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## Friends In All Places

### Colossians 4:10-18

**Intro:** Paul is now bringing his letter to the Colossians to a close and, as is his habit, he closes with some salutations from those who are with him and a few words of instruction to those who will receive this letter. Last time we looked at Tychicus and Onesimus. They would be the ones to carry this letter to Colosse. As we move on through the passage, we'll see that there was quite a regular fellowship meeting in and around the place where Paul was being held as a prisoner. We don't know for certain what his accommodations were at this point in his imprisonment but the last 2 verses of the Book of Acts tells us that Paul dwelt 2 whole years in his own rented house and was able to host all who came to him there ([Acts 28:30-31](#)). So, it's quite possible that Paul wasn't hidden away somewhere in a dark, dank prison cell but the one thing we do know was that, wherever he was, he was chained to a Roman soldier. His freedom was certainly restricted but he was a Roman citizen who had committed no crime so he was quite free to communicate with whomever he chose.

**10-** The next person mentioned is Aristarchus, whom Paul refers to as his fellow prisoner and he was also a fellow worker with Paul in his ministry. Aristarchus was from Macedonia and appears often in the Book of Acts as a regular traveling companion of Paul's. He was originally from the city of Thessalonica and he was with Paul in the Ephesian riot when the mob tried to seize Paul. They missed Paul but they nabbed Gaius and Aristarchus ([Acts 19:29](#)). He was also with Paul when he set sail for Rome under his Roman imprisonment ([Acts 27:2](#)) which meant he also experienced the fierce storm and near-fatal shipwreck described in [Acts 27](#). Now we see him with Paul in prison. It seems Aristarchus had an interesting habit of being with Paul during hard times. Maybe it was just him!

To his credit, Aristarchus stayed with Paul no matter what the circumstances were – a riot, a voyage, a storm, even a prison. He was faithful to the apostle Paul because he was faithful to Jesus. In fact, it's not likely that Aristarchus was an official Roman prisoner. The term fellow prisoner probably means that he simply shared Paul's confinement with him so that he could be a help and a comfort to Paul. So, imagine that! Aristarchus saw

it as his God-given ministry to be a voluntary prisoner for the sake of Jesus Christ and the furtherance of the gospel. The closest thing we have today as a modern equivalent of Aristarchus' calling would be nursery workers! We may laugh but it's really true. They volunteer to do the hard things so the Word can be preached without distraction; and that's a comfort to me!

Paul could never have accomplished all that he did for the gospel apart from the assistance of his many friends and Aristarchus stands out as one of the greatest of Paul's co-workers. He did not look for an easy task. He didn't run when the going got tough. He suffered and labored with Paul.

Mark- This is Mark, the author of the earliest biography of the Life of Jesus Christ, the Gospel that bears his name. Mark played a very important part in the early history of the church. He was a Jew, a native of Jerusalem, where his mother, Mary, kept an open house for the believers in that city ([Acts 12:12](#)). It is a good possibility that Mark was led to faith in Christ through the ministry of Peter (1 Peter 5:13). Scholars also believe that his gospel, which was written from the perspective of Peter, was actually dictated to him by Peter.

Paul refers to him as the cousin of Barnabas so it seems that the Colossians knew who Barnabas was. Either this was through his reputation as a traveling missionary and evangelist or through further missionary journeys made by Barnabas that are not recorded in the Book of Acts. We must remember that the Book of Acts, while it provides a wealth of information, is not an exhaustive record of the history of the early church. In fact, we see in Acts that Paul and Barnabas had a harsh falling out over Mark. He had traveled with them on their first missionary journey as their assistant. He likely took care of travel arrangements, supplies and such. But when the going got tough, he threw in the towel and returned to Jerusalem.

Luke doesn't tell us why Mark quit but when it was time for the 2<sup>nd</sup> missionary journey, Barnabas wanted to take Mark again and Paul flatly refused. Luke doesn't share why Barnabas was so insistent on taking Mark at that time but Paul sheds light on that here. This is the only NT reference that tells us that Mark was Barnabas' cousin. Was Paul wrong for refusing to work with Mark again? We aren't told the condition of Mark's heart at the time and Paul wasn't running a popular tour; he was seeking to win lost souls for Christ. No amount of danger or inconvenience could hinder Paul

from reaching unbelievers with the gospel. It was unfortunate that Paul and Barnabas couldn't work out their differences over Mark but, in the end, it worked out for the furtherance of the gospel. Instead of 1 missionary team heading out to carry the gospel to the Gentiles, now there were 2.

Now, by the time Paul wrote this letter, all that was well in the past. The rift is healed and Mark is once again working with Paul. In fact, Mark is included with the likes of Titus and Timothy as 3 young men who served as special representatives for the apostle. He could send them to churches that were having problems and trust them to help solve those problems and bring that congregation to greater spiritual maturity. By the grace of God, Mark had overcome his first failure and had become a valuable servant of God. Clearly, Onesimus wasn't the only one who has turned a corner. Mark was no longer a cause for dispute but had become a source of comfort as a co-worker.

