

Final Greetings: Paul's Companions

Colossians 4:7-18

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Tychicus, a beloved brother, faithful minister, and fellow servant in the Lord, will tell you all the news about me. I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that he may know your circumstances and comfort your hearts, with Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will make known to you all things which are happening here.

Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, with Mark the cousin of Barnabas (about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him), 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. 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. For I bear him witness that he has a great zeal for you, and those who are in Laodicea, and those in Hierapolis. Luke the beloved physician and Demas greet you. Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea, and Nymphas and the church that is in his house.

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. And say to Archippus, "Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it."

This salutation by my own hand — Paul. Remember my chains. Grace be with you. Amen.

Let us come before the Lord in prayer. Father, we ask now that You would help us, Lord, to come to Your Word with a heart that is ready to receive the Word of truth. I pray, Heavenly Father, that You would send the Holy Spirit to enlighten the eyes of our understanding and to make alive the truth of the Word of God. That we would leave this place knowing that we have met with the Lord, been challenged by the Word of truth, and have grown in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. And we look to You, Lord, now because in us, that is in our flesh, dwells no good thing.

And without You, Lord, we can do nothing. And so we come to You asking that You would help us, for You are our God. And we pray that You would strengthen us and that You would uphold us by Your right hand. And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, we come now to this final part of the epistle, which I will break up this week and probably have another two sermons in the next following weeks. But it comes to this section of the final greetings and the closing exhortations of this fabulous and really God-magnifying epistle. And Paul's endings are probably one of the most overlooked sections of any epistle of Paul, if you are as honest as we should be. We're usually, when we come to this, our reading speeds up when it should probably slow down. Usually, when we come to this, we're like, "Do I really have to read the last parts of this chapter? This is the time where it's like, okay, what's next, Colossians? Let's move on." And so, this we need to stop and reflect on.

I think with coming to the portions of God's Word, we should understand what the Scripture teaches when it says that the Word of God is inspired by God. It's God-breathed, and it is profitable. All Scripture is profitable for us. All Scripture is inspired by God. All Scripture is valuable for us for doctrine, for correction, for reproof, for instruction in righteousness. And to be quite honest, as I came to this text myself, I had to put the brakes on and ask myself, "Lord, what is it here that You want the church to learn? What is it here that You want us to know from this text of Scripture that is so easily neglected?"

The end parts of Paul's epistles, the final greetings that are part of Paul's epistles, are often neglected in a similar way that the appendix of the back of a book is neglected or even a footnote is neglected right there at the bottom of the page. But by my own experience, sometimes some of the most valuable truth that shed light on what's in the book is found in the footnote. Some of the most valuable truths that would help us are usually there at the appendix, and they shed light on what's been said already. And I think in the same way, this section, you will see, does the same.

And so, what is the purpose of these final greetings? Why did the Holy Spirit inspire Paul to write final greetings? It's important to realize that there are many purposes here to the final greetings. Firstly, there's one, and that is to encourage the hearts of the letter's recipients. Basically, reminding them that they are part of something bigger than themselves. In local churches, it's easy to think that this is it and there's not much going on out there. But then, when Paul from the prison cell writes a letter and starts mentioning names of people that aren't among us, that are praying for us, that are sending their greetings to us, we all of a sudden start to take a step back and realize that God's work is bigger than us and that

God is doing things in other places, and what's happening there, people are thinking also about us.

So not only does it serve to help us have a kingdom mindset, but it also helps the church realize that they haven't been forgotten about. A greeting is a way of communicating that I acknowledge you, and that we are praying for you, we care for you. That's what we do when we greet people. And Paul's reminding the church here that there is a bunch of Christians outside of Colossae that are also in Christ, maybe not in Colossae, but they're in Christ and they're in maybe Ephesus or they're in Rome, and they're thinking about you and they're sending their greetings to us, we all of a sudden start to take a step back and realize that God's work is bigger than us and that God is doing things in other places, and what's happening there, people are thinking also about us.

So not only does it serve to help us have a kingdom mindset, but it also helps the church realize that they haven't been forgotten about. A greeting is a way of communicating that I acknowledge you and that we are praying for you, we care for you. That's what we do when we greet people. And Paul's reminding the church here that there is a bunch of Christians outside of Colossae that are also in Christ, maybe not in Colossae, but they're in Christ and they're in maybe Ephesus or they're in Rome, and they're thinking about you and they're sending their greetings towards you. And that serves the church in such a way as to encourage their hearts, to help them remember that there are people that think about them, which also then in turn helps them be affirmed in their love, to realize that there are saints who love us, God's people.

These parts of the epistles, for us 2000 years later, as it were, we look at them thinking, "What's the purpose?" But imagine you were sitting there in Colossae in the days of the persecuted church, where you don't know if that brother that has left you has died since the last time you saw him, where there's no Facebook and WhatsApp and Telegram, where you just, in a moment's time, things go through the web and you can know what everyone's doing in every place. There's no video calls; you wait for one letter. That may not make it, as many letters didn't make it, and it finally arrives there, and there you hear the names of the people that you love, that you perhaps have met, and maybe the names of people that you do not really know, that they're praying for you and thinking about you. We've lost the love or the affection that comes from letters and communication because of how much communication is available to us today and how easy it is to communicate. But put yourself there in the shoes of those early church believers that receive this telegram, as it were, to receive this letter and would hear the names of those people that perhaps ministered amongst them at one point and that they had been praying for.

But the other thing that these final greetings do is that they set before us examples of people. Here we have the Apostle Paul, who is the builder of the Church of Jesus Christ, and here he mentions names of people, and he commends them and sets them before the church as an example. Remember, this letter is not going only to Colossae, but it's going to Heropolis and it's going to Laodicea. And Paul is saying, "These people, Epaphras, are praying, laboring fervently for you in prayer. This is a man that is faithful; receive him. This is a brother here that is doing this and doing that." And the church that sits there, maybe the new Christians, can see examples of what God's people are to be doing and what God's people do. And that's important for us even now, 2000 years later, to learn of these examples.

But lastly, as one commentator put it, and I think it is a very valuable lesson to learn from these final readings, is this: that the greetings remind us that we are dealing not with an abstract theological treatise but with a real letter to real people. If you've been tracking this series on Colossians, we have touched on some of the highest doctrine in all of Scripture that concerns the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ is exalted. This is high Christology in the book of Colossians. Yet here, in the book of Colossians, this is not written to the scholastic scholars that sit in seminaries – not that they're doing anything wrong by doing that – but this is written to real people with real problems living in a real world, facing real battles. And this doctrine, which is so high, which is so majestic, we are reminded that it's written just to ordinary people. People that are just being greeted, and you are here, and this person says hi to this person, say hi to that person, this person over here. And what we do is when we get stuck in this epistle, we glory in the doctrine and we magnify its truths and we rejoice in it, but sometimes we forget about the practical implication that it has to bear on the lives of ordinary people. These truths were shared with slaves, shared with ordinary people, husbands, wives, children. This epistle of the highest doctrine was written to the most lowliest of people, and it's encouragement to us to remind us in the greetings that what we're dealing with here is with practical help for all peoples. And this is what we must never forget. This is not about theological debate as much as it is about practical instruction for the building up of the Church of Jesus Christ. And so, may it bring us back, as it were, down to that place of rejoicing in the practical parts of this epistle as we've been looking at through the last several weeks.

But another thing that I want to focus on particularly today is that this lets us into the ministry of the Apostle Paul more than all that we've considered in the entire epistle. Up until this point, we've had teaching, teaching, teaching, and Paul's been teaching us and making application to us. But now, we get let in, and as it were, we peer through the window into the window of Paul's ministry, and we can see who Paul worked with, how Paul

ministered, and we can learn a little bit about how Paul viewed the Christian ministry. And I think that's very, very valuable to the church today, and I'm hoping that we can do that today as we look at this. Who did Paul work with? Who were Paul's companions? And not only who were his companions, how is it that Paul ministered? In what ways did Paul minister? How can we learn from this text of Scripture?

