

These Are Men Who Preached Christ

Colossians 4:7-18 ⁷ Tychicus, a beloved brother, faithful minister, and fellow servant in the Lord, will tell you all the news about me. ⁸ I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that he may know your circumstances and comfort your hearts, ⁹ with Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is *one* of you. They will make known to you all things which *are happening* here. ¹⁰ Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, with Mark the cousin of Barnabas (about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him), ¹¹ and Jesus who is called Justus. These *are my* only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are of the circumcision; they have proved to be a comfort to me. ¹² Epaphras, who is *one* of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. ¹³ For I bear him witness that he has a great zeal for you, and those who are in Laodicea, and those in Hierapolis. ¹⁴ Luke the beloved physician and Demas greet you. ¹⁵ Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea, and Nymphas and the church that *is* in his house. ¹⁶ Now when this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the *epistle* from Laodicea. ¹⁷ And say to Archippus, "Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it." ¹⁸ This salutation by my own hand-- Paul. Remember my chains. Grace *be* with you. Amen.

I have always loved history, but at the same time never much enjoyed history class. History is stories, true stories, love, adventure, daring, triumph, lost, mystery. Who doesn't like a good story? Real history has stories far surpassing anything any fiction writer can dream up. The problem I think is that a history teacher in a history class has so much time to get through so much history. The consequence is the story is lost. Sometimes history class becomes an exercise in memorizing dates and events and names. What did Patrick Henry say? What night did Paul ride out? How many lanterns were in the tower? Everything blurs together. The stories are lost and the names become faceless. They don't touch our hearts or our imaginations.

It would be easy to treat this list the same way, to skim over it, reading the names as though they were faceless people, yet they are anything but. These are men who labored hand in hand with Paul. They were in storms, thrown in prison, shipwrecked, stoned, beaten, driven from city to city, but always preaching Christ and him crucified, always laboring for the Gospel.

Paul delights in the ministry of reconciliation. Paul rejoices in the preaching of Christ crucified. Remember what Paul says in Philippians:

Philippians 1:16-18 ¹⁶ The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; ¹⁷ but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the

defense of the gospel. ¹⁸ What then? Only *that* in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice.

Paul rejoices in the preaching of the Gospel and for that reason he cannot help but mention these men here with joy and thanksgiving to God for the work that he is doing through them. Yes and not only Paul but the Holy Spirit also, for He has caused these men to be mentioned by name in the Holy Scriptures, so that their labor for Christ and their example might be an encouragement to us who so many years later enjoy the fruits of their hardships and have received from them the joyful message that in Christ our sins are forgiven.

Another reason that Paul goes to the effort of listing these men and sending his greetings is to remind both the Colossians and us that we are not alone in our struggles, but there are many that labor with us all around the world. Struggling to preach Christ crucified, and although we rarely see them we are one in Christ

We so often feel isolated and alone. We can feel isolated and alone as individuals in our homes forgetting the greater Christian family that prays for us at church. We can feel isolated as a congregation seeing only the struggles here in Markesan and forgetting the greater community that is ours in Madison and Fond Du Lac and beyond. We can feel isolated as a synod not really paying attention to what is happening in India and Africa.

There are many people in Africa and India whose dedication and service to the Lord is truly encouraging. Many of them are truly dedicated to the service of the Lord, enduring great hardships for the preaching of Christ crucified.

One example is Yumba in Congo. Here is a man who is the energizer bunny for the Lord. Very often people ask me to ask the mission board for money to build schools and churches and other things. Most of the time I had to tell them no. Every time I would tell Yumba no he would just say, "well if you can't help us we will have to do it ourselves." Sometimes I would send a report back to the Mission board saying we should help Yumba with this or that. And when I came again to give him the money the next year it was already done.

Ibrahim and Kossi are also greatly beloved men who labor diligently in all things to preach Christ.

These are not faceless men on far distant shores. These are brothers and sisters in Christ who stand side by side with us and labor and suffer and preach. They are an encouragement to us as we are to them, so that we do not feel like the fight is lost or that we are alone.

One of the wonderful parts of my life as a missionary was being able to bring these men overseas news about their brothers back home and to bring you back here in the states news about those men overseas.

So who are these men? We won't go through the whole list but we can at least take a moment to consider some of them.

Two names that should jump out at you immediately: Mark and Luke the gospel writers. These are the same men that wrote the gospel of Mark and the gospel of Luke.

Mark's full name is John Mark, which also happens to be my Dad's name. Mark's cousin was Barnabas. And Mark was there with Paul from the very beginning on his first missionary trip. In fact Mark was with the apostles from the very beginning. It was his mother's house where the disciples first met. Many think it was the upper room of his house where the last supper was. And in fact that he was with Jesus in the garden, and he is the one who left his garment and fled naked from that garment. It is true that Paul was apparently not too happy with Mark after that first missionary trip. It seems that for some reason Mark left Paul. But here he is once again laboring next to Paul for the purpose of preaching.

Luke is a physician and the writer of the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts. It is Luke who tells us how the Word of God spread from Jerusalem throughout the entire world. Did you notice that Luke is not a Hebrew? He is not of the circumcision. That makes him the only Gentile to write a book of the New Testament. Probably the only Gentile to write any book of the Bible. No wonder he is the one who writes Acts to tell how the gospel came to his people and even to himself. We find him joining up with Paul in Troas and continuing to journey with him.

Onesimus is a slave, who ran away and heard the word of the Lord. At Paul's instruction he is on his way back to the master he ran away from. What great faith in the Lord he shows and willingness to endure all things for Christ. Onesimus is willing return to slavery and to a unknown punishment at the Lord's command.

Epaphras was most likely the pastor of that congregation. He was laboring for them even while gone, praying for them earnestly. Paul calls on the congregation there in Colossae to treasure and value this faithful pastor whom they have in the Lord. Because there was that temptation in Colossae to abandon the faithful teaching of Christ that was there's through this faithful man Epaphras.

I wish we had time to speak more about each of these other individuals. But let these few serve as an example and an encouragement to us.

Those of you who know Miley Cyrus probably know what really grotesque things she has done. In an interview once she talked about how she has to do this. How she has to get more and more extreme, in the way she dresses, in her haircuts, in her music videos, because otherwise the media doesn't pay attention to her. In other words she is constantly seeking the fame and praise of men, and it is a worthless thing because even if they give it one day it is gone another.

Opposed to that we have here only a single word of praise from Paul yes but more than that from the Holy Spirit. Paul and the Holy Spirit rejoice in what these men who serve Christ and have given their lives to the proclamation of the gospel. But that single word of praise from the Holy Spirit is worth far more than all the fame and glory and money of this life.

The public ministry, whether as teachers or as pastors is not an easy thing but it is well worth it, in order to share in the service of God's kingdom. I pray that some of our young men and women might be encouraged by the example of these men to dedicate their lives to the public ministry, and that all of us might be encouraged and strengthened by their example to renew our efforts here in Markesan, so that in whatever way Christ might be preached.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen