

Colossians 4:7-18

June 2020

WE NEED EACH OTHER

III. In the 18th Century a famous organist travelled around England giving recitals. In each town he hired a boy to pump the organ bellows. After one concert the boy said to him, "We sure gave a great concert." "What do you mean 'we'", replied the organist, "I gave a great concert, now go home." The next night, half way through his magnificent piece, the organ stopped dead and the great organist felt humiliated. At that point the boy who was pumping the bellows popped his head up and grinned, "We aren't giving a very good concert tonight are we?"

It doesn't matter how gifted you are, how talented or accomplished you are as a believer you need the help and support of others.

Paul was such a man. He was a very intelligent competent man with excellent qualifications and great preacher and teacher of the scriptures and financially self-sufficient and yet everywhere he went he needed other people to help him and support him in his ministry. And they were people who had gifts and abilities that he didn't have so they were able to fill in the gaps. He trained new believers to do what he was doing so that he wasn't indispensable and he delegated a lot of his work to them.

III. When I trained for the ministry in 1970, pastors were expected to run everything in the church. The church folk expected you to attend and chair every meeting. And I have to confess I felt out of my depth in some of those meetings. I also felt under real pressure to exercise gifts and abilities that I didn't have. I also found that because I was expected to do all these extra things plus preach twice every Sunday, that I wasn't giving enough time to the areas I believed God had called me to. I felt under pressure to be someone I was not and do what I wasn't gifted to do. So I decided to do what the Apostles did in Acts 7 – Do only what I was called and gifted to do and hand the other stuff over to people who were gifted in those others areas. At first I felt a bit guilty for not attending certain meetings and I got a few comments from people who expected me to be there, but in time it worked out much better for all concerned.

I was so glad when I came here and discovered that June, Louise and Carol were handling the Administration, because I am a hopeless organiser and it freed me to concentrate on preaching, prayer and pastoral care.

From the beginning of Paul's ministry he always had fellow believers who worked with him, prayed with him, loved him, encouraged him, supported him and compensated for his weaknesses. And it seems that as the years went by he was more conscious of his need of their companionship and support.

Today we will look at some of those fellow believers who had become part of Paul's support team.

Paul was a prisoner in Rome at this stage, under house arrest, but his friends were allowed to be with him in his limited circumstances.

Let's look at those friends:

TYCHICUS THE MAN WHO COULD BE TRUSTED

It seems that Tychicus became a Christian when Paul was preaching in Ephesus and he accompanied Paul for the rest of his missionary travels. He went with Paul to Jerusalem knowing that hostility, suffering and imprisonment lay ahead.

He served Paul in whatever capacity he could. He was always there for Paul, ready and willing to carry out his bidding, even in the years of his imprisonment. And here he is still with Paul.

And Paul calls him a beloved brother, a faithful servant and a fellow slave in the Lord.

Tychicus had a servant's heart.

Didn't Jesus say, "He who would be the greatest among must be the servant of all."

These are the people that God entrusts with responsibility and authority. Those who have learned to serve others.....who are not seeking prominence or power or recognition but are willing to do the lowly, unnoticed, even unthanked tasks so that others are released to carry out their ministry more effectively.

When choosing leadership or recommending people for X ministry we need to look for this quality...."Do they have a servant's heart, have they demonstrated that?"

III. D.L Moody was one of the greatest preachers in the 19th Century and each year he held a Bible conference for Christian leaders in Northfield Massachusetts. At night those from Europe who attended the conference would leave their shoes outside the bedroom doors for the conference staff to clean. This was not something the Americans did and when Moody asked some of his Bible students if they would be willing to clean the shoes, he got no response. So he collected the shoes and took them to his room and cleaned and polished them. He was hoping to do this without being seen, but a friend entered his room and was surprised to see Moody cleaning the guest's shoes. The European visitors never knew who cleaned and polished their shoes but Moody's friend told some of the others at the conference and they then took turns cleaning the shoes secretly. D.L. Moody was a man with a humble servant's heart and I believe that was one of the secrets to his success.

Because Tychicus had proven to be such a faithful servant, Paul knew he could trust him with important responsibilities.

When Paul wanted Titus, the Pastor at Crete to come to him, he sent Tychicus as his replacement. And later when Paul wanted Timothy to join him, he sent Tychicus to take over pastoring the church at Ephesus.

And here Paul was about to send Tychicus to the Colossian church with this very letter. He also carried with Him the letter to the Ephesian church and the letter to Philemon.

Tychicus, a man who had proven his faithfulness, dependability through the good times and the hard times.

ONESIMUS THE MAN WHO FOUND CHRIST ON THE RUN

[Neville.] Onesimus was a slave in the home of a man named Philemon, the leader of the church in Colossae.

