

THE PEOPLE WHOM GOD USES  
COLOSSIANS 4:7-18

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

The attention of the nation has been directed toward Afghanistan in the last few weeks. It has been difficult for us to see a twenty year investment in lives and money end up with a government controlled by a terrorist organization that may provide a breeding ground for more terrorists who will try to mount attacks against our country. How is it that a ragtag group of fighters could end up forcing out a modern army?

There are several answers to that question. Part of the answer, it seems to me, has to do with commitment. A man by the name of Carter Markasian, who has served as an advisor to several US military leaders in Afghanistan, says, **“More Afghans were willing to serve on behalf of the government than the Taliban. But more Afghans were willing to kill and be killed for the Taliban. That edge made a difference on the battlefield.”** (Politico, 7/6/2021)

There is another kind of commitment to be found in Afghanistan. In July several Afghan pastors and church leaders decided to register with the government as Christians. In this Islamic republic it was already illegal for Afghans to convert to Christianity. But these Christians felt compelled to do it for the sake of future generations. They were immediately interviewed by government authorities but not arrested. Now the Taliban has taken over and is searching for Christians..

In one village just taken over by the Taliban a 14-year-old daughter was ripped away from her Christian family and put into sexual servitude. Another Christian's home was raided and Christian literature was confiscated. Such is the cost of Christian commitment in Afghanistan. (Mark Morris, The Gospel Coalition, 8/16/2021)

There is a certain respect that people get when they are willing to die for a cause. The God who is really there is looking for committed people. He is looking for people whom He can use. He is looking for people who are willing to die for Him. But He is hardly seeking terrorists and killers. As we have seen in our study of Colossians, it is our foundational beliefs which are crucial. Who, or what, is the object of our commitment? Paul wrote this letter largely to counter false teachers seeking to lead the Christians astray in Colossae with beliefs which did not correspond to reality.

The passage before us this morning tells us important things about the kind of people whom God uses. We are going to examine this with the intention of discovering what qualities and behaviors we might seek to develop so that we might be useful to Him, so that our lives might have some significance in the view of eternity.

We have come to the last message in our study of the New Testament Book of Colossians. Next week our missionary to Mormons will be with us. After that we will begin a study of the kings of Judah from 2 Chronicles.

We have seen that the Apostle Paul wrote Colossians in response to reports from the small church in the town of Colossae in western Asia Minor that teachers there were saying wrong things about the message of Christianity. So in the first two chapters of Colossians Paul summarizes the basics of the Christian faith, with a special emphasis on the sovereignty of Christ. In the last two chapters he applies this Christian doctrine to the daily circumstances that Christians face. In the verses before us today he gives his final greetings and instructions. In the process we learn something about the kind of people whom God uses.

I.

In vv. 7-9 we learn about THE GOERS. (PROJECTOR ON--- I. THE GOERS) We learn something about the two people whom Paul sends to Colossae with this letter. First, we find out about Tychicus. Verses 7 & 8 (p. 985 in ESV Bibles) tell us, **“Tychicus will tell you all about my activities. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts...”**

The name of this guy appears five times in the New Testament. “Tychicus” originally meant “fortuitous” or “fortunate.” (PROJECTOR ON--- ACTS 20:4) In Acts #20 v. 4 Tychicus is mentioned as one of the men who went with Paul from Greece to Jerusalem at the end of his third missionary trip to bring a financial contribution from the European Christians to the Jewish Christians in Israel. (PROVINCE OF ASIA) Tychicus is also noted as being from the Roman province of Asia in Asia Minor. Perhaps he was converted to Christ during Paul’s ministry in Ephesus, which was in Asia.

Acts tells us that Paul is arrested by the Romans after he gets to Jerusalem. (CAESAREA-ROME TRIP) He spends two years in jail in Caesarea. Then he is shipped off to Rome. It is from Rome that Paul is writing this letter to the Colossians. Our letter to the Colossians indicates that Tychicus is with him in Rome. We don’t know if he was also with Paul during the preceding two year imprisonment in Caesarea.

(EPHESIANS 6:21) In Ephesians #6 v. 21, which is probably written about the same time as Colossians, Paul indicates that Tychicus is also going to drop off that letter to the Christians at Ephesus, probably on the same trip as the one in which he is delivering the letter to the Colossians.

Paul is tried before Nero’s court at the end of this time of imprisonment in Rome. Apparently he is released. A couple of years later he is arrested and imprisoned in Rome again. (CRETE MAP) From there he writes a letter to Titus, who is serving as a pastor on the island of Crete. In Titus #3 v. 12 (TITUS 3:12) Paul says that he is going to send either Tychicus or another guy to serve as a kind of interim pastor in the place of Titus, so that Titus can come and see Paul in Rome.

(2 TIMOTHY 4:12) A bit later Paul writes 2 Timothy. In #4 v. 12 he says that he is sending Tychicus to Timothy in Ephesus, apparently so that Timothy can come to visit Paul in Rome. (EPHESUS ROME MAP)

In our passage Paul describes Tychicus as a “beloved brother” and a “bond-servant in the Lord” and a “faithful minister.” What stands out about Tychicus in the Biblical record is not that he is a great preacher or a brilliant teacher or a gifted evangelist or a great athlete, but simply that he is a guy who is a faithful servant, a servant motivated by his love for God and love for other people. He is a guy who is willing to help out wherever he is needed.

That is one of the things that God is looking for in the people whom He uses. Are you that kind of person? Are you willing to help out when and where help is needed in the cause of Christ? That may mean helping out as a caregiver in your extended family. It may mean volunteering to help in the nursery. It may mean pitching in to help clean up after a church event. It may mean seeking to be a witness in some kind of community organization.

The mission of Tychicus here is to carry this letter to Colossae (COLOSSAE MAP) and to tell the Christians about Paul’s condition and situation. In the process he is to provide encouragement to the believers there. Tychicus is a faithful servant. He is reliable. He is willing to pitch in wherever help is needed. He is the kind of person whom God is inclined to use.

In v. 9 we are told about Onesimus. Paul indicates that he is sending Onesimus to Colossae along with Tychicus. He calls him “**our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you.**” So Onesimus is also from Colossae. He is to join Tychicus in informing the congregation about Paul’s situation in Rome.

The name “Onesimus” means “useful.” It was a common name for slaves in the Roman Empire. It turns out that Onesimus was indeed a slave. For in the short, one chapter New Testament Book of Philemon Onesimus is a central character. Philemon was a slave owner and a Christian. He also lived in Colossae, and there was a church that met in his house. Perhaps the entire Colossian church met there. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Onesimus was Philemon’s slave. At some point he had run away from Philemon. Onesimus ended up in Rome. He somehow got connected with Paul and was converted to Christ. In v. 10 of Paul’s letter to Philemon he describes Onesimus as “**my child... whose father I became in my imprisonment.**” He had become valuable to Paul and the Christians at Rome.

Paul saw a need for Onesimus to be reconciled to his slave owner. So he sent him back to Colossae and to Philemon. In the letter to Philemon Paul told the master of Onesimus to receive him back as a brother. Furthermore Onesimus was to give a report and to participate with Tychicus in encouraging the congregation that met in Philemon’s home.

Would that not have been a fascinating scene to witness in terms of interpersonal relationships? Here was a former slave, a runaway slave, who was to give instruction and encouragement to the Christians who met in his slaveowner's house.

Onesimus, you see, was a law-breaker. Running away from a slave owner was a crime. Philemon could have had Onesimus killed. But God can use even law-breakers, if they will turn in faith to Christ. He can use even law-breakers from the lowest level of society. As we well know, he can use people behind bars and people who have been behind bars. He can use us no matter what kind of questionable background we have had,

II.

Onesimus and Tychicus were the goers. Paul was sending them to Colossae. The people described in vv. 10-14 are THE STAYERS. (PROJECTOR ON--- THE STAYERS) They are key Christians who are remaining with Paul in Rome.

In v. 10 mention is made of Aristarchus. Paul writes, "**Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you...**" We don't know a lot about Aristarchus. His name appears a couple of times in the Book of Acts. (THESSALONICA CORINTH MAP) He seems to have come from Thessalonica in Greece. Perhaps he was converted when Paul passed through there on his second missionary journey. A couple of years later he is at Ephesus (THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY) when Paul on his third missionary journey is there for two years. A riot breaks out at the end of that time. The rioters are upset because of the great influence that the Christians are having. They can't find Paul. But they do find Aristarchus and another guy. According to Acts #20 the rioters apprehend these two Christians and drag them into the Ephesus theater. (EPHESUS THEATER) Fortunately these Christians are let go a short time later.

Aristarchus is said to accompany Paul on his last trip to Jerusalem. Now he is with Paul in Rome. (PROJECTOR OFF) Paul describes Aristarchus as a fellow prisoner. It could be that he is also in chains, having been arrested with Paul. My guess is that Paul is speaking figuratively. Aristarchus is a faithful guy who is staying with Paul in his imprisonment and experiencing the same conditions as the apostle, who is chained to a Roman guard but who is living in his own rented apartment..

Aristarchus is thus included in the historical record not because of any particular talent or skill or singular accomplishment. He has a place in Biblical history because he was simply a devoted friend and a faithful, committed Christian.

Verse 10 also notes that Barnabas's cousin Mark sends his greetings. The Colossians are instructed to welcome him. John Mark was from Jerusalem. He was a young man when Jesus was conducting His public ministry. There is evidence that the Upper Room where the Last Supper happened was owned by his mother.

