

DMPC Sunday 1st March 2026

**Sermon Colossians (16). Greetings to others & conclusion,
Colossians 4:7-18: 'With a little help from my friends'**

Intro to Last passages verses ...7-18 – Old Friends

Here we are on the final passages in Paul's letter to the church in Colossae.

He's taken us on this wonderful journey..... and now he's wrapping up.

If we're honest, these final passages, the bits at the end of the letter, are often overlooked. They're not making heavy theological points. It's a list of names and greetings from and to people that we don't know.

But Paul didn't waste parchment and ink. So if he thinks it's important enough to write these verses, then I think they're important enough to give our time to. I never read a book and miss the last page.

So let's spend some time exploring the final verses of Paul's letter to the Colossians.

Faded photo

In my head, when I read this passage, I visualise a group photo. It's blurred, old. And it's a photo of a bunch of friends.

Do you have any group photos like this? Photos of yourself with old friends? A sports team, or a school class perhaps. Or you and some old friends gathered together, smiling for the camera, perhaps you're young and have no idea what the future holds or that time would pass like it has.

Maybe it's not even a real photo, it's just a snapshot in your mind's eye. Old times. Good friends. Can you picture the faces?

This passage is a snapshot of Paul's friends, his companions in the gospel at that time. Paul knows he owes so much to them. And he wants the various churches in the different places, and the people supporting him, to know each other. He wants them to love and support each other like they have supported him.

To include them in this doctrinal letter indicates that he must have a deep love for these friends. They were indispensable people in helping him carry out his work. And they in turn it seems have deep loyalty to him.

Paul, a titan of the church, a prayer warrior and theologian extraordinaire, a man who seems so in tune with the Holy Spirit. He can't go it alone. He needs others to support him. And we're the same, we can't do it alone. It's always been that way.

Friends in the bible

In the book of Exodus, when Joshua goes to fight for the Israelites, it becomes clear that when Moses held his hands up Joshua prevailed. But Moses' hands grew heavy when he was weary, and when he did that the Israelites lost. So his friends who were with him, helped. Aaron and Hur held Moses hands up so that Israel could win their battle. (Exodus 17:8). We think of Moses as this great figure, which he was, but he needed his friends.

Proverbs 27:17 'As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another'.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-11 'Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor:¹⁰ If either of them falls down, one can help the other up.' Of course, this passage ends with 'a 3-fold cord not quickly broken'.

We know a lot about Paul from his letters and from the book of Acts. From his conversion he was never alone. There was a brief period in Athens when he was alone and he was waiting for friends. Apart from that he was always with friends. Christian friends.

And this letter, filled with so much wisdom and encouragement, ends with a list of some of the friends.

So who are they?

Who are these faces on this faded photo of ours? Aren't you a little curious? I am!

I'm taking you right to the last verse of the letter, and then and only then, will we have finished the letter to the Colossians!

Vs7. Tychicus (*Tikkakus*).

Ok, so face number one is Tychius.

Verse ⁷ 'Tychicus will tell you all the news about me. He is a **dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant**^[a] **in the Lord**. ⁸ I am sending him to you for the express purpose that you may know about our^[b] circumstances and that he may **encourage** your hearts. ⁹...

Paul isn't wasting ink talking about himself. Tychicus will tell them that. Tychicus is a beloved brother, a faithful servant, fellow prisoner for the lord'.

Delivering this letter is no small task. Tychicus must have travelled from Rome, across Italy, sailed across the Adriatic, crossed Greece, sail again over the Aegean, landed at Myletus and walked up the Lycus river valley, to Laodicea and Colossae.

He wasn't just a delivery boy. Paul says he's sent him to bring comfort. To find out about the recipients.

Tychicus is mentioned 5 times in bible. He seems to be from Asia Minor. He was in Ephesus (Acts 20:4), on the list of people who went with Paul to Jerusalem -that was quite an adventure. In every city on the way they were told that they would be trouble to greet them when they get to Jerusalem. Tychicus carried on.

In Colossians he's still with Paul. It appears as though he has been with him for a long time... the whole time perhaps.

Later, when Paul wanted Titus with him in the winter of his life, Paul offers Tychicus as his replacement (Titus 3:12).

The last letter in which we encounter him is 2 Timothy 4:12, when Paul asks Timothy to come and be with him, Tychicus is sent to cover his church in Ephesus.

So Tychicus is also like a locum minister, covering for Titus and Timothy. He does what Paul asks of him. He really is a loyal servant.

This letter, that Tychicus is carrying to the people of Colossae is written before the letters to Titus and Timothy. Nobody knows that will happen yet. They don't know Paul will be released from this time, and yet be imprisoned again. And Tychicus will be with him through it all.

He also had other letters with him, we will come back to these other 2 letters later.

We know nothing of his heritage, we don't know a word he said. Paul says - he's a beloved brother. That's quite a compliment. To be beloved. To be a brother or a sister. This is an indispensable friend.

I hope you have someone in your life who is a beloved brother or sister. And that you get to play that role for someone else.

Onesimus.

Now he is not travelling alone. He has a companion on this perilous journey. Another trusted friend of Paul called 'Onesimus'.