But Onesimus rebelled against his master and ran away. The punishment for this was death.

Onesimus escaped to Rome, hoping to lose himself in

the crowd, but somehow he came into contact with Paul and became a follower of Jesus.

Paul sent Onesimus back to Philemon encouraging Philemon to take him back, not just as a slave but as a brother in Christ.....a fellow sinner saved only by the grace of God.

This whole business taking place at the moment about black lives matter. This should never be an issue for a Christian. We of all people should love and accept others regardless of their colour, culture, race, beliefs, background, status or whatever because that is how God has accepted us. This is how it should be in our churches as well.

Gal 3:26 *For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on Christ, like putting on new clothes. There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

III. When Stephen Olford was pastor of Calvary Baptist church NY he was welcoming 3 new members into the church and one was a Chinese immigrant, another was a woman who washed laundry for a living and the other was the Attorney general of the USA. Stephen said to those gathered, "Before the cross the ground is level."

Onesimus was running away from physical slavery, but he discovered that he was a slave to a master far crueller than any man. He was a slave to forces within himself such as rebellion, hatred, bitterness, greed, pride, jealousy. And the more he enjoyed his physical freedom, the more he realised he was still a slave in his heart.hated what he saw in his heart.

And when he heard the message that Jesus came to set people free from the power and penalty of this evil within.....he discovered a freedom that surpassed anything he had known before and was willing to go back to his master and back to physical slavery if necessary.

The greatest freedom anyone can experience is to be free from those dark forces within and to be free from the burden of guilt and shame because we have given into those forces. That is real freedom. Do you know that inner freedom? It's wonderful.

Remember I said that the slave Onesimus had run away from Philemon, the leader of the church in Colossae. A few years later, Ignatius, a Pastor in a neighbouring church wrote speaking of Onesimus, the pastor of the church at Colossae.

ARISTARCHUS THE MAN WHO SACRIFICED HIS FREEDOM

Aristarchus came to Christ in Ephesus and when a riot broke out because of the believers, he was seized by the mob and imprisoned.

Later Aristarchus went to Jerusalem with Paul and all the way to Rome. He wasn't content simply to be one of Paul's visitors; he chose to be imprisoned with Paul.

He gave up his physical freedom to identify with this man of God in prison. He literally lay down his life for his friend.

How could anyone sacrifice their freedom in this world? They could, if they had found real freedom within that comes when Jesus releases us from those internal forces that enslave and destroy us. They could, if they knew that there was something far far better than what this world offers us. They could if they loved a friend so deeply that they wouldn't see it as a sacrifice but as a privilege.

III. During the Simba uprising in Zaire in 1960 the Simba rebels arrested a group of missionaries at Wamba and decided to execute Bill McChesney because he was an American. When his fellow missionary Jim Rodger an Englishman, saw what was about to happen, he stepped up beside Bill and said, "If you must die, brother, I'll die with you." When the rebels asked Jim, "What nationality are you?", Jim was silent. And they assumed he was American so both men were both beaten and kicked to death.

MARK, THE MAN RESTORED FROM FAILURE. v10

Mark went with Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey, but when the going got tough, he backed off and went home.

When Paul set out on his next missionary journey, and Barnabas wanted to take Mark, there was a big argument because Paul felt Mark was unreliable and so Paul found another travelling companion, Silas.

And yet here we have Mark standing with Paul in

his time of need. And during the last days of his life as Paul faced execution he wrote to Timothy and said, "Bring Mark with you because he is helpful to me in my ministry."

The man who started out in ministry as a failure,

ended up being a loyal, supportive friend and helper to Paul and the writer of the second Gospel.

He didn't start out well, but he ended well.

I know of people who made a commitment to Christ and floundered around in those early years so much so that I wondered if they would ever make it.....I have since come across them, and they are strong growing believers.

III. In my first church a young man came to Christ, but he was so up and down and on and off that I wondered if his commitment was really genuine. I honestly thought he wouldn't make it.

20 years later when we were in Te Puke he and his wife turned up on our doorstep and he had come all the way down from Auckland to share with us what God had been doing in their lives. It made my day.

Praise God, He never gives up on us. It doesn't matter how often you've failed or how low you've sunk he will never stop reaching out to you with unconditional love and forgiveness.

When we fail and blow it He doesn't withdraw and get the huff. As soon as He sees our broken, sorry heart he comes to forgive, cleanse, heal and restore.

JESUS JUSTUS THE MAN WHO EXHIBITED CHRISTLIKENESS

We don't know much about this man, except that he had the same name as our Lord and that his character was such that they called him righteous or just.

Aristarchus, Mark and Jesus Justus were the only

Jews among Paul's fellow workers in Rome. The Jews in Rome had largely rejected the message of Christ.