And so, I want us to take the time to look at that. What does this portion of Scripture tell us about Paul's ministry? Well, let's begin by looking in this section at verse number 7. Immediately in the final greetings, we are introduced to a man by the name of Tychicus and a man by the name of Onesimus, and then we get on to Aristarchus, Mark, Justice, Epaphras, and we have all these lists of people, of names, names of individuals. And what it immediately tells us and shows us is this: that the Apostle Paul was a man who worked with others. He was a man who had companions. He was a man who entrusted the work of the ministry to other people. He was not one who did all the work himself. Remember, he's sending Tychicus and Onesimus to go and bear word about Paul and where he's at and what he's going through. He's sending them out to go and do this. Something that Paul couldn't do himself, he was entrusting to others to do. Straight away, that lets us into the heart and mind of the Apostle. He was a man that was employing people to do the work of the Lord. He was a man who was not thinking of himself as a soloist or someone who was to bear the whole burden of the Christian ministry. But he was a man who realized that God's work is teamwork, and it involves the body of Jesus Christ.

And straight away, we see that Paul has this idea. He says, "Here's Tychicus, here's Onesimus. I'm going to send them to you to tell you about what's happening with me." And then he goes on to say, "I have fellows here," and he mentions their names. "I have Justice, and I have Mark, and I have others. These are my fellows. I have a fellow laborer also, whose name is Epaphras." And what is he telling us? We see in the life of the ministry of the Apostle Paul that he was not alone in the work of God. He was one who employed others in the work, which says a lot about the man. It says that he was not insecure. A man who seeks to take control of the Christian ministry and govern everything himself will not find it easy to hand on things to others for it to be done. Paul himself actually encourages the people to go and do work for him. And he was not insecure that it may not work out exactly the way that he had planned it to work out.

You see, the issue of insecurity in Christian ministry and authority is that there's a micromanagement, as it were, and there's a fear in letting people go and represent you or say something in case it doesn't come out exactly the way you would like to say it. And that ends up causing a lot of insecurity in the hearts of the person that's leading. But Paul was not that

way. Paul was a man that realized that it's okay, God's in control. God is sovereign. God is ruling, and this work is His work. This is His kingdom. He is Lord of His own kingdom. I'm not building my own little empire, trying to micromanage the people under me. I'm happy to have servants who serve and do the work of God for the glory and the kingdom of God.

And the Apostle Paul was not a lone ranger, and that's an encouragement to us to see in his life and in his ministry. A lesson to learn about the work of the Lord Jesus Christ: He calls men His fellows. Look at verse number 10. He says in verse 10, "Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, Mark the cousin of Barnabas, Jesus who is called Justice." He said these, plural, are my only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are of the circumcision. There are others that were Gentiles, but they were the Jewish believers that were there, that were helping him, and they were called fellow workers.

This tells us that Paul didn't have a view of himself that was so grand, this grandiosity kind of view whereby he is the only one that's working. He's the only one that's imprisoned. He is the only one that is going through what he's going through. No, he was somebody that realized that I have fellows and other fellows that have suffered just like I have. I have other people that have been in prison just like I have. There have been other Christians that have been serving just like I have. There are other people that have been laboring just like I have. And Paul says, "I commend them to you, and I want you to know that they are my fellow laborers."

This lets us into the companions of the Apostle and tells us and reveals to us how he was a team player. And may God give us that same attitude in the work of Christian ministry. But secondly, what we also learn in this is that Paul was affectionate with the people that he worked with. In this text of Scripture, I look at verse number seven. He says, "Tychicus, a beloved brother," and then he goes on to mention not only Tychicus as a beloved brother but in verse number nine, he talks of Onesimus as a beloved brother, and also in verse number 14, he calls Luke the beloved physician.

