



## **Colossians 4:7–11**

7 Tychicus will tell you all the news about me. He is a dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. 8 I am sending him to you for the express purpose that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts. 9 He is coming with Onesimus, our faithful and dear brother, who is one of you. They will tell you everything that is happening here. 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 among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have proved a comfort to me.

## **Reflection**

I was astounded the other day to read that we send and receive 269 billion emails each day. That's 98 trillion emails a year, 98 and twelve zeros. And that's even before we consider social media, direct messaging and text messages. It's no wonder that our age has become known as the information age, the age of mass media and

communication. In the first century however, they just had letters and ink, and far more importantly, the messengers who delivered those letters. You see, paper, ink and scribal services were prohibitively expensive and a significant percentage of the population couldn't read. This meant that the messenger's role was crucial, not only reading out loud the letter, but also delivering in person much fuller news of the writer's life and wellbeing. And that's where Tychicus comes in. We read about him in today's passage from Colossians 4:7–11,

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There's often hidden treasure in the personal remarks at the end of Paul's letters. We're tempted to glance over them, or

rush through them, kind as if the show is over and these are the credits. But God has preserved these words in Scripture as his words to humankind just as much as the most famous parts of Colossians. And so, unsurprisingly, when you dig a little you will almost always find hidden treasure in these personal remarks.

Our passage mentions several names. We're going to take a look at the back story a three of them from other references in the New Testament to see what we can find; Tychicus, Onesimus & Mark, the cousin of Barnabas.

Firstly Tychicus. It's hard to downplay the importance of Tychicus. There's an old saying, 'For the loss of a nail, lose a horseshoe; for the loss of a horseshoe, lose a

horse; for the loss of a horse, lose a soldier; for the loss of a soldier, lose a battle; for the loss of a battle, lose a kingdom.’ The point here is that there is greatness in the smallest things done for Jesus. After all, what would be the use of Paul’s writing a letter if it did not get delivered? What would be the use of the towering thought of Colossians 1, some of the highest teaching about Jesus Christ in all of Scripture, if no one ever read it? All this was entrusted to Tychicus, and Tychicus delivered; no doubt also blessing the Colossian church with the intimate details of Paul’s emotional state in captivity, and one hundred other small things to help them pray for Paul.

Tychicus is mentioned five times in Scripture. Paul gives us his character here ‘a

dear brother, faithful minister and fellow servant' and an encourager of Christians. We gather that he was brave travelling alongside Paul through the danger and suffering of his ministry. But that's about it. In the long book of Acts, Luke records no great deed or speech that Tychicus gave. And yet in supporting Paul, in delivering this letter to the Colossians, this plain man whose heart beat for the Lord changed the world forever. Because there is greatness in the smallest things done for Jesus Christ.

Secondly there's Onesimus, his backstory comes from the precious New Testament book of Philemon. Onesimus is runaway slave, who stole from his Christian master, and went into hiding in Rome, the most populous city on earth. But instead

of losing himself there, needle in a haystack kind-of-stuff, he found his master's Lord through Paul's teaching and became a follower of Jesus. An amazing transformation took place, and formerly, by his own admission, Onesimus went from being useless to both his master and Jesus to being indispensable to them both through his service of Paul. And this transformation in the life of a runaway Roman slave gave Paul the occasion to write one of the most beautiful books of the New Testament which embodies the reconciliation and transformation that lies at the heart of the gospel. And so secondly here we have, the runaway slave turned brother, sharing this role of messenger, spokesperson for the apostle Paul and protector and deliver of his letter to the Colossians.



Finally, let's look at Mark so carefully identified by Paul as the cousin of Barnabas. Another incidental mention? No, another diamond in the rough. You see Paul famously fell out with Mark. They'd travelled together early in Paul's ministry only for Mark to abandon Paul. The Bible doesn't give us a reason but given the hardships, danger and stress of Paul's life I think we can read between the lines. Whatever it was, Paul was deeply let down. Later when Paul was planning a second journey, Barnabas insisted that Mark come along but Paul didn't want anyone fainthearted on team and so they parted ways. But now twelve years later, here's Mark caring for Paul in prison. And Paul speaks warmly about him in his letters to Philemon and Timothy. And so we have a beautiful glimpse into the reconciliation and forgiveness between the

two men. One commentator I think rightly concludes,

‘If two believers cannot be reconciled, then either both or one is not in fellowship with God.’

Although, I think it’s important to note that in this case there was some time apart before the two men were reconciled.

## **Think & Pray**

Isn’t it amazing how much we can take from these seemingly incidental personal remarks that close off Paul’s letter. Which of them speaks most loudly to you today? Paul’s offered us the briefest window in members of his team, without whom his ministry would have been impossible; and

what have we found? An unremarkable man, a former thief, and someone who in the past has deeply let him down. It's important to remember as well that Paul himself is a former murderer of Christians. Look at grace and power of God in the team that he hand-selected to change the world! Look at God's power through human weakness!

Perhaps Tychicus resonates most in your heart. The history of the Christian church has millions like Tychicus, millions of people like you whose hard and faithful work in the small things will only be recognised in heaven. But be assured, there is greatness even in the smallest things done for Jesus Christ. They and you will be proved integral in his saving plan for our world.

Perhaps Onesimus' story is your story. In many ways his story is the story of every Christian. Runaway slaves to sin, turning our backs on our master and wanting to live our own way, a miraculous encounter with Jesus, lives turned on their heads, an about face, and now more useful to our master than ever. How is your transformation going? How much distance have you put between your former way of life?

Or finally, Mark and Paul. Is there someone you've let down that you need to reconcile with, and make it up to? Is there a Christian brother or sister you need to forgive in your church in order for you to work together as a team for our Lord? What differences can you set aside, what unlovely person can you love, for the sake of the gospel?

Pray over all of this. Pray that you and I both would be transformed and that God might use our weakness, just as he has done with these men, for his glory in our world.