

Doing the Lord's Work Together

Introduction and Outlines

- **Scripture reading:** Colossians 4: 7-18; Ephesians 4: 11-13.
- **Introduction:** Church picture wall. It is amazing how God sovereignly brought all these people into the same church so they could cross paths with one another in their journeys of life for a period of time.
- **The importance of companionship:** Ecclesiastes 4: 12 “And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three *strands* is not quickly torn apart.”; Proverbs 27: 17 “Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.” This is true of life, of work, and even more true of ministry. Moses as an example (Exodus 18, Numbers 11).

- **Outlines:**

Topic: Doing the Lord's Work Together

- A. A Faithful Servant—Tychicus
- B. A Repentant Sinner—Onesimus
- C. A Companion through Thick and Thin—Aristarchus
- D. A Restored Failure—Mark
- E. An Encouraging Coworker—Jesus Justus
- F. A Praying Warrior—Epaphras
- G. A Special Gift—Luke
- H. A World-loving Defector—Demas
- I. A Sacrificial Giver—Nympha
- J. A Fellow Soldier Needing Encouragement—Archippus

A Faithful Servant—Tychicus (vv 7-8)

- **“Faithful servant”:** All believers are to serve the Lord, so we all are Christ's servants. But Paul saved this sense for the next phrase “bond-servant in the Lord”, and focuses here on Tychicus' service to Paul. Paul has great trust in him that he sent him to Colossi from Rome to report their situations to the church. Meanwhile, he was entrusted with three precious letters from Paul to send to believers in the churches. These three letters are Ephesians, Philemon and Colossians.
- **“fellow bond-servant in the Lord”:** From man's point of view, he is a servant of Paul and never made a name for himself. But Tychicus is a servant in the Lord, the same as Paul. This is also the identity of every Christian.

A Repentant Sinner—Onesimus (v9)

- **“Onesimus”:** A runaway slave. He was a slave of a Christian man named Philemon, but he ran away from his master, met Paul in Rome, was saved under the proclamation of Paul (cf. The book of Philemon). According to the culture of the time, for a slave to runaway is a very serious crime, and the master can kill the slave legally.

- “**faithful and beloved brother**”: Would you call someone with a past of serious crime a faithful and beloved brother? Key evidence of saving faith is repentance, that is, taking responsibility and embracing the consequence of sin. So Paul sent him back mainly to find his master Philemon, and to be reconciled with him in Christ. No matter how vile a person’s past is, the moment he believes in Christ, he immediately becomes a beloved family member. No sinful past can hinder this close relationship.

A Companion through Thick and Thin—Aristarchus (v10)

- “**Aristarchus**”: In Acts 19: 29, Paul was persecuted by pagans on his 3rd missionary journey, Aristarchus was dragged along as his companion; In 20: 4, he returned to Jerusalem with Paul; In 27: 2, he went with Paul as Paul was sent to Rome in chains, where they had a shipwreck and almost lost their lives. Here, Paul is imprisoned in Rome, and Aristarchus appears again as Paul’s “fellow prisoner.”

The Bible never mentions Aristarchus carrying out any important ministry work. But he is always there when Paul is in trouble and needs support the most, accompanying and helping Paul by his side. This kind of person who gives support and encouragement has a very important role in every ministry team.

A Restored Failure—Mark (v10)

- “**Mark**”: In Acts 12 before the first missionary journey, Paul chose Mark in Jerusalem and took him back to Antioch to serve the church there (12: 25). At the beginning of the first missionary journey, he brought Mark along as a helper (13: 5). However, v13 records a serious failure of Mark. The missionary team “came to Perga in Pamphylia; but John left them and returned to Jerusalem.” Either he dreaded the difficulty of the ministry ahead, or he didn’t want to follow Paul’s ministry decisions, in any case, he gave up, left the team, and went back to mama in his hometown Jerusalem. At this point, Mark was a total failure, unfaithful, unable to finish the task.

This incident made Mark a controversial figure that caused severe disagreement between Paul and Barnabas (15: 36-40). Barnabas wanted to take Mark on the second missionary journey, but Paul was worried that he would make the same mistake, and so Paul and Barnabas had to separate.

A failure once renounced by the apostle Paul, Mark had a remarkable revival later in life, and the key person is Peter who called Mark “my son” (1 Peter 5: 13). It must be Peter who accepted and strengthened Mark in Jerusalem.

