

Col Ch 4 Vs 7-10

“Co-Laboring In Christ”

Vs7-18

In May, 1953, two men became the first in history to climb to the top of Mt. Everest; Edmund Hillary, a New Zealand beekeeper and explorer, and his Sherpa guide from Nepal, Tenzing Norgay. They reached the summit together and attained instant international fame. On the way down from the 29,000-foot peak, Hillary slipped and started to fall. He would almost certainly have fallen to his death, but Tenzing Norgay immediately dug in his ice-axe and braced the rope linking them together, saving Hillary's life. At the bottom the international press made a huge fuss over the Sherpa guide's heroic action. Through it all Tenzing Norgay remained very calm, very professional, very uncarried away by it all. To all the shouted questions he had one simple answer: “Mountain climbers always help each other.”

I have found that the ministry is a lot like Mt climbing, there's always an obstacle of new heights just waiting to be conquered. and Paul the apostle was the ultimate ministry Mt climber. There was never a Mt too high, never an obstacle too overwhelming that he wasn't willing to confront it head on if it meant taking the gospel to places previously uncharted.

But Paul was also very aware of the very thing that was confirmed in the heart of Edmund Hillary on that day in May, 1953 and that's that it's never wise to climb Mts alone. In fact it can get you killed, there's no lone rangers in the ministry, but rather it's absolutely critical in the ministry to have accountability, ministry partnerships, and teamwork; no one can go it alone. Eccl 4:9-10 says, *“Two are better than one, Because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, For he has no one to help him up.”* and To that Edmund Hillary would shout a big amen! None of us can go it alone.

You remember when the Amalekites in Ex 17 fought against the children of Israel. and As long as Moses would hold up his hands the children of Israel would be winning, but as he would tire and his hands would fall, they would begin to lose. and So Aaron and Hur came to Moses and assisted him in his ministry by grabbing a rock for him to sit on and they would hold up his arms for him. He just couldn't do it all by himself, he needed support, he couldn't carry out his “mission” alone.

As great as Paul the apostle was, even he was no exception, when it came to the work of the ministry he had a whole net work of people that would accompany and assist him in the task that God had placed before him. He had prayer partners, men who would co-labor with him on the mission fields, he was more than just a great soul winner; he was also a great friend maker. He wasn't so tunnel visioned for the lost that he neglected the saved. and As you read through the various epistles that he wrote along with the book of Acts you find more than 100 different Christians (many named, some aren't) that Paul associated himself with.

Jesus understood the need for cultivating co-laborers in the kingdom, of course you know that He hand selected 12 men to pour Himself into, to impart His vision and His heart to for 3 years so that they might continue on with the work after His departure physically from this earth. and They (though often times proving themselves to be a thorn of sorts in Jesus' side), but they would also be a support to the Lord, encourage *Him* from time to time. We all need to allow the Lord to cultivate co-laboring relationships in our lives. (Now obviously if you're a guy, don't cultivate *close* co-laboring relationships with gals and vice versa). The only *close* co-laborer that needs to be in your life of the opposite gender is your spouse. But Paul had co-laborers in his life, people who would assist him and help him in propelling the gospel to new places and before us is a list of a few such people.

Vs 7

Tychicus means "fortuitous" or "fortunate", and no doubt he was having had the privilege of hanging out with and ministering alongside the apostle Paul for so many yrs. But I want you to notice with me 3 things about this man that just leap out of this scripture to define his life. We read that #1 he was a "beloved brother" #2 a "faithful minister" and #3 a fellow servant. These are the things that define his life, when I contemplated this I was challenged to consider what it was that defined my life. and I'm not certain that we can ever completely accurately evaluate that in and of ourselves because our hearts may deceive us, but what is it that defines me? If someone were to define my life in a single sentence what would sum it up?

Think about that for a minute, how would someone evaluate your life and sum it up? Would they say, "hey, they're a beloved bro/sis, he/she is a faithful minister, and a servant of Jesus Christ? Or would it be more like, "Well, they're hyper-critical and difficult to get along with, sometimes you can count on them but you can never be sure, and if the task is too tough or inconvenient, count them out." This man got a great evaluation via the Holy Spirit; the scriptures record him as beloved, faithful, and a servant of Jesus Christ

A beloved brother, Paul grew to consider Tychicus one of his dearest companions and as you read through the book of Acts and other letters such as Ephesians and 2nd Tim and Titus you begin to understand why. Because as you begin to put the pieces of Paul's life together you realize that all of these things such as the Jews plot to murder Paul, his trials before Felix, Festus, and Agrippa, that harrowing voyage to Rome, that Tychicus could have very well been with Paul through all of it, away from his own home for years. and Then at the end of Paul's life when his execution was eminent during his 2nd Roman imprisonment you find Tychicus still with him and Paul sends him to replace Timothy for a season so that Timothy can come and see Paul one last time.