The example of Mark is an encouragement to everyone who has failed in their first attempts to serve God. He didn't sit around and sulk; he chose to do better, not get bitter. He got back into the ministry and proved himself to be faithful to the Lord and to the Apostle Paul. Of course, it helps to have a Barnabas close by to encourage younger Christians in the Lord. Maybe Mark would have made it without the support of Cousin Barnabas but who knows? It would appear that God used Barnabas to encourage Mark and restore him to service once again. In doing so, Barnabas lived up to his name: son of encouragement ([Acts 4:36](#)).

**11-** Jesus (Joshua) Justus- We know nothing about this man except his name and his ethnicity. He was a Jewish believer that who served with Paul. The name Jesus (Joshua) was a popular Jewish name and it was not unusual for Jewish people to have a Roman name as well (Justus). This man represents those faithful believers who serve God but whose deeds are not announced for the whole world to hear. He was a fellow worker with and a comfort to Paul and that's all we know of him. But that's okay because the Lord has kept a faithful record of this man's life and ministry and will reward him accordingly. We don't have to post every thing we do for the Lord online for the world to see. In fact, Jesus said our left hand shouldn't know what our right hand is doing – like my drum playing...

Paul does go on to identify Aristarchus, Mark and Jesus Justus as the only

Jewish co-workers with him at that time. Normally, this would be an insignificant and unnecessary fact to include in a closing but, in the context of probable Jewish opposition in Colosse, it's more likely that Paul wants to remind them that some Jews, whom they know or know about, have been willing to discard their supposed religious entitlements for the sake of the gospel in which there is no Jew or Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised. They have volunteered to serve alongside Paul in his mission among the Gentiles. It is also a great irony of Paul's life that while he was called to be the apostle to the Gentiles, he would have given anything to be able to successfully evangelize his fellow Jews ([Rom 9:1-3](#)).

**12-13** - We first met Epaphras at the beginning of this study. He's the one who founded the church in Colosse ([1:7-8](#)). He had been lead to Christ through the ministry of Paul in Ephesus and had returned home to share the good news of salvation. It seems likely that he also started the churches in Laodicea and Hierapolis. In modern terms, Epaphras would be known as a home missionary. Oddly enough, he would not be returning to Colosse with the letter which had been written in response to his arrival in Rome.

There is a whole sermon in this for church leaders and pastors. Although he founded the church, Epaphras is aware that others can lead it through its present problems, and that the church can flourish without him. A mark of a good pastor or leader is to know when their job is done and to let others take over. Don't worry, I'm not there yet. But I have had 2 great examples of this in my life. When I lived in the Philippines, I knew a missionary that had come to the big city and started a church. That was the only work he started and he stayed there until he retired. I don't know what became of the church after he left.

On the other hand, my father, on his 2<sup>nd</sup> trip to the Philippines, started a small work in Butuan. They started in their rented house and the Lord blessed and the work grew. A Filipino man surrendered to the Lord's work and Dad began to mentor him. After a short time, the man began to slowly take over the work but he would always comment that they could do more if they had more money. Dad finally pulled him aside and told him that in the ministry, you don't need more money, you just need more of the Holy Spirit: you need to follow God's guidance and directions and He will provide the funds when they are needed. Eventually, my folks returned to the States and the work exploded over the following years. Where they once just owned a

building, now they own the entire city block. They have several services on Sunday, their own Bible school and they have started over 60 other churches all throughout the country.

When the Lord tells you it's time to let go, you only hinder His work by stubbornly holding on.

What motivated Epaphras to share the gospel? Paul says he was a bondservant of Christ. The word servant in our modern English idiom implies a voluntary service but the Greek word *doulos* is better translated as slave. To be a slave to Christ means that all one's possessions, aspirations and time belongs completely to Him. Christ now owns him; thus Epaphras doesn't offer service to Him only as his time or inclination permits. Of course, now that he is parted from the church in Colosse, his service to them is performed in the arena of prayer!

One secret of Epaphras' ministry was his prayer life. Paul knew this because he shared a room with him and when Epaphras prayed, Paul heard and saw him! What were the characteristics of his prayer life that Paul observed?

1) He prayed constantly (always) – In this, he's a great example of Paul's admonition to continue...in prayer (2). He didn't pray only when he felt like it. He was constantly in prayer, seeking God's blessing for his people. He doesn't wait for things to grow desperate before interceding for them but continually prays for them, day in and day out.

2) He prayed fervently (laboring fervently) – The Greek word used here means agonizing, the verb form of the word used to describe Christ's struggle in prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane ([Lk 22:44](#)) and the same word Paul used in [1:29](#) to refer to his missionary labor. Prayer was serious business with Epaphras! This word was used to describe Greek athletes as they gave themselves fully to their sports. Paul connects prayer with his working hard for them, picturing prayer as a struggle.