EPAPHRAS, THE MAN WITH A PASTORS HEART v12

This was the man who had become a X in Ephesus and taken the Gospel back to his people in the Lycus Valley, where the cities of Colossae, Laodicea and Hierapolis were situated. He established churches in each city and became the Pastor.

He came to Rome to seek Paul's advice for the churches under his care.

And as Paul got to know Epaphras, he realised he was a man with a true Pastor's heart.

"He is always wrestling in prayer for you...."

The word there is agonizing or in some places fighting.

In other words he was a man with an aggressive, passionate heart to see his people mature and be fully assured of their faith.

What did he mean by this?

Maturity.....relates to character. Maturity for a believer means that we are becoming more Christ like in our attitudes, behaviour and relationships.

Assurance....relates to what we believe. That we are more confident in our faith in Christ and more deeply rooted in the truth of the scriptures.

LUKE, THE MAN WITH A SPECIALISED MINISTRY

Luke was a doctor and because Paul had been quite sick on his first missionary journey, he took Luke along with him on the next one.

Paul called Luke, the beloved physician and Luke accompanied Paul to Rome and at the end of Paul's life, as he faced execution in Rome, Luke was the only one who remained with him ministering to his physical needs.

God used this man to write 52 chapters of the N.T.

DEMAS THE MAN WHO DEFAULTED AT THE END v14

This man who had begun the Christian race well and had been in ministry side by side with Paul, never made it to the end.

During Paul's final imprisonment in Rome, Demas abandoned Paul and Christ because the desire for and the love of the things of this world became stronger than His love for Christ.

We all feel the pressure of the society in which we live.....to yield to its temptations, to adopt its values and standards, to pursue its ambitious, greedy materialistic goals, but here was a believer who had come so far along the road of faith and at the end gave into that pressure.

The example of Demas is a warning to all of us.....you can be taught by the greatest X, be exposed to the power of God, be involved up to your neck in X ministry.....that doesn't mean you are beyond falling.

Demas started out well but didn't make it to the finish line. It's also an encouragement to know that even Paul had people on his team who failedso did Jesus.

III. In 1967 I was a new Christian and started attending a young men's Bible study group at Hillsborough Baptist Church. Our leader was a man named Nelson Skeates. He had a profound influence on me as a 17 year old. It wasn't so much the Bible information he shared with us, it was his personal relationship and love for Jesus that oozed out of him. Sometimes he would apologise for not preparing the lesson because when he went to do it he got side tracked with some aspect of truth that God was showing him and that truth so touched his heart that the time just flew by as he interacted with God in prayer and worship. And although we didn't study the planned lesson, what he did share with us from his personal relationship with God was life giving and had a powerful effect on us all. Every one of those young guys in the group went into some kind of Christian ministry, except who was killed in accident.

However one of those young men who became a missionary in Europe returned home and later turned his back on Christ gave up his Christian faith. A friend of mine went to visit him a few years ago because he

was dying of cancer. My friend tried to encouraging him to turn back to Christ, but he refused to. He said, "I don't believe in that stuff anymore." And he died an unbeliever.

It must have broken Paul's heart when he later wrote these words to Timothy, 2 Tim 4:10, "Demas, because he loved the things of this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica."

There's a warning here to all of us who are getting on in years. We may think we are beyond falling away, but I have seen it happen many times. Although we might be retired and taking it easy, our enemy has not retired and he is still very active. He will try to get you to slacken off, to become spiritually lazy, to be off your guard. Then he will come at you with ungodly thoughts to try and weaken you morally and lying doubts to try and undermine your faith.

Satan is a dirty fighter and he doesn't give up even when we are at our weakest. What do we need to do about this?

Guard your heart and mind

Paul says in Eph 4:27, "Don't give the Devil a foothold. As soon as a lying doubt or an ungodly, unloving thought comes into your mind had it over to Jesus for destruction. Don't even entertain it for a moment."

Feed and nurture your spiritual life

With the scriptures, prayer, worship and the company of Christians who encourage you in your faith.

Charles Wesley

Jesus, confirm my heart's desire

to work, and speak, and think for You;

Still let me guard the holy fire,

and still in me Your gift renew.

A WORD TO LAODICEA v15

Until the 3rd Century believers mainly met in homes because of persecution.

A WORD TO ARCHIPPUS v17

"Complete, see through the work God has called you to do." A Word to you and me. Keep at it! Don't give up! Keep going even if you do slip and slide and falter along the way.

Apart from Demas, all these people mentioned here
as far as we know, remained faithful to Christ until He called them home.

The only way this is possible is living a life in dependence not upon our own strength, abilities and will-power but in dependence on the One who lives within us.....supplying us with every resource we will ever need to love, serve, follow and obey Him to the end.