Now, I want us to realize that what Paul is saying when he says these are my beloved brothers is a very high, affectionate term. He's saying these are my dear brothers, the brothers of my love. That is affection. Paul's heart yearned for the people. He loved them. He wasn't just working for the sake of working with them because it's like on this corporate level, as it were, or just on this strictly business relationship. Paul's heart is opened here because these people are beloved, and Paul always uses this language to describe, and really what it does is it lets us into the heart of Paul to describe how enlarged his heart was to the Christian people.

Paul says, "These are my beloved brothers. This is my beloved physician." His heart was enlarged. In chapter 3 of this same epistle, he also calls this church beloved. They were his beloved. They were beloved not only of himself but they were beloved of God. Paul says this to the Corinthians as well. In 2 Corinthians chapter 6, Paul was getting resistance from the people there at Corinth regarding his ministry, and they were perhaps even questioning. He was questioning whether they really loved him, and this is how Paul writes to them. He says, "Our heart is wide open. You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted by your own affections."

You know, Paul is saying, "Our heart of love is open wide to you. The tension and restriction that exists in relationship rests on the part of you, O people of Corinth. Your heart is where the restriction lies. It's in your affection that there is no passion for me."

And what Paul could say is that he could stand there before the church and clearly call out these people as beloved brethren because his heart was enlarged for God's people. And it's a beautiful thing to realize that Paul wasn't in it just because, "Well, God called me to do this, and I just got to do this, and that's it." He loved the people that he served. He loved the people that he ministered to. He loved God, and he loved God's people, and it comes out with affectionate terms toward them.

So much so that the Apostle Paul, when he describes all his perils that he went through – you read it sometime in 2 Corinthians 11 on your own time – but he goes, "In perils of famine and out in the shipwreck and being whipped and scourged." You look at this, and you think, "How does this guy go through all this?" You know what he says, though? He says, "You know what one of the major things that I battle with?" He said, "You know what comes upon me daily? Oh, the scourging comes upon me once in a while. The shipwrecks only happen a few times. The hunger here and there, but you know what happens to me daily?" He goes, "What comes upon me daily is this: my deep concern for all the churches." He says, "Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?"

I just want us to understand this for a moment. Here is the Apostle Paul. The man, if in one sense in terms of his ability and skill and enjoyment of power, may not have needed really anybody. If he didn't want to use anybody and didn't have a love for anybody, he's the kind of guy that could have just done everything on his own. He could have probably done everything on his own in terms of his strength and his ability and his capacity. But he's a man who loved people so dearly, he goes, "I am anxious not about the stripes on my back but about the church. You want to know what I worry about when I can't sleep? You're saying it's the church of Jesus Christ.

How are the people doing? How are the brethren going? Who is weak, and I'm not weak also? Who stumbles, and I don't burn with indignation?"

I want us to see that for a moment. When this man says, "My beloved brother," he doesn't just mean that to tack it on as a kind of word just on the end of a bit of an adjective, always "my beloved brother," just like that, like it doesn't really mean anything. When he says this, you know what? His heart is burning for these people. He loves them. His affection is towards them, and it teaches us a lot about the way he served.

Now, who did Paul work with? That's a really important question. Did Paul work with anybody? Was Paul the kind of person that just said, "Whoever comes and wants to work with me, I'll work with them," or "We're just anybody can work in the kingdom of God"? Was that his attitude, or was he more concerned about the character of the people with whom he was working? This is what we also see about Paul's ministry: it wasn't just this "have a go," and it wasn't just this idea of, "Hey, there's no checks and qualifications for Christian work." We have too many adjectives in this portion of the epistle that we've just read to think that Paul was undiscerning in the people that he ministered with.

Let's consider some of those just for a moment. We've been talking about the word "beloved," but that word "beloved" is followed by the word "brother," and what we learn from the people that Paul was companions with and worked with in the ministry is that they were brothers. And what Paul means by that is that they were people who had true faith in Jesus Christ. He was not talking about the fact that we are all brothers in the sense that we were all created. He was not talking about the fact that it's just because you call me brother, therefore you are brother. Paul realized that in the work of the Christian ministry, this is a work of the children of God who have been saved by the grace of God, who have a relationship with God Himself. Paul worked with what he called brethren, brothers.