3) He prayed personally (for you) – He didn't pray around the world for everyone in general and no one in particular. He focused his intercession on the saints in Colosse, Laodicea and Hierapolis; no doubt even mentioning some of them by name. For him, prayer wasn't an impersonal religious exercise because he carried these people in his heart and prayed for them personally.

4) He prayed definitely – If you had asked him what he was praying for, he could have told you. His great desire was that the believers in those 3



churches might mature in their Christian faith. He was concerned that these believers would both know and do the will of God. The will of God here doesn't refer to what God wants them to do but to God's plan of salvation (1:27). Epaphras, like Paul, wants the Colossians to become fully established in their understanding of all that God has done in Christ so that they will not become easy prey for false teaching that merely has the appearance of wisdom (2:23).

5) He prayed sacrificially (great zeal) – Real prayer is difficult. Paul had great conflict (agony) as he prayed for Colossians (2:1) and Epaphras also experienced much distress. This doesn't mean that we must wrestle with God in order to get Him to answer but it does mean we should throw ourselves into our praying with zeal and real concern. If there is no burden, there can be no blessing. Praying that cost nothing accomplishes nothing.

Nearly all of the men with Paul are named and commended in some way or another but Epaphras was the only one commended for his prayer ministry. This doesn't mean the others didn't pray but it does suggest that prayer was his major interest and ministry. He was Paul's fellow prisoner ([Philemon 23](#)) but even confinement could not keep him from entering the courts of heaven and praying for his brothers and sisters in the churches.

**14-** Luke – A very important man in the early church. He was a Gentile, yet was chosen by God to write 2 Books of the Bible: [Luke](#) and [Acts](#). Both were likely written to inform the Roman courts as a history of the Christian faith and to explain Paul's unwavering adherence to that faith. He was also a physician and was dearly loved by Paul. The profession of medicine had been perfected by the Greeks and physicians were highly educated and held in the highest regard. It's interesting; even though Paul had the power to heal people, he still traveled with a physician.

Luke joined Paul's team in Troas (the we in Acts 16:10) and traveled with Paul to Jerusalem. He was also with him on the voyage to Rome, shipwreck and all. No doubt, Luke's personal presence and his professional skill through all this was a great encouragement to Paul during that very difficult time. While God can and often does bring strength and healing in miraculous ways, He also uses the means provided in nature, such as medication. Luke is a glowing example of the professional man who uses his skills in the service of the Lord and gives himself to go wherever God sends. He was a beloved Christian, a skillful physician, a devoted friend and

a careful historian!

Demas – Nothing positive is said of Demas here, only that he sends the Colossians greetings and thus, must have been known to them. He is mentioned only 3 times in Paul's letters and these 3 references tell a sad story. In **Philemon 24**, he is listed along with Mark, Aristarchus and Luke as Paul's fellow laborers. Here, he is simply named and there is no special word of identification or commendation. It's the 3<sup>rd</sup> reference in **II Tim 4:10** that tells us what ultimately became of him, Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world. At one point in his life, Mark had forsaken Paul but he was reclaimed and restored. Demas, on the other hand, forsook Paul and apparently was never reclaimed. His sin was that he loved this present world: the whole system of things that runs this world, or society without God.

In his first epistle, the apostle John points out that the world entices the believer with the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life (**I Jn 2:16**). We don't know which of these traps Demas succumbed to, maybe all 3. what we do know is that Christians today can succumb to the world just as Demas did. How easy it is to maintain a religious veneer, while all the time we are living for the things of this world. Demas thought he could serve 2 masters, but eventually he had to make a decision; unfortunately, he made the wrong decision. It must have hurt Paul greatly when Demas forsook him. It also hurt the work of the Lord, for there has never been a time when the laborers were many. But, most of all, this decision hurt Demas because he wasted his life pursuing something that could never last.

**15-17-** Paul goes on to communicate greeting to individuals he knows: Nymphas in Laodicea and Archippus in Colosse. There is some indication that Archippus may have been related to Philemon, possibly his son, and clearly a minister in some regard. Paul's greeting shows that he thought highly of Archippus and valued him as an associate in God's work. But notice, Paul didn't encourage Archippus directly, he instructed the congregation in Colosse to do so. He needed to hear this from the people around him, from the people he was ministering to. This isn't a reprimand of any kind but was intended to stir him up to greater diligence and encourage him in the work.

**18-** Paul signs his letter with a final request to remember my chains. He

usually dictated his letters but would take pen in hand for the final greeting. This is not a complaint or a plea for pity. It's best to see this as an encouragement for those who may also suffer persecution for their faith as well as another request for their prayer support. Paul's telling them not to be ashamed to suffer for the truth. Following Paul's example requires more than just a halfhearted commitment to the gospel. This letter itself becomes a means by which the believer can see and experience God's grace even when circumstances become difficult. 😊