us against the danger of loving the world and drifting away from costly discipleship. He serves as a sober example of incomplete faithfulness. Sadly, his name has gone down in history as a synonym of those who want the best of both worlds rather than willing to carry the cross of discipleship.

Some remain steadfast, some are restored, and some drift away, but all reveal how critical partners are in ministry. Last, notice Paul mentions some:

3—Fellow members who SUSTAIN the church (4:15-18)

“Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house. And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea. And say to Archippus, ‘See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord.’ I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.”

The last couple of names mentioned are those who would be known by the Colossians. While the other names are of those who were with Paul, the last couple of names are of those who supported the ministry where they were.

Nympha—a sincere hospitality

Paul says in verse 15, “Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house.” It was only a trip of about nine miles to get to Laodicea from Colossae, so they were neighboring towns. And the church

in Laodicea met in the house of Nympha. It's interesting that churches in those days met in houses. It wasn't until the third century or so that church buildings developed. It is a wonderful illustration of those who have the important gift of hospitality, who use their resources to advance the work of the gospel. Nympha was a woman with means who opened up her house for the church, a sincere hospitality.

Archippus—a solemn accountability

Let's look at the last three verses before we finish: "And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea. And say to Archippus, 'See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord.' " Archippus perhaps was the pastoral stand-in while Epaphras was in Rome. And as he read the letter, he had just heard about a whole bunch of people who were faithful to fulfill their ministry. And Paul has just given a whole lot of illustrations back to back for Archippus, and says, "By the way, Archippus, fulfill the ministry that you've received in the Lord. Tychicus has, Onesimus has, Aristarchus has, Mark has, Jesus Justus has, Epaphras has, Luke has. And now is the time for you to do so as well."

The church is sustained by ordinary faithfulness of those who opened up their homes, leveraged their gifts, fulfilled callings, and were willing to go the distance for the sake of the gospel. And as I look back on this list of names, I'm reminded that the ministry of a local church is a team sport in which we are involved. It isn't a spectator event, but is participation. We are all together in the trenches.

What does it say to you? It says to me, "Brandon, you've just seen a portrait of some people who did what they could do to make Paul's ministry possible. So are you doing your part?" If every member of Hopewell were just like me, what

kind of church would Hopewell be? In a real sense, you're Archippus. You've just seen all these examples. Now it's time to fulfill your ministry, do your part, that the kingdom mission may be advanced. I hope it says that to you. And friends, it is encouraging to know that we're not alone in this task! Jesus said:

Matthew 28:18-20—“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

If you don't know Jesus as your Savior, let me tell you, He is a Friend to sinners! He was crucified for our sins, raised for our justification, and the Bible says that whoever looks to Him in faith will be saved. Trust Him as your Savior, confess Him as your Lord, and welcome Him into your life as your Friend.

Church, we're in the trenches together. So let's pray together as we close.

“Father, we praise You for the message of Colossians. I pray that the truth of the sufficiency of Jesus Christ in all things would be solidified in our hearts. We don't need the stuff that the world throws at us. All we need is Jesus. And I pray that we as Your people at Hopewell would be unified in purpose as we continue to serve together in the ministry trenches. In Jesus' name, Amen.”