When Paul and Barnabas set out on their first missionary journey (PROJECTOR ON--- FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY), they brought Mark with them. But when they got to Perga, John Mark decided that he wanted to return to Jerusalem for reasons unknown

to us. When Paul and Barnabas were about to set out on their second missionary journey, Barnabas wanted to take Mark along, but Paul objected. He did not think that Mark was reliable, that he had a good reason to leave them on the first trip. (PROJECTOR OFF) Acts #15 vv. 37-40 tell us that the two leaders had a sharp disagreement about whether they should bring Mark along. So Paul and Barnabas split up. Paul took Silas with him. Barnabas took his cousin Mark along, as the two missionary teams headed out into different areas.

By the time of the writing of Colossians some twelve years later, Mark has regained Paul's favor. What does this tell us about the kind of person whom God uses? It tells us that He uses Christians who have been unreliable in the past. God is the God of the second chance--- and the third chance--- and the fourth chance. God is a forgiving God. It took time to regain Paul's favor. Probably it took some evidence of change before Barnabas was willing to take Mark along with him. But God can use us even when we have blown it, as long as we repent and show consistency over time.

In v. 11 Paul mentions a guy named Jesus Justus, who also sends his greetings. "Jesus" was a common name among Jews in the first century. We know nothing else about him. Paul adds in v. 11, **"These are the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me."**

Paul seems to be disappointed by the limited response to the gospel from his fellow Jews who are living in Rome. He has received a better response from Gentiles. Such it has been through most of the centuries since that time. Fortunately, in the last couple of decades there has been an increasingly positive response among Jewish people to the claim that Jesus is the Messiah. Our church in Connecticut was in an area populated with a lot of Jews. We were blessed to be able to baptize several of them.

Notice also in v. 11 that Paul refers to these people as "fellow workers." Paul saw himself as part of a cause that was bigger than himself. He saw Christianity as a team effort. God tends to use team players rather than lone rangers. Paul was involved with slaves and slave owners and Jews and former law breakers and now also Gentiles.

In vv. 12 & 13 Paul speaks about Epaphras: **"Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God. For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis."**

Epaphras is from Colossae. He is a Gentile. Chapter 1 v. 7 indicates that he is the one who brought the gospel to this area. So he is a founder of the church. Clearly he possessed evangelistic and speaking ability. He apparently had come to Paul in Rome to tell him about the church in Colossae and to ask for advice about how to handle the false teachers there. For some reason, he is going to stay in Rome for a while longer.

(COLOSSAE AND NEARBY TOWNS) The thing which stands out about Epaphras here is his concern for the Christians at Colossae and the nearby towns of Laodicea and Hierapolis. This concern is expressed in prayer. Paul describes that prayer as a struggle in their behalf. The verb he uses is the Greek word from which we get our word “agonize.” Epaphras agonized over other believers in prayer. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Perhaps you don't feel like you have any special ability or talent. Perhaps you feel like you have limited time and energy. We are reminded by the example of Epaphras that we can always pray. Prayer is not second class work. It is of vital importance in the work of God. The Lord is always looking for prayer warriors whom He can use.

Verse 14 describes another kind of “stayer.” Paul says that “Luke the beloved physician” sends his greetings. Here was a professional who had a specialized skill. He was another Gentile and a medical doctor.

The Book of Acts indicates that Luke joined Paul on his second missionary journey (PROJECTOR ON--- SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY) when the apostle came to Greece. It appears that Dr. Luke was with Paul for the rest of his journeys. Paul reveals in one of his letters that he has experienced some kind of health problem. He asked the Lord to take it away, but God chose not to do that. (PROJECTOR OFF) Perhaps Luke used his medical skills in a practical way to help Paul with his health issue. Perhaps he also used those skills in his missionary work, although Paul in some places was able to heal people supernaturally.

Luke also had writing ability. The Gospel According to Luke and the Book of Acts were both written by him. So God uses people with specialized skills who are willing to dedicate those skills to the Lord.

Many of you are familiar with Samaritan's Purse. This group is one of those Christian agencies that sends people with specialized skills to regions of the world struck by natural disasters. They recently sent three disaster relief units to Louisiana to help out in the wake of Hurricane Ida. They have set up an emergency field hospital in Haiti to treat victims of the recent earthquake there. There are other Christian organizations with skilled people who have also helped out.

Paul mentions in v. 14 without comment that Demas sends his greetings. A few years later Paul speaks of him again. (PROJECTOR ON--- 2 TIMOTHY 4:9-10) He writes, **“Do your best to come to me soon. For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica...”** At a crucial time when Paul really needed Demas around, he jumped ship. The apostle says that it was due to the pull of the world. He did not have a good reason to leave.

