

Nov. 15, 2020

# Portrait of Paul's Ministry Team

Colossians 4:7-18

Part 2

*Jesus is Building his church through the fallible dependent labor of ordinary people like us.*

LTS: 1 Cor. 1:13-23

This morning my goal – once again – is to encourage you with the following truth; Namely, that Jesus is Building his church through the fallible dependent labor of ordinary people like us.

Last week I proposed to you that this last section of Colossians is kind of like a verbal portrait of Paul's ministry team. It comes to us as something of a missionary letter through which Paul is introducing us to the people who are advancing Christ's mission in the ancient world by serving according to their gifts and opportunities.

Now, for the purpose of offering a cohesive structure I proposed that the list of Paul's ministry team-mates can be broken down as follows:

- I. Two Faithful Messengers:
- II. Two Fearless Ministers:
- III. Four Tireless Coworkers:
- IV. One Distant Supporter:
- V. One Fellow Soldier:

The two faithful messengers whom we learned about last week, are Tychicus – the chief communications officer of Paul's world-wide missionary endeavor, and Onesimus, the former run-away slave whom Paul is sending back to Colossae to make things right with his master.

The two fearless Ministers were Aristarchus (Paul's fellow prisoner) and John Mark who failed as a missionary but was later used by God to write the gospel that bears his name, which, BTW, may well have been the very first of the four gospels.

This morning, then, I want to move on to the third group of people in Paul's list; But before we do, let's stand together and read the text before us

Read Col. 4:7-19

### III. Four Tireless Coworkers:

1. The first of these men (11) is known as “Jesus called justice.” Clearly, this is NOT a reference to Jesus our Lord, but to a different Jesus about whom we know very little. In fact, so obscure is this dear brother that I’m tempted to refer to him as the Invisible Man. He’s an enigma to the records of church history. In point of fact, this is the only place in the N.T. where we find his name. But let’s take a couple minutes to see if we can make some edifying observations:

- A. The name Jesus was common in Israel. It means Yahweh Saves. “Jesus” is the Greek name for the Hebrew Joshua.”<sup>1</sup> The “Jesus” in this verse was apparently a Jew whose surname was Justice (a name that means “righteous”).
- B. Mathew Henry suggests that “It is probable that he changed his name [to] Justus, in honor of the name of the Redeemer.”<sup>2</sup> Of course, that’s speculative on Henry’s part. But While we are unfamiliar with this brother’s background, we know that he was loved by Paul who speaks of him as one who whose very presence brought him comfort in his affliction. What does that mean, exactly?
- C. Well, to offer “Comfort” in the context of suffering means to ease one’s grief or trouble. It is to offer consolation, Solace, relief, or soothing to one who experiences affliction.”
- D. The word for comfort here is the word from which we get the medical term, Paragoric – which refers to a kind of medication that relieves physical pain and other uncomfortable symptoms of illness.
- E. In this case, however, the delivery of comfort came from the personal presence and timely words of “The invisible man” - Jesus Justice.
- F. Now, it seems clear that Paul’s comfort was, at least in part, owing to the fact that Jesus Justice was a fellow Jew (as were Aristarchus and Mark). Remember, Paul was the Apostle to the Gentiles. He was a Jew who lived far away from his homeland. He was surrounded by people whose background and cultures were very different from a society grounded in Jewish customs and values. And though he loved his Gentile brothers dearly, there is just something special about receiving visitors from home when you find yourself in trouble in a foreign land.
- G. I suspect that Jesus-Justice didn’t spend a lot of time with Paul in Rome. The reason I think that is because When we turn to Paul’s letter to Philemon, Paul offers an almost identical

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew Henry, [\*Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume\*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2337.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew Henry, [\*Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume\*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2337.

list of co-workers, but the name Jesus Justice is absent. The “invisible man has disappeared.”

- H. It may very well be that this faithful brother made the long journey to Rome simply to render comfort and encouragement to Paul on behalf of one of the churches. After that, he may have just gotten up and returned to his responsibilities back home.
- I. Now when we think of the ministry of comfort, we are not talking about a difficult, complicated endeavor. You don't have to attend seminary to become good at it. You just need to let your love for one another move you to action.
- J. Consider this, when you set out to comfort a suffering brother or sister, you are actually fulfilling the great goal of showing the world what God is like. Isn't this what we learn from 2 Cor. 1:3-4?