When times got tough in Paul's life, this man was there for him, and I can just tell you (and I'm sure you know it to be true), when it seems as though the world is against you, it's encouraging to have a brother or a sister at your side who can encourage you and "ride out the storm" with you through thick and thin because they know your heart, and are willing to stay by you and support you. It means a lot, and Paul found such a friend in Tychicus, he was a beloved brother, no matter how hard, or even life threatening it got, Paul could count on him. and He was a faithful minister, MacArthur points out, "Because he is a man of proven loyalty, Paul has an important task for him: He is to deliver the letter to the Colossians. Not only does he carry Colossians, but Ephesians and probably Philemon as well. The trip from Rome to Colossae was a difficult one. Tychicus would first have to cross much of Italy on foot, then sail across the Adriatic Sea. After traversing Greece on foot, he would sail across the Aegean Sea to the coast of Asia Minor. After all that, he still faced a journey of nearly one hundred miles on foot to reach Colossae."

He was a faithful, or trustworthy minister, and the fact that Paul would entrust 2 and more than likely 3 inspired writings of scripture to be delivered by his hand only further validates his faithful service. Paul didn't have to wonder if he could count on him to "deliver" or follow through or not, there was no question as to his faithfulness.

It's been said that, "The greatest ability is dependability" and I would agree, not only did he minister *to* Paul and *with* Paul, but *for* Paul, he could be entrusted with any task that Paul might commit to his hands.

Finally he was a fellow servant, the 1st two things that Paul mentions is in regards to Tychicus' horizontal relationship to himself, this one refers to his vertical relationship with the Lord. *To* Paul and *for* Paul he was a beloved brother and faithful minister, but *with* Paul he was a fellow servant of the Lord Jesus Christ They labored together concerning many things in the kingdom; he was a fellow "doulos" or bond slave, teamwork and partnerships are essential in the ministry.

It's a wonderful thing when God brings alongside an individual who will serve the Lord with you throughout a lifetime; this was the type of man Tychicus was for Paul. He didn't need the lime light, wasn't concerned about notoriety, he just loved the Lord and was willing to serve the Lord with Paul and be there to support what God was doing in his life.

I pray that we would be known to one another and by one another as those who encourage and support one another through difficult times, who are trustworthy and dependable when something is committed to us as we just serve the Lord together throughout the seasons of our life.

Vs 8-9

Now this “Onesimus” (which means “profitable”) is the same Onesimus that you read of in the short letter of Philemon who was Philemon’s run away slave. But while in Rome, (seemingly in prison) he came across Paul and Paul turned him onto Jesus Christ and so Paul is sending him back to Philemon (no longer as a piece of property) but as a beloved brother in Christ. (Let’s turn to Philemon quickly) Vs 7-19

So you begin to see how these letters intertwine, Tychicus was delivering these letters and Onesimus was accompanying him so that when they came to Philemon, he would stay with him. and Paul is letting Philemon know that at one point even though he may’ve been unprofitable, Christ has changed his life so give him the opportunity to bear fruits worthy of repentance and treat him as a brother who’s been forgiven.

But part of their mission was not only to deliver the letters to Colosse and Ephesus, but also to inform and keep up to speed the believers in those cities as to what was happening with Paul. They didn’t have cell phones, or e-mail, they couldn’t just have something Fed ex’d overnight, so when they would write, the individual who was delivering the letter would post everyone on the current situation, prayer needs and whatever praise reports there might be. and Really this is another great usage of speech, (we were talking about speech last week). and Paul is saying we’re going to inform you off all that is happening so that you can fight the good fight with us by waging war in your prayers. Sharing one another’s burdens Gal 6:2 says, “*Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.*” The law of Christ speaking of the law of love that Jesus inaugurated in John 13:34 when He said, “*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.*” 1 Thess 5:14 says “*Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all.*” Bear one another’s burdens, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, but how can we bear one another’s burdens, or comfort the fainthearted, or uphold the weak if we don’t know you’re being burdened by something, or you’re feeling spiritually weak and fainthearted.