We Christians sometimes do that. At a crucial time, when our presence and involvement could really be used, we pull out. We leave a mate without a Biblical reason. We back away from a friend in trouble. We back out of some ministry responsibility when the going gets rough. Sometimes the reason may be categorized as love for this present

world. It is not for genuine, godly reasons, although I would suspect that Demas tried to convince Paul that it was God who was leading him back to Thessalonica.

III.

Finally, in vv. 15-18 we come to THE PEOPLE THERE. (III. THE PEOPLE THERE) We learn about a couple of the Christians who are there in the region of Clossae. In v. 15 the author writes, “**Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house.**” Perhaps Paul is implying that Nympha is in Laodicea, which was ten miles from Colossae.

It is important to realize that there were no church buildings until the middle of the third century. Before that time Christians met in people’s homes. In some towns there were not many Christians at first. Everybody met in one house. Bigger cities with faster growing churches met in several homes.

Here Paul recognizes a woman who hosts a church in her home. This is a woman with hospitality. At least once or twice a week she had to deal with people coming to her house. That meant cleaning up before and after. Maybe it meant food preparation. But she did all of this willingly, and God used her because of it.

God uses hospitable people who are willing to use their homes to promote the kingdom of God. Churches always need people who will host meetings, who will invite people over for meals to strengthen ties among Christians, who will take in missionaries on furlough and so on. One of the frustrations that our family has had it that we have not been able to have more people in our house because of our health challenges. We are grateful for those who are able to be hospitable in this way. God used Nympha because of her hospitality. He can use many of us also.

In v. 16 Paul says that this letter and another one coming from Laodicea should be read in the meeting of the church in Colossae. In v. 17 he says that Archippus should complete his ministry. The Book of Philemon suggests that he was a member of the household of Philemon. We are not told what kind of ministry Archippus was supposed to complete.

Then in v. 18 Paul says that he is signing the letter with his own hand. Somebody was taking dictation for Paul. Even back then there were problems with identity theft. In order to avoid the danger that other people might circulate letters, claiming that they are from Paul, he signs his personally. He concludes by asking the Colossians to remember his imprisonment. Probably he wants them to pray about it. He concludes, “**Grace be with you.**”

We see here at Rome and Colossae that God was using different kinds of people. He was using slaves and slave owners. He was using Jews and Gentiles. He was using people with special skills and people without special skills. He was using men and women. He was using law breakers and religious scholars.

The common denominator that these people shared was the quality of faithfulness, faithfulness to the Apostle Paul and faithfulness, more importantly, to the Lord. That is the key quality which God is always seeking in people who truly desire to be useful to Him. Moses had a great upbringing in the royal court of Egypt. But he killed a man and had to flee into the wilderness where he ended up being a shepherd. Nevertheless God saw qualities of faithfulness in him, and ultimately He used Moses to lead His people out of Egypt to the promised land.

David was a youngest son, a shepherd boy from the little town of Bethlehem. But God saw in him a heart of devotion to Him and qualities of faithfulness. In the end the Lord promoted him to become a great king in Israel.

Paul was a religious scholar. He was also a persecutor of the church. God saw potential in him. Once Paul was converted he began to display qualities of tenacious faithfulness that were to qualify him to become the apostle to the Gentiles and author of a significant part of the New Testament.

George Boldt (GEORGE BOLDT) was the manager of a small hotel in Philadelphia. One rainy night in 1891 an elderly couple came wandering in, looking for a room. George Boldt explained that there were three conventions in town and that his hotel was booked up. Out of compassion for this couple, He gave them his own room. The next morning when the man paid his bill, he told George that he was the kind of manager that he would like to employ some day.

George didn't think too much about that remark. But two years later he got a letter from a man who identified himself as William Waldorf Astor (WILLIAM WALDORF ASTOR). It was the man whom George had treated kindly two years earlier. Astor asked George to come to New York City. He paid his way, and George made the trip. Astor brought him to see the hotel which he had built. It was the Waldorf Hotel. Astor convinced George to become its manager. (WALDORF ASTORIA HOTEL) A few years later the hotel that Astor's cousin built next door, the Astoria Hotel, was added to the complex. Until his death in 1916 George Boldt was the manager of the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel.  
(PROJECTOR OFF)

The Lord Jesus Christ has promised that He is building a wonderful mansion for those who have trusted in Him. Someday He is going to bring us to it. In the meantime He is looking for faithfulness from His people.

God is seeking faithful men and women, boys and girls, who will bloom where they are planted. Education and economic situation and social class and ethnic background are never the issue. The issue for Him is our faithfulness.

Are you faithful to God and to your responsibilities, as a parent, as a grandparent, as a child, as a Sunday school teacher, a deaconess, an elder, a neighbor, an employee, and simply as a Christian? If you are, then know for sure that God will use you to



accomplish His purposes. May the Lord help us all to be faithful to Him and to the responsibilities which He has entrusted to us.