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, <sup>4</sup> who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

- K. Ministering comfort to those who struggle is enormously important. If, indeed, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is the God of all comfort, then our ministry of comfort is the labor of God himself. Our hands are his hands! Our graciousness is His grace. He is actually ministering through us. What an incredible privilege!
- L. Listen, beloved: The main thing I want to emphasize about the example of Jesus-Justice is that, as far as we can tell, he was just an ordinary, run-of-the-mill faithful Christian servant of the Lord living on mission and making a powerful – albeit invisible – impact on the world by ministering comfort.
- M. Jesus-Justice was NO spiritual celebrity. He wasn't “reverend-multi-gift.” He didn't have a following. He wasn't pursuing recognition. He reminds me of the faithful deacons of Calvary Bible Church who serve God's people week after week, day-after day rendering service, aid and comfort where it's needed simply because they love the Lord.
- N. To be sure, the same thing could be said about many of you – both men and women – who seem to be always on the lookout for someone whose down; someone who's hurting; someone whose sick, someone who just needs a fellow Christian to show up at their door with a big smile, a cup of coffee, and a timely Scripture to sooth their troubled soul.
- O. Who is Jesus Justus? I don't think I could answer that question any better than Warren Weirsbe who said,
- P.

He is simply a man who represents those faithful believers who serve God but whose deeds are not announced for the whole world to know. He was a fellow worker with Paul and a comfort to Paul, and that is all we know about him. However, the Lord has kept a

faithful record of this man's life and ministry and will [one day] reward him accordingly.<sup>3</sup>

- Q. Like Jesus-Justice, all the members of Christ's church, are called be faithful, often invisible, servants of the Lord who are known only by those who are personally comforted and encouraged by them.
- R. And let me say for your encouragement that by God's grace, CBC has come a long way in building a church culture that values this kind of every-member-ministry. My purposes is simply to spur you on all the more.
- S. Beloved, the Lord is building his church through the fallible, dependent labor of ordinary people like you and me.

2. The Second of Paul's tireless coworkers is named (12) Epaphras. Now this is the man who most likely planted the church in Colossae. You may remember that in chapter 1 of Colossians Paul implies that he had never personally visited Colossae. We know, however, that Paul spent two years teaching in what is commonly called the School of Tyrannus. When Paul visited the region of Ephesus he temporarily changed his strategy from walking all over the known world planting churches as he could, in favor of the strategy of setting up schools to which many could come and study at Paul's feet. It is at least plausible to think that Epaphras was one of those young men who attended the school Paul established there in Ephesus..

- A. Epaphras apparently, heard the gospel, repented and eventually became an effective evangelist and church-planter. We know he planted the church in Colossae because as Paul speaks about the gospel (Col. 1:7) he indicates that the believers in Colossae learned it (the gospel) from Epaphras. In fact, many believe that he not only planted the church of Colossae but in Hierapolis and Laodicea as well.<sup>4</sup>
- B. In any case, it was through Epaphras that Paul learned about the struggles the church of Colossae was encountering, and that became the impetus behind Paul's inspired letter to them.
- C. The chief characteristic of Epaphras in the mind of Paul, however, is on display for us in v. 12 of our text.

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<sup>3</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, [\*The Bible Exposition Commentary\*](#), vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 151.

<sup>4</sup> Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, "[Epaphras](#)," *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 703.

Read v. 12

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.

- D. Epaphras was not just an evangelist, he was a man of prayer. He had learned from Paul the very discipline that he called all of us to in verses 2-3. You will remember that's where Paul exhorted us to pray steadfastly, watchfully, and with thanksgiving. Epaphras took that instruction seriously.
- E. And notice what he prayed. His prayer sounds like a compressed version of the point of Paul's whole letter. Namely, "That you may stand mature and fully assured in the will of Christ."
- F. Paul wrote his letter to the Colossians to encourage them to grow to full maturity in Christ. We see this throughout Paul's letter. For example:
- (1:9-10) "we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, <sup>10</sup> so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God..."
  - (1:28) "We admonish everyone and teach everyone with all wisdom so that we may present everyone mature in Christ."
  - (2:2) Paul prays that they would "reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and knowledge of God's mystery which is Christ."
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- G. Epaphras prayed for an ever-increasing spiritual maturity in the fellow members of his church. This should be instructive for us, my friends. Do we pray for the maturity of our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ?
- Do you pray that your pastors "may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding"?
  - In your small group, do you pray that the brothers and sisters you fellowship with week after week would "reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and knowledge of God's mystery which is Christ"?
  - This is how Epaphras prayed. And Paul commended him for it.
- H. But once again, you don't have to be a super-Christian to pray like this. Epaphras was a normal, every-day Christian seeking to be faithful his Lord. Now you may say, "But wasn't he a church planter? Yes. But we have two church planters sent from our church that you

know very well. You know they are normal, relatively unknown believers who, like Epaphras “Work hard” in the ministry (13) and are simply being faithful with what God has given them.