Verse 9⁹ He is coming with Onesimus, our faithful and dear brother, who is one of you. They will tell you everything that is happening here.'

Who is Onesimus? Well now, this is quite the story. Onesimus was a man on the run. And Paul has sent him back to the very place he was running from. The very person he was running from. He has a complex and dark past, which became a bright future thanks to the heartfelt acceptance of the teachings of Jesus.

Now I said a moment ago that I would return to the other letters that they were carrying. They were letters to Philemon and a letter to the church at Laodicea.

Colossians was written to the church at Colossae. And Philemon was written to one family in that church.

Philemon, the person, was a convert to Jesus and member of the church of Colossae (verse 19 Philemon). He was also a wealthy man and owned a servant called Onesimus. Onesimus ran away. In those days, if found, runaway slaves were executed. Whilst on the run God led Onesimus to Paul, and he too became a convert to Jesus.

And now Paul has asked Tychicus and Onesimus to travel together to the place he was running from. To deliver these letters. One letter for the church at Colossae. And one letter to Philemon, the slave master that Onesimus had run from. And in the letter Paul asks him to accept him as a *brother*. An ask to accept him as a brother of Christ Jesus, as a fellow member of the church of Christ. Paul writes a letter to request his acceptance and Onesimus hand delivers it.

Onesimus is introduced here as **our faithful and dear brother**. In Paul's letter to Philemon, he *commands Philemon to welcome him, "no longer as a doulos (Greek for slave/bondservant) but more than a doulos, as a beloved brother" and to "receive him as [he] would receive [Paul]" (Philem. 1:16–17).*

The runaway slave now has all the dignity of an apostle! The division between a slave and the master is eclipsed in light of this greater thing they now have in common. This was scandalous teaching. But it's what the gospel requires.

Jesus has the most amazing ability to take our past, however awful, whatever we think of it - and turn us into something new. Jesus brings us into new life with him. These two old adversaries are now one in Christ. They are brothers now. 'Onesimus is my very heart' says Paul, he is 'beloved, faithful'.

Any person in Christ is a new creature.

There is the chance that Onesimus may have become the pastor of the Colossian church (his master's pastor!)

When we embrace the gospel, our core identity changes. What's most true of us is that we're now in Christ.

Three Jewish companions - Aristarchus (*Aristokus*), Mark and Jesus/Justus

We now come to verse 10, ¹⁰ My fellow prisoner *Aristarchus* sends you his greetings, as does *Mark*, the cousin of Barnabas. (You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him.) ¹¹ Jesus, who is called *Justus*, also sends greetings. These

are the only Jews^[c] among my co-workers for the kingdom of God, and they have proved a comfort to me.'

In our faded photo, we have these 3 Jewish companions, Aristarchus, Mark and Jesus also called Justus. It's clear that Paul is comforted by his fellow Jewish converts; he faced so much opposition from his previous friends and colleagues. These three brought comfort to him in his isolation. It's good to have friends that know your roots isn't it? That understand where you've come from.

Aristarchus is 'my fellow prisoner', it's likely he came from Thessalonica. He was with Paul during his 3 years in Ephesus. When the riot broke out he was seized by the mob because he was recognised as one of Paul's companions. (Acts 19:29).

When Paul goes to Jerusalem he goes too. When Paul was captured in Jerusalem (Act 27:2), he was with him. It seems likely that he was with him through all of his imprisonment.

There's no evidence that he stood at front at church, or led groups, or worship band, or toastie bar, but he stayed with his friend. He gave up his freedom to be with him. Stuck by him. In the rough days, the really rough days. In the riot. In the storm. In prison.

I hope you have someone who stands beside you on the rough days. The really rough days.

His name means 'one caught in the spirit'. That seems pretty special.

Mark.

Verse 10, Mark the cousin of Barnabas also sends his greetings. This is followed by the line – 'You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him'.

Now this is John-Mark, cousin of Barnabas. His mother's house served as THE meeting place for Christians in Jerusalem. This is the Mark who went on to write the gospel according to Mark. From today's perspective he seems pretty special, wouldn't you say?

So why does Paul say 'if he comes to you, welcome him'? Is that not obvious?

Well not at this point in the narrative. You see Mark wasn't always dependable. He *needed* Paul's instruction to welcome him.

The book of Acts records that in Paul's first missionary journey Mark had bailed on them. He'd left them, somewhat in the lurch, at a dangerous part of trip (Acts 13:13). Later on, Barnabas suggested to Paul that they take him again and Paul says no. There was a big argument about it.

Mark had been a disappointment. And a point of contention.

Yet here he is, when this letter is written, about 11-12 years later, back in fold. The followers are commanded to receive him.

It seems as though, despite his panic on that journey, Mark went through reconciliation with Paul, and eventually they made up. Paul calls him a fellow worker (Phil).

I think this is thanks to Peter. In 1 Peter, Peter calls him 'his son'. Peter knows all about failure. Peter made plenty of mistakes. And he doesn't give up easily. He forgives. He mentors. He steps in and lifts up.

And John-Mark, Mark the Evangelist, grew from strength to strength.