To be in one of these categories doesn’t necessarily indicate sin in your life either, maybe you’re just feeling overwhelmed, or fainthearted and you need encouraged. Grab someone and say, “hey, could you just pray for me, I feel like I’m going through the meat grinder and I could really just use your prayers.” Paul wanted people to know his affairs, good, bad, or indifferent, because he wanted people to be praying for him. He wasn’t soliciting money, or asking for sympathy, some Christian workers have this way of sharing their hard circumstances in such a way as to compel you or manipulate you so that you give them money. But that was never the case with Paul, not that it’s wrong to support a ministry that God places on your heart, but just make sure God’s placing it on your heart, and you’re not being manipulated and compelled by guilt or constraint.

Vs10

Now Aristarchus, much like Tychicus was one of those guys who stayed with Paul through thick and thin, and you read a bit more concerning him in the book of Acts as well, beginning in ch 19 and 20, and then again in ch 27 vs 2 his name surfaces. So he was with Paul during the riots in Ephesus, experienced that radical shipwreck with Paul on the way to Rome that Luke describes so graphically and now here in prison Aristarchus is still with him. Probably not by force, the term “fellow prisoner” probably refers to his voluntary confinement with Paul in order to comfort and support him and be an encouragement to him, no doubt an incredible friend and an inspiring individual for Paul.

Mark, or maybe your bible says “Marcus” is John Mark, the nephew of Barnabas (the KJV says “sister’s son to Barnabas”) so that we know that Mark was Barnabas’ sister’s son, his nephew. and Yes this is the same Mark that you read about in the book of Acts that went with Paul on his 1st missionary journey but somewhere in the middle of it he bailed out. and Because of that when it came time for Paul to go out again, Barnabas said, “Ok, I’ll get Mark and we’ll be on our way” and Paul said, “Hold up pal, he’s not going with me again, he can’t be counted on, what if something comes up this time and he bails again, he might get us killed.” and We read in Acts 15:37-40 *“Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark. But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work. 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.”*

There’s a number of lessons to be learned there that we don’t have time to delve into this morning but for now what I want you to realize 2 things. #1 That even though they had a disagreement and Mark became an instrument of division in the body, God worked reconciliation in their lives, the bible says we’ve been given the ministry of reconciliation, both man to God and man to man, (believer to believer).

Here Paul is already seeing Mark as a valuable companion again, he’s forgiven him and he’s saying, “Hey, don’t reject Mark” maybe they knew that he’d bailed on Paul and wasn’t sure how to handle him, if they should rebuke him or receive him or what? and Paul is saying, “Receive him” whatever happened Mark overcame that failure and proved himself useful for the ministry.

Paul was quick to acknowledge that, so 1st we see reconciliation, 2^{ndly} Mark serves as a wonderful inspiration to everyone who’s 1st attempt at ministry has failed, he didn’t sit around and sulk and think “What’s the point? I may as well give up.” He got back in there, repented of whatever it was and showed himself to be an individual of value, faithful to the Lord, and the apostle Paul.

I have little doubt that both Barnabas and Peter had a great part in his restoration (Peter refers to Mark as his son in 1 Pet 5:13). and Peter who knew what it was like to fail and to be again restored into the ministry by the Lord was no doubt a key instrument in the restoration of Mark, and God use this young man mightily, and because he didn't give up, but repented, and was restored, we have the gospel of Mark today, he would write one of the 4 gospel books that we have.

Vs11

Most of Paul's companions were Gentiles, the majority of the Jews considered him a traitor and a violator of the law of Moses, (which he wasn't) but because he taught grace as opposed to the Mosaic law they had rejected him as an apostate, but these guys had proven themselves to be an encouragement and a comfort to Paul.

Vs12-13

Now Epaphras was their Pastor, and it seems like he started 2 other churches near him as well. and What's recorded of him (primarily) is his love for the body that God had entrusted to him, and the fact that he labored for them in prayer. and Here we see that word "bondservant" again which means, "a slave for life by choice due to the love of your Master and your Master's love for you." and He's saying that he's a servant of Jesus Christ forever because he loves Him so much in response to Christ's love for him.

The very thing that Paul exhorts them in, in vs 2 of this ch, that they would continue earnestly in prayer, he commends Epaphras for in demonstrating continual fervency in his prayers as a worked out reality in his own life. Time will forbid us to delve into them with any depth but I want you to jot down 5 things that marked his prayer life that might help you in your ministry of prayer. #1 He prayed "persistently", Paul says he's always praying for them, not just when it's convenient, or when he feels like it, it's become a discipline of his life to pray for them persistently.

#2 He prayed, "passionately" he "labored fervently" with his whole heart, the Greek word that's been translated "labored fervently" is "agonizomai" (ag-o-nid'-zom-ahee); from which we get our word to "agonize", it was used of athletes that devoted their entire being to the discipline it took to win the prize.