I. You see, beloved, once again...

*Jesus is building his church through the fallible, dependent labor of ordinary people like you and me.*

3. The third Tireless Coworker is a man we are all familiar with. His name is Luke. Paul refers to him here in v. 14 as “Luke the beloved Physician.”

- A. While Paul often uses the word “Beloved” (agapētos) of congregations, he also uses it of fellow gospel-workers who are especially dear to him, including Timothy (1 Cor 4:17; 2 Tim 1:2), Tychicus (Eph 6:21; Col 4:7), Epaphras (Col 1:7), Onesimus (Col 4:9; Phlm 10–16), and Philemon (Phlm 1).<sup>9</sup> Paul and Luke then are dear friends, and some have argued that Luke was his closest friend.<sup>5</sup>
- B. Col. 4:14 affirms that Luke was a physician (iatros).<sup>10</sup> That he was a Dr. “indicates [that he was] a man of some learning and training”<sup>11</sup> He was probably a Gentile, trained in the Greco-Roman art of healing. He is also thought to have been rather wealthy. As Paul was committed to providing for himself as a tent-making missionary Luke may have continued to work as a physician as he traveled with Paul, thereby providing for his own needs.
- C. He most certainly would have provided medical care for Paul and his team. Paul’s many encounters with hostile mobs would have required the attention a doctor on a regular basis. Luke may very well be the first medical missionary in church history.
- D. In any case, it’s important to note that Luke was a Gentile Christian. We know he was a Gentile because right here in the text (11) Paul says Aristarchus, Mark, and Jesus-Justice are “the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers.” Now, Since Luke’s name was absent from that short list of Jewish Christians, I think we can safely infer that

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<sup>9</sup> See also Rom 16:5, 8, 9, 12.

<sup>5</sup> Mark J. Keown, [\*Discovering the New Testament: An Introduction to Its Background, Theology, and Themes: The Gospels & Acts\*](#), vol. I (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), 220.

<sup>10</sup> On physicians see R. K. Harrison, “Physician,” in *ISBE* 3:865.

<sup>11</sup> J. D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: Eerdmans; Paternoster, 1996), 283.

he is a Gentile.<sup>6</sup>

E. It's interesting to note that Paul (Phlm. 24) refers to Luke as one of his coworkers. This is the term Paul used regarding of other key players in his mission. For example, he use "fellow worker" to describe Aquila (Rom 16:3), Timothy (Rom 16:21), Titus (2 Cor 8:23), or Philemon (Phlm 1).<sup>12</sup> It is no great stretch to assume that each of these men were those who preached the gospel wherever they went. So, we shouldn't think of Luke merely as a passenger in Paul's travels, but as a true gospel worker. – a missionary – a gospel preacher in his own right. Luke was a vital asset to Paul's ministry.<sup>7</sup>

F. Now, just for a moment, turn with me to 1 Cor. Chapter 2.

In verses 27-28 we read: For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.<sup>27</sup> But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong;

G. Generally speaking, the people that God uses in the world to fulfill his mission of Redemption are NOT the wise, the noble, the brilliant the educated people of the world. Normally, he uses people like most of us. The nobodies, the simple, the lower echelons of society. This is the "rule." And this is the point of this whole sermon! But there are exceptions to the rule. And I think Luke is one of those exceptions.

H. He was a genuine scholar, a physician, historian, geographer, a theologian and probably an orator capable of effectively preaching the gospel. Like Paul himself, He was truly an amazing man.

I. In fact, though we rightly consider Paul a prolific biblical author, Luke actually contributed more to the writings of the N.T. than even Paul. I did the math this week and while Paul wrote 2,033 verses of the N.T. Scripture, Luke actually wrote 2158. The corpus of Luke's writings exceeded that of Paul by 155 verses. This was an amazingly brilliant man. In many cases, he was Paul's intellectual equal. No wonder they were such close friends!