Mark later sat under the influence of the Holy Spirit and wrote the gospel that we read today. His picture is in stained glass windows. He is a man of second chances. Mentored by a man of many chances.

Thank you God for second chances, and third chances, and forth. Thank you for the people in our lives who have helped us. Help us to forgive others as much as we need forgiveness ourselves. Help us to be a Peter to someone.

Epaphras, Luke and Demas

We then have Epaphras, Luke the doctor and Demas (verse 12-14) sending greetings.

Epaphras is known to the readers, his home is in Colossae. He has stayed with Paul and his time away from them was spent hard at work, praying for their growth in Christian maturity.

Luke, the doctor, will go on to write another Gospel. I want to talk about Demas a moment.

Demas

Demas was one of Paul's "fellow workers" in the gospel during this imprisonment. Looking forward, there is biblical evidence that Demas was with Paul during his second imprisonment in Rome, at least for a while.

Then something happened. In 2nd Timothy Paul wrote about a sad situation: "Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica" (2 Timothy 4:10).

The Greek verb implies that Demas had not merely left Paul but had left him "in the lurch". Undoubtedly, Paul was deeply let down by Demas.

It's never easy, for anyone, to see a friend in whom you've placed your trust, abandon you in the midst of hardship. We all know folk, I'm sure, who we thought we knew, do something hurtful. And we've seen people who have been certain of their faith at one point, turn their back on it.

They need folk like Peter to welcome them, show them the way. Without a Peter they may be lost forever like Demas. Even with them, they may not return. And that is hard. Past service is no guarantee of future faithfulness.

There is nowhere in the Bible that we read of the restoration of Demas. He seems to have been lost to them forever. Perhaps in your own photo there is a face of someone you've not seen in a very long time. Words have been said, or things done.

But the tale of the people in this letter, the faces in this faded picture, is that failure is always met with forgiveness if forgiveness is sought.

Give my greetings (verse 15) / Nympha

And now we're coming into the home stretch. Verse 15 Pauls says - Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house.

Nympha seems to play a significant role in early Christian community. She's likely a leader and benefactor who provided her home for gatherings of believers. She seems to be generous and devout, and have considerable means, as she owned a house large enough to meet in.

Revelation 3:17-18 tells us that the church in Laodicea was wealthy, as a prominent person in that church it's highly likely that she was proportionately well off.

It was common practice for the early church to meet in people's houses. Other people listed in the NT as hosting gatherings of Christians in their homes are;

Mary mother of John Mark in Jerusalem. Acts 12:12.

Lydia, a merchant in Philippi Acts 16:40

Priscilla and Aquilla in Ephesus 1 Cor 16:19 (Paul called them 'my coworkers in the ministry of Christ Jesus Romans 16:3)

Philemon and Apphia in Colossae Philemon 1:2

Possibly Titus Justus in Corinth Acts 18:7.

Public Nature of the letters

Paul sent 3 greetings. 1 to Colossian believers, the recipients of letter. 1 to believers in Laodicea. 1 to Nympha and the church in her house.

And then it says, verse 16, after this letter has been read to you, see to it that you read each other's letters too. Pass them around.

He wants them to share wisdom and fellowship. Written this letter to Laodicea, which is just a few miles away from Colossae. He wants them to swap letters. To build each other up. Share these truths.

Verse 17. Tell Archippus

And then verse 17, 'tell Archippus see it that you complete the ministry you have received in the Lord'.

We don't know what this is, but Archippus is part of Philemon's household, (according to vs 2 of Philemon's own letter). He's encouraging him in his work for the Lord.

Verse 18. **'I Paul, write this greeting in my own hand'**. He's signing in his own hand. He often dictated and got his letters written down by other people. We learn in other letters that his eyesight failed, well his is only human. But he's saying that he is signing this letter now.

Remember my chains. Grace be with you.

Then the last 2 sentences of the letter. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.

Paul bears his imprisonment with grace and composure. He suffers for Jesus and accepts this. But it's not easy. Freedom would be preferable. He is in need of their prayers and comfort.

Grace be with you. Grace. When we realise how much we require the grace of God, how precious it is, our gratitude must surely make us more gracious to others.

This is not the letter of an arrogant man, as Paul is often made out. It is deeply inspired by the Holy spirit, and also a deeply human letter, written by someone with lots of conflicting emotions. Facing dangers every day.

One who has experienced the saving grace of Jesus, and wants others to.

In this final set of verses Paul is reminding us that we're all in need of grace.

Christians belong to one another in a fellowship of mutual love, prayer, instruction and service. We all have things to learn from other Christians and other churches.

We can all fall. We can all pick each other up.

Paul is trying to bind his readers together with his friends who are with him in prison, and with other churches. To bring unity to the people of God.

It is a reminder that the gospel – it's not abstract – it's about people. In Jesus the word became *flesh*.

God, the main subject of it all, is known above all as the God of love.

Paul served his brothers and sisters so diligently. And they served him too. And he wanted them to serve each other.

Conclusion

In a moment we will sing 'Brother, sister, let me serve you'. And it goes all ways. We want to serve Jesus. We want to serve each other. And we need to let others serve us, in His name too.

Grace be with you.

Amen.