

## Greeting the Brethren (Colossians 4:7-18)

Today, Lord willing, we're going to finish our tour of the Letter to the Colossians. We've finished with Paul's doctrinal discussion of who Jesus is and what He accomplished and we've finished with his practical exhortations about how we Christians are to live our lives *coram Deo* – before the face of God. It's all summed up in Chapter 3, verse 17:

*And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. (Colossians 3:17)*

Now we come to the very end of the letter and before Paul signs off, he sends a series of greetings from those Christians who are partners with him in his ministry. It's really tempting to just blow these off. We don't know these guys. Why would we be concerned about them saying "hey" to a bunch of Christians who lived almost 2000 years ago? But all scripture is of some consequence.

*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)*

We need to remember that when we're tempted to just skim through those endless genealogies we find in the Book of Numbers or in Matthew and Luke. We need to remember that when we're tempted to blow through the details of the Law we find in Leviticus. We need to remember that when we come to the greetings at the end of the Pauline letters. *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and [all scripture] is profitable.*

So we're not going to just skip the greetings we find at the end of Colossians. These are our brothers in Christ. These are our fellow saints. We are going to spend eternity with them. We're going to greet the brethren this morning. We're going to see if we can learn a little bit about them, and in the process, learn a little about ourselves.

So let's get started.

*Tychicus, a beloved brother, faithful minister, and fellow servant in the Lord, will tell you all the news about me. (Colossians 4:7)*

Tychicus is going to bear this letter to the Colossians. They didn't have an organized postal service like we have. If a letter was to be sent, it had to go with a messenger and Tychicus drew the short straw in this case.

Paul calls him a beloved brother. He calls him a fellow servant in the Lord and he calls him a faithful minister. The word translated minister is *diakonos*. It is sometimes translated as deacon, or even pastor. It literally means a waiter of tables and that gives the sense of what a Christian minister must be. Jesus said:

*"If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all." (Mark 9:35)*

And ...

*... whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:26-28)*

Tychicus had a servant's heart, and that made him great in the kingdom of God.

We read about Tychicus in other New Testament passages. In Acts 20:4, we learn that Tychicus was among those who accompanied Paul to Jerusalem at the end of his third missionary journey. In Ephesians 6:21, we see that Paul used him to bear the letter to the Ephesians. In 2 Timothy 4:12, Paul again sent Tychicus to Ephesus. And interestingly enough, Paul at least considered sending Tychicus to Crete to relieve Titus, who was pastoring there.

*When I send Artemas to you, or Tychicus, be diligent to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there. (Titus 3:12)*

That tells me that Tychicus was fully qualified for pastoral ministry. Tychicus was a faithful partner in Paul's ministry.

Paul gave him the job of delivering the letter, but he also directed him to tell the Colossians all about what was happening with Paul. Paul was in prison. This was his first Roman imprisonment and it certainly wasn't as bad as his second would be. We learn from the book of Acts that he was able to dwell in his own rented quarters and that he was able to receive visitors and conduct a teaching ministry. Of course, he was chained to a Roman guard, so he didn't have complete freedom. And that was why guys like Tychicus were so important to him. Tychicus, the faithful minister.

*I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that he may know your circumstances and comfort your hearts, (Colossians 4:8)*

But as we'll see in the next verse, Tychicus isn't going to be traveling alone.

*... with Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will make known to you all things which are happening here. (Colossians 4:9)*

Now, there is quite a bit more than would first be apparent. From verse 9, all we really know is that Onesimus must have originally been from Colossae. He is ... *a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you*. But as it turns out, they have more than one letter to deliver because in Colossae, there is a man named Philemon. He was quite wealthy. In fact, the Colossian church probably met in Philemon's house. Onesimus had been one of Philemon's slaves.

There were a lot of slaves in the Roman Empire and wealthy folks like Philemon would have a number of them working in the household. Onesimus was one of those, but he ran away. In the Roman Empire, runaway slaves were put to death, so Onesimus was a fugitive, but we learn a bit more in Paul's letter to Philemon.

