**Lessons from First Century Christians**

**Introduction:**

Read Hebrews 12:1-2. “Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” NKJV It does us good to read about the lives of Christian men and women; their examples encourage us to more faithful lives ourselves. We need to emulate the good qualities and virtues of others who have devoted their lives to following Christ. “Lives of all great men remind us, we too can make our lives sublime.”

**Text:** Colossians 4:7-18

**Body:**

1. Tychicus Colossians 4:7-8 “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,” NKJV Tychicus was from the province of Asia in Asia Minor. Ephesus was the capital. He accompanied Paul part way on the Third Missionary Journey. He had become close friends with Paul and had probably been sent to Rome to help and comfort him in prison and bring back news of the apostle to the church at Ephesus. (Acts 28:30-31) “Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.” NKJV Tychicus returns with Onesimus and delivers the letters to the Colossians and the Ephesians and maybe the Philemon letter too. Tychicus was a man of trust. Paul depended on him to bring these great epistles back. Lesson: God has entrusted us with carrying the gospel to all the world. Was His trust misplaced? Tychicus was a beloved brother; the church is God’s family, isn’t it? We have all been born of the same incorruptible seed!

(I Peter 1:22-23) “Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever,” NKJV We need to be very concerned for our spiritual brothers and sisters; we should be warm and friendly. Tychicus was a faithful minister, willing to serve at all times and under all circumstances. He was a fellow slave and understood that he had been bought at a price and his life was not his own. He is a great example to learn from!

1. Onesimus Colossians 4:9 “with Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will make known to you all things which are happening here.” NKJV Onesimus was a slave from Colosse who had run away from his master. He came in contact with Paul, and been converted. Paul urged him to return to his master and entreated Philemon to receive him as a brother in Christ. (Philemon 15-16) “For perhaps he departed for a while for this purpose, that you might receive him forever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave – a beloved brother, especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.” NKJV As Paul had told the Galatian brethren in Galatians 3:28 “in Christ there is neither bond nor free.” He had undergone a tremendous change – from an untrustworthy runaway slave to a faithful and beloved brother. This was true conversion. Are we still living exactly the same as before we became Christians? Something is wrong if we are. Are we more dedicated and committed?
2. Aristarchus, Mark, and Justus Colossians 4:10-11 “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.” NKJV
3. Aristarchus was a Macedonian of Thessalonica who was converted from Judaism and became a faithful traveling companion of Paul. He was with Paul in Ephesus when the uprising about the goddess Diana took place. (Acts 19) Now he was a fellow-prisoner – not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. Even if it meant death. Tradition has it that he was beheaded at Rome with Paul.
4. Mark was a cousin or maybe a nephew of Barnabas. He started out with Paul and Barnabas on the First Missionary Trip but left and returned to Jerusalem. (Acts 13) Barnabas wanted to take him on the Second Journey but Paul said “no.” (Acts 15) This caused contention between Paul and Barnabas. So Barnabas took Mark with him and went to work in Cyprus. But Mark proved himself to be a very useful servant and a good colleague of Paul. (II Timothy 4) (Philemon) Lesson: We see the importance of godly friends. Without men like Peter, Paul, and Barnabas, Mark’s life may have turned out very differently. When we stumble, it’s essential that we have those near us to lift us back on our feet.
5. Jesus called Justus was associated with Paul in prison. He brought comfort to Paul. How helpful it must have been for Paul to have Christians of the Jewish backgrounds, like himself, working with him. Gravestone epitaph: “He was a comfort to others.” (I Thessalonians 4:18) “Therefore comfort one another with these words.” NKJV

**Gentile Brothers**

1. Epaphrus Colossians 4:12-13 “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.” NKJV Epaphrus was a Christian from Colosse who was a fellow prisoner with Paul. (Philemon 23) “Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you,” NKJV He had probably started the congregation in Colosse and was laboring fervently for Christians in Colosse, Laodicea, and Hierapolis. All three cities were within a few miles. “Agonizing” He didn’t just pray, but labored in prayer, showed his great concern for them. Paul desired they be spiritually mature and completely assured in all the will of God. The Hebrews’ writer informs us this comes by studying and applying the Word of God. (Hebrews 5:12-14) “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.” NKJV Let us today follow Epaphras’ example and pray fervently for the congregation here and world-wide and then work to do God’s will on earth.
2. Luke Colossians 4:14 “Luke the beloved physician and Demas greet you.” NKJV Luke was the writer of Luke and Acts. He was a companion of Paul on part of both of the Second and Third Missionary Journeys. He remained with him during the first imprisonment at Rome and during his second imprisonment in Rome and near the end of his life. Paul wrote: “Only Luke is with me. . .” (II Timothy 4:11a) He was probably Paul’s dearest friend. We need to stick by our faithful friends in Christ just as Luke stuck by Paul.
3. Demas Colossians 4:14 “Luke the beloved physician and Demas greet you.” NKJV Demas sent greetings to the Colossian Christians. He was a fellow-laborer. (Philemon 24) “as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow laborers.” NKJV He was faithful at this time and a helper in Paul’s work. But six years later, Paul says this in II Timothy 4:9-10. “Be diligent to come to me quickly; for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica – Crescens for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia.” NKJV Demas had abandoned Paul, seemingly quite recently. After experiencing the suffering of Paul and how his life had been threatened, Demas decided that he was unwilling to put his life on the line for the sake of the gospel. He loved the world too much. He loved living too much! He wanted to be safe from persecutions of the faithful Christian’s life. Christians can feel as Demas did. “Fail in school, business, or home is unfortunate; to fail as a Christian is tragic.” Thomas Holland

**Closing Remarks of Paul to the Church at Colosse**

1. Colossians 4:15-16 “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.” NKJV Greetings to the brethren in Laodicea and to Nymphas. Something happens to the Laodicean church because by the time Revelation is written, it receives a terrible rebuke. (Revelation 3) These two congregations were to exchange letters. The Laodicean letter may have been a copy of Ephesians. Nymphas is a faithful Christian in Laodicea, apparently where the church met. He must have loved the church very much.
2. Colossians 4:17 “And say to Archippus, ‘Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it.’ ” NKJV The entire congregation at Colosse was to encourage and exhort Archippus in his work for the Lord. Imagine how good he would feel! All of us need to remember these words of Paul to encourage each other to be faithful.
3. Colossians 4:18 “This salutation by my own hand – Paul. Remember my chains. Grace be with you. Amen.” NKJV Paul authenticates this letter by signing with his own hand. He asks them to remember why he was in prison.

(Colossians 1:24) “I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church.” NKJV This would also help them during their difficult times. He closes by wishing for them God’s greatest blessings.

**Invitation:**

So much can be learned from the lives of these brethren in Christ that can help us on that last day to be found faithful.

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