This mans prayer life was one of passion, #3 he prayer "personally" he didn't pray around the world for everybody in general and nobody in particular, he centered his intercession on the saints in Colosse, Hierapolis, and Laodicea, Paul notes his praying was specifically for them, he says "for you" and we spoke last week about the need for praying personally, specifically, Epaphras did this.

#4 He prayed “purposefully” there was a very definite request that he was making for them, “*that they would stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.*” What an awesome way to be praying for people that they would be established completely (no guessing games) in all (not some) but the whole will of God. That they would mature into the fullness that God would desire for their lives, so many times we pray so small for people (if we pray for them at all) and we focus on peripheral issues. and If we’d learn to pray as the bible demonstrates many of the things that we’re praying for would be swallowed up in the bigger requests.

It’s not that it’s not good to pray for someone to make their bills each month, or to receive direction or correction when needed. But if they’re standing perfect and complete in God’s will for their lives, those things are going to be included in God’s will for them. I encourage you to study the prayers recorded in Paul’s letters keeping in mind the inspiration of the Holy Spirit behind them and maybe let them serve as a model or a basic structure for your own prayers, and then continue praying whatever else God is placing on your heart.

Then #5 (and I couldn’t think of a “P” word) he prayed “sacrificially” the word “zeal” here is the Greek word “ponos” which literally means “anguish” or “much distress” so that you might almost say, he prayed “painfully” in the sense that his heart was burdened deeply for them. Warren Wiersbe said, “If there is no burden, there can be no blessing” and it was John H. Jowett (if I say his name correctly) Who said, “Praying that costs nothing, accomplishes nothing.” Of all the men listed and commended here, Epaphras is the only one commended for his ministry of prayer, remember that and learn why he was marked for his prayer life and emulate it.

Vs14

Now Luke, who wrote the Gospel of Luke (and possibly the only gentile writer of Scripture) was a doctor. and What I would have you be aware of is that even though Paul was used in radical ways to bring healing to the lives of probably hundreds of people throughout his lifetime, he still traveled with a physician.

God will use supernatural and natural means to bring healing to man, and God has given us a degree of wisdom and expects us to utilize it and the fact is, that if at all possible, medically minded individuals, trained professionals in the medical field make great missionary teammates; all of these guys were team players.

Now, it would seem as though Paul had begun to have his doubts about Demas by now. He will have an unfortunate end and Paul doesn't really commend him here in any way, and by the time he writes 2 Tim we read in ch 4:9-10 "*Be diligent to come to me quickly; for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world.*" Whether it was the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, or the pride of life that ensnared him, the bible doesn't say. But what we do know is that he left his 1st love Jesus Christ Can a man walk away from his salvation; do you think Paul would've ministered with him if he wasn't ever saved? Be careful to abide in Christ, don't place your eyes on the things of this world, but keep them focused steadfastly upon Him.

Vs15-16

Now we don't have any letter from Laodicea. But since the earlier manuscripts of Ephesians don't have the words "in Ephesus" in vs 1 of ch 1 indicating that it was written primarily as a circulatory letter that was meant to circulate throughout the churches, many people believe that that's the letter he's in reference to and that it was currently in Laodicea but they were to read it as well. However if there was another letter, I have no problem believing that what God wanted to preserve, He preserved and that until I've got all of what's here worked out in it's fullness in my life, I don't need to worry about what's not here.

Vs17

Just place your name there in the place of Archippus, " _____ take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it." God has a plan for your life, and I would exhort you and say to you today, take heed to it, that you may fulfill it. Maybe he was overwhelmed or uncertain in some way, and Paul just gave him some incredible inspiration in the list of these other guys in what they'd endured and come through and yet God had been faithful to them and had seen them through every struggle, every stress, and every strain. and Now you take heed as well, that you may fulfill the ministry that you've received in the Lord..

Vs18

So it ends as it begins, the parenthetical marks of this epistle are grace, it's all about the grace of God, by the love of God, and you are complete in him, no need to look any farther, He is your all in all.

If you're here this morning and have never been a recipient of the grace of God, I would like (on the behalf of God) to open that door to you and give you a personal invitation to receive His grace. Now, none of us deserve it, that's why it's called grace, and it's by His grace that we're saved through faith, by believing that Jesus Christ died on the cross for your sin and was raised for your justification. and If you're willing to receive His grace and believe upon Jesus Christ for the remission or forgiveness of your sin, then the old things of shame can pass away from your life today and you can be made brand new.