*I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten while in my chains, who once was unprofitable to you, but now is profitable to you and to me. I am sending him back. You therefore receive him, that is, my own heart, whom I wished to keep with me, that on your behalf he might minister to me in my chains for the gospel. But without your consent I wanted to do nothing, that your good deed might not be by compulsion, as it were, but voluntary. For perhaps he departed for a while for this purpose, that you might receive him forever, 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. (Philemon 1:10-16)*

Onesimus was a fugitive. He ran away from Philemon, but somehow, by God's grace, he made his way to Rome. Somehow, he met this imprisoned Apostle named Paul. And

Paul led him to Christ. (*Onesimus, whom I have begotten while in my chains.*) Paul is sending him back, because he feels it was the right thing to do. He is asking Philemon for mercy based on the wonderful fact that they are now brothers in Christ.

Can you imagine the courage of the reborn Onesimus? Philemon would have been perfectly justified in putting him to death, but I'm quite sure that mercy ruled the day. Onesimus, the runaway slave, had become a valuable partner in ministry, not only for Paul, but also for Philemon.

*Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, (Colossians 4:10)*

Aristarchus was from Thessalonica, as we learn from Acts 27:2. He was arrested in Ephesus, during the riot there. (Acts 19:24) He was also among those who accompanied Paul to Asia. (Acts 20:4) And he was with Paul on that perilous voyage to Rome. (Acts 27:2) Paul calls him "my fellow prisoner". I don't think that Aristarchus was actually under Roman arrest. I think it is more likely that Paul calls him a fellow prisoner because Aristarchus would not abandon him. He stayed by his side through all his trials and persecutions.

We need Christian brothers like that!

*Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, with Mark the cousin of Barnabas (about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him), (Colossians 4:10)*

The fact that Mark is there in Rome with Paul is really remarkable. (No pun intended.) Mark was a young guy who went with Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey, but when the going got tough, Mark bailed. Paul had enough of him, so when Paul and Barnabas planned their second missionary journey, Paul said "We're not taking that Mark guy ... he's not reliable." Apparently, Cousin Barney was offended by that.

*Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another. And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus; but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God. (Acts 15:39-40)*

Mark eventually became closely associated with Peter. Peter even calls him "my son" in 1 Peter 5:13. And God chose him to write Peter's words down in the book that is now called the Gospel of Mark.

Our God is a God of second chances. Young Mark bailed when the going got tough, but mature Mark became a faithful partner in ministry. How do I know? And the very end of his life, locked in a dungeon during his second Roman imprisonment, Paul wrote these words:

*Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, **for he is useful to me for ministry.** (2 Timothy 4:11)*

Have you ever experienced failure in your Christian walk? Have you ever failed to do what you know you should have done? Have you ever walked away from something the Spirit was calling you to do? Remember Mark. God can still use you! He is a God of second chances.

*... and Jesus who is called Justus. These are my only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are of the circumcision; they have proved to be a comfort to me. (Colossians 4:11)*

Aristarchus, Mark and Jesus Justus were Jews like Paul. According to verse 11, they were the only ones. The rest of Paul's fellow workers were Gentile Christians. I know it grieved Paul that the vast majority of Jews he preached to rejected their own Messiah.

*I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, (Romans 9:1-3)*

But those redeemed Jews, while few in number, proved to be a great comfort to Paul and they were his fellow workers for the kingdom of God. They were his partners in ministry.

*Epaphras, who is one of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. For I bear him witness that he has a great zeal for you, and those who are in Laodicea, and those in Hierapolis. (Colossians 4:12-13)*

Epaphras was apparently from Colossae. He's one of you, says Paul. Epaphras was a prayer warrior ... *always laboring fervently for you in prayers.*

We all need prayer warriors. I'm convinced I could not possibly do what I do here at Canyon Community Church without the faithful prayers of so many saints. We have people back at our old church in Machias praying for us every day. Bob Waltrip calls me every Sunday morning to pray with me, that I would remain faithful in delivering the word of Christ to you all. I know many of you pray for us too. And the leadership at Village Missions ... they meet together to pray for us daily. And my pastor, Ron Sallee, prays for you ... many of you by name. Like Epaphras, he prays that you would stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. What a gift our prayer warriors are, because the prayers of the saints are like incense that ascends before the throne of God. God hears those prayers. God honors those prayers.