Luke 22: 32 “.....when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.”

Have you ever been a failure? God can use a past failure, Mark is a real-life testimony.

An Encouraging Coworker—Jesus Justus (v11)

- “Jesus who is called Justus”: No other record, here says he is one of the only three fellow Jewish coworkers with Paul.
- “an encouragement to me”: Paul loved his Jewish kinsmen dearly, but all they gave Paul was “great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart” (Romans 9: 2-3). God used Justus to bring encouragement to

Paul. This kind of comforting encouragement among coworkers is essential for ministry partners serving together.

A Praying Warrior—Epaphras (vv 12-13)

- “**Epaphras**”: He planted the church in Colossae (1: 7). It is also him who, with the burden for the church, traveled long and hard to find Paul in Rome to ask for guidance for the church (1: 8). We see here that he is a shepherd who devoted himself to prayer.
- “**always laboring earnestly...in his prayers**”: “labor” in Greek means body pain caused by continuous high intensity work. Literally, he may have prayed to a point of body pain, keeping a posture where he can pray most effectively for a long time for the church.
- “**stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God**”: Echoing Paul’s prayer for the Colossian church (cf. 1: 9; 2: 2). The emphasis of their prayers focused on strengthening the faith, knowing God’s will, and being sanctified. Such prayers occupy too small a portion in the prayer meetings of most churches in our time. Do Christians today not see the importance of prayer for spiritual things? Or do they see such spiritual needs as too intangible, not as visible as the practical needs? Or do they simply lack the discipline of praying for spiritual things and don’t know how to pray?
- “**those who are in Laodicea and Hierapolis**”: Epaphras not only cares for his own church, but also prays for other churches nearby. He is an example of having a kingdom vision. Such examples are not unfamiliar to our church (Pastor Kirkland, GA elders, and other fellow pastors). They not only serve faithfully in their own churches, but are also given by God a heart to be used in the broader kingdom ministry. Praise the Lord for these coworkers!

A Special Gift—Luke (v14)

- “**Luke, the beloved physician**”: It implies that his role in the ministry team is their doctor. Physician was then as it is now an honorable career which people envy greatly. Luke did not use his talents for his own gain. He gave up his high-pay career, joined Paul’s missionary team, and became a kingdom soldier for the kingdom ministry.

Every gift and talent can be used by God. Medical professionals, pilots and teachers etc., often play crucial roles in remote missionary fields. If you are willing to dedicate all your life to the Lord, God can use all of your experience and talents for His good purpose.

A World-loving Defector—Demas (v14)

- “**Demas**”: A few years later, the true nature of his life was revealed. “Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica” (2 Timothy 4: 10).

Some try to defend Demas, saying this may only be a temporary failure. But Paul says the reason he left is “having loved this present world”. This contradicts the description of a true biblical Christian. The hearts of Christians are fundamentally not in this world (cf. 1: 5; 3: 1-4; 1 John 2: 15; James 4: 4).

1 John 2: 19 “They went out from us, but they were not *really* of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but *they went out*, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us.”

Jesus has Judas, Paul has Demas, but regardless, God is always sovereign as King. Fake and defecting coworkers cannot hinder God's kingdom work. We are the testimony of that!

A Sacrificial Giver—Nympha (vv 15-16)

- “**Nympha and the church that is in her house**”: This may be the gathering place for the Laodicean church. “The church that is in her house” describes a specific group of brothers and sisters committed to regular gathering. Similar house churches are also seen in Romans 16: 5, 1 Corinthians 16: 19, and Philemon 2.

In our era, some people hold “churches” online and call them cyber-churches, where people can attend “church worship” in their pajamas at home and don’t have to share life with anyone. These so-called churches deceive themselves and are not churches at all.

A Fellow Soldier Needing Encouragement—Archippus (v17)

- “**Take heed**”: Not a stern warning, but an exhortation. Philemon 2 says he is “our fellow soldier”. He is Christ’s soldier, Paul’s fellow soldier. Spiritual battles can be hard, and fellow soldiers on the battleground should cheer each other on.

Applications

- #1. Praise the wonderful work of God!
- #2. How does God use your gifts and talents to build His Kingdom? Have you found your place in the group photo of St. Louis Chinese Christian Church?
- #3. Don’t forget that this passage is full of greetings. Greeting is the simplest way to express love for one another. In the spiritual family of the church, greeting is the genuine, natural and kind expression of love.