J. The reality is, God sometimes uses people with extraordinary gifts. The church has always had its Luther's Calvins, Whitefields, Spurgeons, and Edwards's. Just this week

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<sup>6</sup> Mark J. Keown, *Discovering the New Testament: An Introduction to Its Background, Theology, and Themes: The Gospels & Acts*, vol. I (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), 223.

<sup>12</sup> See also Rom 16:9; Phil 2:25; Phil 4:3; 1 Thess 3:2; Phlm 24.

<sup>7</sup> Mark J. Keown, *Discovering the New Testament: An Introduction to Its Background, Theology, and Themes: The Gospels & Acts*, vol. I (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), 221.

we heard the news that we lost another such man, Jay Adams, who stepped into the presence of His redeemer Saturday morning. He was an absolutely brilliant scholar and pastor. We praise God for such men! But for the most part, Jesus builds his church through the fallible, dependent work of ordinary people like you and me.

K. And that brings us to the 4<sup>th</sup> Tireless Co-worker.

4. The Fourth Tireless Coworker is a man by the name of Demas.

- A. Once again, we don't know much about Demas. This text and others seem to indicate that Demas was counted among the faithful brothers who served with Paul and at some level was used by God to advance the gospel across the known world.
- B. He is mentioned NOT only here in Colossians but again in Philemon. I suspect everyone who served under Paul had to be a tireless servant. There was always much to be done, and for now, anyway, Paul was not able to travel. Demas would have played an important role in the ministry.
- C. Nevertheless, for all the faithful saints who followed the Lord or followed Paul, there would always be those who eventually turn their backs on the work and on the Lord.
- D. In 2 Timothy, Paul, writing his final letter before his execution, appeals to Timothy, saying: "Do your best to come to me soon. For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me."
- E. In the church, the most heartbreaking thing that can ever happen is to discover that a key player in the ministry was actually a fraud and deserter. No doubt it was with a broken heart that the apostle John explains (1 John:2:19) "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might be plain that they are not of us."
- F. This too, is the common experience those who faithfully strive with others in tireless ministry. There will always be people who fall away. There will always be pseudo ministers of the word who, on the inside are not at all as they present themselves on the outside. They are pretenders, hypocrites, and frauds. But time and truth go hand in hand. Given enough time, the truth eventually comes out. And so it was with Demas.
- G. These are the Four tireless Coworkers. And that brings us to...

IV. One Distant Supporter:

Read v. 15-16

1. Once again, we don't know much about this dear lady. What we do know is that this was a woman given to hospitality. And I suppose the highest level of hospitality is letting the whole church meet in your house on a consistent basis. In the First Century, you get the distinct impression that they met NOT just weekly, but almost daily! But in the church of Laodicea, they never had to worry about where they would meet, Nympha's door was open to the church.
2. Even to this day, one of the most needed ministries in the church is the ministry of hospitality. And this ministry, like so many of the most vital ministries of the church are hosted and organized by ordinary people, living on mission for the glory of God and the advancement of the gospel.
2. And by the way, in in the ministry of Jesus and that of Paul, much of the financial and practical support came from generous women like Phoebe, Lydia, Nympha and others. Apart from their faithful service the gospel would likely not have made the progress it did in the early years.
3. So again I say, Jesus is building his church through the fallible dependent labor of ordinary people like you and me.
4. Now there is one more person Paul mentions, and I have identified him as

## V. One Fellow Soldier:

Read v. 17

1. Paul is simply telling Archipus that his ministry is his God-given mission, and that as a soldier in God's army, he is expected to fulfill his duty.
2. This is a good place to end this message. You see, we have all been drafted into the Lord's army. We know that we are to live "On Mission" for the glory of Jesus. I suspect we, like Archipus, have good intentions, but perhaps its time for you to press through those good intentions and fulfill the ministry you have received from the Lord.
3. If you don't know what the Lord wants you to do, feel free to come and talk with one of your pastors or small group leaders. They would be happy to help you discover it.

## Final Greeting.

Read. V. 18

So, there you have it:

- I. Two Faithful Messengers:
- II. Two Fearless Ministers:
- III. Four Tireless Coworkers:
- IV. One Distant Supporter:
- V. One Fellow Soldier:

And all of this to remind us that...

Jesus is Building his church through the fallible dependent labor  
of ordinary people like us.