*Luke the beloved physician and Demas greet you. (Colossians 4:14)*

We all know about Luke, the Gentile physician. He was a faithful traveling companion of Paul's. I was thinking this week, Luke probably came in really handy. Everywhere Paul went, it seems like he was beat up and thrown out of town.

*From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; (2 Corinthians 11:24-25)*

You go through stuff like that, it's good to have a doctor on staff.

But Luke was much more than a doctor. He was also a pastor. And he was the only Gentile author of the New Testament. He wrote the gospel of Luke and he wrote the Acts of the Apostles. At the end of this letter, he sends his greetings, not only to the Colossians, but to you as well. He is your brother in Christ!

Demas sent his greetings too. At this time, Demas was obviously partnering with Paul in ministry, but unfortunately, it wouldn't last. In 2 Timothy we read:

*... for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica. (2 Timothy 4:10)*

How painful that must have been for Paul! It's really hard when people you think are your brothers and sisters in Christ end up turning on you. But you know, none of us can read hearts. There are tares among the wheat, and some of them are in ministry. There are people who will let you down. Remember, as Paul did,

*At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them. **But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me,** (2 Timothy 4:16-17)*

Jesus will never leave you, nor forsake you. He said...

*... lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:20)*

Place your confidence in Him!

But even though some folks will let you down, there are always Christian brothers and sisters who will not abandon you. You need to seek them out. You need them and they need you. And so Paul writes ...

*Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea, and Nymphas and the church that is in his house. Now when this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea. (Colossians 4:15-16)*

We need to maintain communication and fellowship with Christians in other churches and in other communities. There is only one body of Christ, His Church universal. Despite what the world thinks, we are not in competition with Canyon Baptist Church, or the Hungry Horse Chapel, or Lion Hill Baptist. We are allies in the great spiritual war. We are Christ's soldiers doing our utmost to rescue the prisoners of war Satan has deceived and imprisoned. We need to encourage one another. And we especially need to encourage our pastors.

*And say to Archippus, "Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it." (Colossians 4:17)*

We don't know for sure what the issue was with Archippus. In the letter to Philemon, though, we have a clue in the greeting.

*Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our beloved friend and fellow laborer, to the beloved Apphia, Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house: (Philemon 1:1-2)*

I think Archippus was possibly the son of Philemon and Apphia. And I think he had been given the responsibility of pastoring the church that met in their house. Paul sends this somewhat terse exhortation:

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

Pastoring a church can sometimes be overwhelming, especially for a younger pastor. Pastors need to be reminded that their calling was from the Lord. It won't always be easy. It will sometimes be incredibly difficult. But what is required of a steward is that he remain faithful.

Folks, I hope you pray for me. And I pray you will whap me up-side the head if it looks like I'm shirking my responsibilities. Pastors need to be encouraged.

Christianity is not some sort of spectator sport. We all have a role to play in the ministry of the Church. God has gifted each one of you so that you can do your part.

Neither is Christianity an individual sport. We need one another. We need people who will be faithful in standing alongside us. We need to be encouraged, exhorted, and yes, sometimes we need to be rebuked.

So don't isolate yourselves from the brethren. If Paul needed partners, you certainly do as well. So greet one another. Get to know one another. Pray for one another.

*Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. (1 Corinthians 15:1-2)*

I pray there is nobody here who has believed in vain. I pray that every one of you has accepted the free gift of salvation available only by Jesus Christ.

*For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, (1 Corinthians 15:3-4)*

If you believe that, you are my sister in Christ; you are my brother in Christ. We are family and it is the greatest family ever! And if you believe that, even the great Apostle Paul is your brother in Jesus Christ. At the end of this letter, he greets you!

*This salutation by my own hand—Paul. Remember my chains. Grace be with you. Amen. (Colossians 4:18)*