Now, did Paul always get that right? Well, in this epistle, we have a man by the name of Demas, and we realize that Paul wasn't sitting there just making sure that he was checking everyone, you know, right around, as it were. We have Demas here, and we know that Demas was one who forsook him and forsook the Lord, essentially having loved this present world. And so, we realize that Paul didn't have an infallible knowledge as to who belonged to God and who didn't belong to God. That's a very unhealthy way of doing Christian ministry, trying to really work out whether everybody is saved, as if you are the final decider of whether someone is saved or the one that declares people to be saved.

But what Paul was concerned about is that there was a credible profes-

sion of the people that he worked with, so much so that he was confident to call them brethren, that he could call them brother, that he could say, "Receive this person in the Lord." And Paul, we see that in this epistle, in this part of the epistle, he uses the word "brother" three times as referring to those that he was working with. There was a brotherhood of believers, a filial communion that was due to their common relationship with God. And so, he worked with Christians.

But secondly, what we also see is that he not only worked with brothers, but he worked with faithful brothers. Look at verse number seven of this chapter: "Tychicus, a beloved brother, faithful, a faithful minister, fellow servant in the Lord." He worked with the faithful. Verse 9: "with Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother." You know, Paul said of Tychicus and Onesimus that they were worthy of commendation, not only as brothers but as faithful brothers. Faithful, faithful. Faithfulness was of paramount importance to the Apostle Paul. He was concerned about the faithfulness of God's people, people that were faithful to God.

What is faithfulness? Faithfulness is having a character of trustworthiness, that there is a continuing in obedience to God despite the outside pressures that will seek to turn us from doing the things that God has called us and given us to do. Faithfulness is the consistent diligence, steadiness, trustworthiness of a man that is committed, or a woman that is committed, to obedience to Jesus Christ, that will not be shaken by storm, that will not be shaken by opposition, but one who will steadily follow in the ways and the commandments of his Lord and Savior. They were trustworthy servants.

He said to Onesimus and Tychicus, "I want you to take what is happening with me, tell the church there what's happening with me." Think about that. How many people would you entrust your reputation to? How many people would you say to, "I want you to go to this place and tell them everything you know about me and what's happening with me right now"? You got to trust them, right? Were they going to speak the truth? Are they going to tell a lie? Are they going to put things in a certain way that will make me look bad? Or are they going to try and overthrow what I'm trying to do here in the work of God? Or will they faithfully testify to what is happening in my life right now?

He even entrusted them with the epistle, to carry the word of truth which he had written to that place. There was an entrustment there because they were faithful. And Paul repeats this in Corinthians: "Moreover, it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful, that a Christian, that a person, that one who is a follower of Jesus Christ, a steward of God, whom God has committed and entrusted things to, that they be found faithful, faithful."

Paul worked with those who were faithful. This is not only important to Paul; this was important to the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself said, "He that is faithful in the little will be faithful in the much." And my friends, do not be mistaken, but on the final day when we stand before our Savior and Judge, the very thing by which He would judge us for and commend those who are true believers in Him is for their faithfulness. He will look into the eyes of His faithful servants, and He will say, "Well done, My good and faithful servants." Those who are not faithful servants are the ones that evidence that they do not belong to God. In that same passage of Scripture, those that have their portion with the hypocrites are taught that faithfulness is of high priority in Christian service and Christian work, and should be marked out by all who believe in Jesus Christ.

Paul worked with those who were brothers, those who were faithful, and those who were humble. In verse 7 and verse 12 of the ending of this epistle, we have reference to fellow servants. These are people that were slaves of Jesus Christ, fellow servants not of a household, but of a spiritual household, the household of God. Paul said these are my fellow servants, these are people that also labor with me in humility under the lordship of Jesus Christ. These are also fellow do losses, fellow slaves, and servants of Jesus Christ. He worked with those that were humble, those that had the attitude of Zebedee's sons, who are not welcome in the work of Jesus Christ.

Remember when the sons of Zebedee and their mother came and said, "Hey, grant to my sons that one may sit on Your right hand, Jesus, and one may sit on Your left hand." And what did Jesus reply to them? He said, "But whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant, and whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave." What does He say? "Just as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give His life a ransom for many." You know, Jesus is saying, in My kingdom, there are not lords, there are servants, for I am Lord alone. And Paul says, "I'm working with people that are brothers, I'm working with the faithful, and I'm working with faithful, humble servants that are part of the brotherhood of the Christian faith."

Finally, Paul also works with the diligent. In verse 11, he says, "In Jesus, who is called Justus, these are my only fellow workers for the kingdom of God." Look at verse 12 of this same chapter, "This is Epaphras, who is one of you, a bondservant of Christ. There you go, a servant, a humble servant, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers." You know, Paul is saying that my companions are made up of the brethren that are faithful, that are servants, and that are workers in the kingdom of God. They are laborers in God's harvest and in God's vineyard. They are not people that are slothful in the service of the Lord. He labors fervently in prayers, and

Paul was not a companion of the slothful.

In the last section of what I want to consider here is who Paul was not afraid to work with. So, we looked at the fact that Paul is happy to work with these kinds of people that are godly, people that are set apart. But who is it that he's not afraid to work with? I think this is also a very important insight into the life of the Apostle Paul's ministry.

Paul was not afraid to work with new converts. He was not afraid and suspicious of people that professed newly their faith in Jesus Christ. Here we have a man by the name of Onesimus in verse 7, who was Philemon's runaway slave. He had left the household of Philemon as an unfaithful servant and an unbeliever. He ran away from the household of Philemon, and somehow, in God's providence, he ends up meeting the Apostle Paul. The Apostle Paul shares Christ Jesus with him, and he is converted and comes to newfound faith in Jesus Christ. Paul says he is no longer a slave but a beloved brother, and I am going to send him back to you with Tychicus. I want you, Philemon, to receive him in the Lord, not as a slave but as a brother.

I want you to think about what that means. Here is the Apostle Paul, looking at a new convert and saying to a new convert, "Receive these brothers down here; receive this new convert in the Lord."

You know what it tells us about Paul? Paul believed that the gospel he preached was truly the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believed. He was not someone that just saw someone profess Jesus Christ and was completely suspicious. He saw the work of grace in his heart, he saw the fruits of righteousness which are by Christ Jesus, and he didn't say to Tychicus, "Don't worry about Onesimus, I don't know about him." He said, "I've seen the grace of God in his life; take him with you. Yes, don't let him lead, as it were, but let him work with Tychicus. Get him to go with you, Tychicus, back to the church at Colossae, and he's a faithful brother that will be a blessing to you." Think about that: a new convert being called a faithful brother by the Apostle Paul himself.

You know, that tells us the Apostle Paul believed in the power of the cross of Jesus Christ. I think so many times we preach a gospel, and we see people come to Christ, but we wonder if that power actually has saved people. We see transformation, we see God doing a work in their hearts, but we have this sometimes ugly suspicion that doesn't fuel the fire of those who are new believers in Jesus Christ, but rather quenches the fire that is freshly burning in their hearts. But Paul didn't do that; he saw a man newly converted and saw that there was a work that he could do that was within his capacity under the engagement of Tychicus, and he sends him back with

him.

All these things lead us into the heart and mind of Paul. And lastly, what we see here in verse 10 is that there was a man by the name of Mark, the cousin of Barnabas, that Paul says to the church at Colossae, "When he comes to you, receive him." If you've read the book of Acts, you'll find that Mark was one that Paul regarded as unfaithful at a certain point. Paul works with the fallen. Here, Paul and Barnabas in Acts 15 have a contention whether or not Mark, John Mark, is fit for the Christian ministry or not, and Paul says, "No, he's not. I don't think he's ready at this time." Barnabas says, "Yes, I want to take him with us." Paul said, "He left us at Pamphylia; he's not coming with us." And Paul and Barnabas have a sharp contention, and they part ways: Paul takes Silas, Barnabas takes his cousin Mark.

Now, Paul, the very one that said no to John Mark, now says regarding John Mark, "When he comes to Colossae, I want you to welcome him. I want you to receive him. When he comes to you, receive him as a faithful brother, basically receive him into your fellowship." At one point, perhaps, Paul couldn't say that, but now, at this point, he could. And that teaches us something about the Apostle Paul. It teaches us that whenever he seemed not to receive somebody in a certain ministry, it wasn't personal. He was concerned for the kingdom of God and for the work of God. He wasn't seeking to just disown people or not see the potential in people, but if someone wasn't where they were meant to be, he would acknowledge that, and then, in due course, he was hopeful that the grace of God would work, and he would help and support that to the point that they would be reinstated into Christian ministry.

And I think that's a beautiful picture of grace in Christian ministry and being gracious with people. It wasn't just writing John Mark off, saying, "Because you failed once, I don't know if I could ever trust you again." But he realized that it's not only the grace of God that can save, but it's the grace of God that can sanctify. And here, he says, "I've heard reports about John Mark; you receive him." Later on, in 2 Timothy, he says, "He's profitable unto me," which, at one point, he wasn't.

So, what do we learn from all these things for us here as Christians in this century? We learn this: that if the Scripture is inspired, and if the Word of God teaches us of the people that Paul was working with and regarded as faithful for Christian ministry, then it only naturally applies, and we can also deduce that the people that Paul saw fit for Christian ministry in the categories of faithful and these kinds of things are the same people that Jesus sees fit for Christian ministry.

What we can learn from this is that if Paul is working with companions who are faithful, humble laborers and servants of Jesus Christ, then we can see that this is also what God is looking for in His service in the kingdom of God.

We must never forget that God is not looking for great intellects or people of great social status. He's not looking for people of popularity, but rather, as 2 Chronicles puts it to us, it says this: "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout all the earth to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him." If Paul and Jesus are looking for the faithful, we can have confidence that God Himself is looking for the faithful to carry out His work in the vineyard.

We may not have great intellects, we may not have great physical capacity, we may not have great physical strength, but what we do know and can be certain of is that if we are faithful Christians who love God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and you put that person in the hand of Almighty God, He will use them to fulfill His purposes in the world. That should be an encouragement to us, dear people of God, that the Christian ministry is not about professionalism, nor is it about your set of skills, nor is it about your ability to perform. Christian ministry is about faithful, diligent, humble servants of Jesus Christ that will say to the Lord, "Give me the towel and tell me what to do, and I'll do it for Your kingdom."

I think if we will be honest with ourselves, the Christian Church today has gotten rid of those categories in examining people that are right for Christian ministry and have simply looked, as the children of Israel looked to Saul, they say, "Give me a man who is head and shoulders above the rest, and we'll make him king. Give me a man that stands tall and perhaps can speak and perhaps can do this and perhaps can do that and has all these natural abilities, and I think this will be the man that we want to follow." But God says, "You sought out a man like Saul when Saul was not the one that I had chosen." God had chosen a little ruddy shepherd boy that was not even considered by Samuel as the one that was a first choice for ministry.

You remember the Prophet Samuel that goes into the house of Jesse and he says to the sons of Jesse, "Bring your sons before me because truly the Lord's anointed is here." He goes past one, "No, not this one," God says. "Well, surely it's this one." "Oh no, it's not that one. Surely it's this one." And it's so much that Samuel asks Jesse, "Do you have any other sons? Because God sent me here, I know, but I don't seem to be finding the Lord's anointed here." And he says, "Yes, I do. I have a young shepherd boy." David was probably about 16 or 17 years of age, and he says, "Bring him to me." And God was the one who said, "This is the Lord's anointed."

I just say this: the Christian Church sometimes is just as blind as Samuel, rocking up to the household of Jesse, not taking the Word of God as the criteria by which we choose people in the service of God, but rather looking with the eyes of the natural man. "If this man will make a good businessman, maybe he'd make a good pastor. If this man is a good public speaker in a natural realm, oh, then maybe he could make a good preacher." But we lose sight of the very things that God has given us to look for. What has God taught us to look for? Gifts, the grace of God, and spiritual qualifications of godliness, of holiness, and of Christian living. These were the things that Paul was eyeing out. These were the things that Paul incorporated in making companions of the people that he worked with, not just anyone, but also not just the ones that were head and shoulders above the rest in the world around us.

You might say here today, "I want to serve the Lord, but I've been unprofitable. You don't understand what I've done, even as a Christian. I've been unprofitable to the Lord in my past service." I tell you, my friend, if you are like John Mark, you can be profitable again for the Christian ministry. Your past failings are not the end of the service of God. Paul and Jesus will call those who are faithful, humble servants that will repent and turn and work in God's harvest field.

You might say, "Well, you don't understand who I've been before I met the Lord. I've done a lot of things in my past life that I don't know if God will receive me and want me to serve in His harvest field." Do I need to remind you of Onesimus? In fact, do I need to even remind you of the man who wrote this epistle himself, who persecuted the Church of God, hailing people into prison and consenting unto their death?

He writes here as a man that has been touched by the grace of God, and he knows what that means. You say, "Well, you don't understand my past life." Well, my friends, do you understand the grace of God? Do you know, do you hear the voice of God saying to you, "Have not I forgiven you?" Can't you hear the voice of God saying to you, "Where are your accusers? Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more." Don't you hear the voice of the Lord saying to you that My grace is greater than your sin? Don't you hear the blood of Jesus Christ crying out that your sins and iniquities I will remember no more through the blood of that everlasting covenant?

My friends, there is no reason for why you cannot take up the towel and follow and serve Jesus Christ. There is no excuse by which you can say before God this hour that my sins can't be forgiven and that God won't receive me into work. My friends, do not insult the power of the cross of Jesus Christ. His power saves; His blood cleanses from all unrighteousness.

We live in a day, lastly, the last bit of application, where Christian churches are more concerned about carnal qualities than they are about Christian qualities. And I tell you this, it's a problem. It's about giving people a go but not considering who are the people that are being given a go, and it does disservice to the cause of Jesus Christ. There are many Christian churches today that, because someone can play an instrument well, they get to serve in the Christian Church. Are they brothers? Are they faithful? Are they humble? Are they people that love and follow the Lord Jesus Christ, or are they seeking praise? The best thing is to get the mic, and it's a problem. We wonder why the church is dry, why there's no power in Christian ministry now, because the very things that we're considering as qualities by which we may put someone in service are not the things that God is looking for.

And I think we need to reorient our vision, to study the Word of God in such a way that lets us into the life of Paul, into the heart of Jesus, as to the very ones that He sees fit for service in His kingdom. And I think the problem with many Christian churches today is that everything they're looking for, they're missing the Davids. They're looking for the talents and missing the grace and power of God, and it's a problem that the Church of Jesus Christ needs to repent of.

Let me finish with this verse in closing that was read to us this morning, which helps us really think about these things. He says, "For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence" (1 Corinthians 1:26-29).

God saves people that are most unlikely, the low lives of society, as it were, and they get filtered into the Christian Church once they are believers in Jesus Christ. And you know what? God says these are the people that I've called, that I have chosen, that I expect to serve and love Me and carry out My work. You know why? So no one can glory in God's presence, but they understand that this is the work of God, this is the grace of God, and that grace and work is praised forevermore, not the power of human wisdom, not the power of human might, not the strength of man's intellect, but what gets praised in the end of it all is the grace of Jesus Christ by which He saved us and has called us and equips us for His work. Let us pray.