**Bethel Christian Fellowship**

**Fair Lawn, NJ**

**The Cherished Friendships of Paul (9): “Tychicus and Onesimus,**

**Faithful Envoys and Beloved Brothers in The Lord”**

**Colossians 4:7-9**

**November 5, 2023**

There is no question that Paul was courageous and willing to endure whatever suffering came his way. But he was also susceptible to discouragement and disillusionment like the rest of us. That’s why he cherished the love and support of his friends, whom he repeatedly calls his “beloved brothers” and “faithful servants” and “fellow bondslaves in the Lord.”

These were the people who comforted him. They spoke truth to his soul. They reminded him of God’s faithfulness and goodness. They encouraged him to press on. They didn’t necessarily hold an ecclesiastical office. Nor did they generate any money to subsidize his ministry. Most of them wouldn’t be in anyone’s spiritual Hall of Fame, and yet these are the people whom Paul praises.

With the exception of the more prominent personalities (such as Apollos, Barnabas, and Luke), most Christians have never heard of these men, yet it’s hard to imagine how Paul could have accomplished all that he did without their love, support, and assistance.

Over the past two weeks we have looked closely at how two of these “lesser lights” (Hiebert) had ministered to Paul. Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25-30) and Epaphras (Col. 1:7-8; 4:12-13) were different men, but they shared the same character and virtue, and thus the same commitment to serve and support Paul at great personal sacrifice. For this they were highly commended to their respective churches, and praised in the loftiest terms by the apostle.

The same is true for the two men whose names are mentioned in the verses before us today. Like Epaphroditus and Epaphras, they’re not exactly familiar household names. But Tychicus and Onesimus were both cherished friends of Paul; and both were highly commended by him because of their faithful service to him: “*As to all my affairs, Tychicus, our beloved brother and faithful servant and fellow-bondslave in the Lord, will bring you information. For I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts; and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of your number. They will inform you of the whole situation here*” (Col. 4:7-9).

Tychicus first appears in Scripture during the latter part of Paul’s third missionary journey. As we learn from Acts 20:4, he was a native of the province of Asia and among Paul’s fellow travelers on his last journey to Jerusalem. We also know that those fellow travelers were delegates from their respective Gentile churches, carrying contributions for the needy saints in Jerusalem (Acts 24:17; Rom. 15: 25-26; 1 Cor. 16:1; 2 Cor. 8-9). The fact that Tychicus was selected as one of these stewards reveals how trustworthy he was. The close contact that he would have had with Paul on this journey to Jerusalem would have also forged strong and lasting ties with the apostle.

Four years later, Tychicus was one of Paul’s faithful companions during his first Roman imprisonment (Acts 28:16-31), which is when Paul wrote his letter to the Colossians (4:3, 18). In God’s providence, Tychicus became Paul’s personal representative and probably the one who carried the letter to the Colossians (4:7) and to the Ephesians (6:21-22). At the same time, he was accompanied by Onesimus, whom Paul was returning to Philemon, where the Colossians were meeting in his house-church (Philem. 1-2).

As we turn to today’s text, our goal is to note the significance of Paul’s relationship to both Tychicus and Onesimus. Their relationships to him will also become evident.

**First,** Paul informs the Colossians of his purpose in sending Tychicus to them: “*As to all my affairs, Tychicus will bring you information . . .*” (v. 7a). This reminds the church that while urgent doctrinal matters had been addressed in Paul’s letter, his personal matters would be conveyed to them through his personal representative. Let’s also keep in mind that although Paul never visited these saints (Col. 2:1), they still would be eager to learn about his circumstances in Rome. Since he was sending such a trustworthy messenger, Paul did not think it was necessary to write about his personal affairs. He knew that his beloved friend wouldn’t misrepresent or undermine him in any way!

**Second,** the commendation Paul gives to Tychicus reveals that he held him in the highest personal esteem; “*our beloved brother, and faithful servant and fellow-bondslave in the Lord*. . .” (v. 7b). Because he was a *beloved brother*, he was willing to stay with Paul even though his situation was a difficult one (Cf. 4:3). Think of how encouraging this must have been for Paul, especially when everything seemed to be going against him. He was also a *faithful servant*. The word “servant” (*diakonos*) technically means “deacon,” but that’s not how Paul is using it here. He simply means that Tychicus was his faithful assistant. He ministered *to* Paul, and he also ministered *for* Paul, carrying out the ministries Paul had assigned to him. By referring to him as a *fellow-bondslave in the Lord*, Paul looked at him as his valued colleague in the ministry. Like the apostle, he had submitted his will to the will of the Lord Jesus, to do *His* bidding.

**Third,** Paul amplifies his purpose in sending Tychicus to Colossae: “*For I have sent him to you…* *that you may know about our circumstances and* *that he may encourage your hearts*. . .” (v. 8). Besides informing them about his news from Rome, Paul also wanted Tychicus to minister to them. Among other things, they needed to be encouraged to stand firm against the heretical teaching that was worming its way into the fellowship (Cf. 1:15-23). All of our churches today need more people like Tychicus. Encouragement is something that everyone can do – and everyone must have!

**Fourth,** Paul has also sent along Onesimus, another “*faithful and beloved brother*” (v. 9a). That might not be significant to most people, if this wasn’t the same Onesimus that Paul mentions in his letter to Philemon. This would be Onesimus, the *Roman slave*, who himself was from Colossae. Here was a man who had no possessions, no rights, and no inheritance under Roman law. He was of no regard to most of the people of his day, and yet Paul loves him and refers to him as his “brother.”

In his letter to Philemon, Paul also describes him as his spiritual son (Philem. 10). Evidently, when Onesimus ran away from Philemon, he traveled to Rome, where he met Paul and came to faith. Then he faithfully ministered to Paul during his imprisonment (Philem. 11-13). Paul is now sending him back home, with the personal guarantee that he will repay any loss that Philemon has incurred (Philem. 18).

A comparison of this verse (4:9) with Philemon 1, 8-22, makes it clear that Tychicus was also given the responsibility of safely returning Onesimus to Philemon (the church at Colossae was meeting in his home; Philemon 2). In presenting Onesimus to him, Tychicus would also deliver Paul’s letter to Philemon. From the epistle to the Ephesians, it’s also clear that Tychicus delivered Paul’s letter to the Ephesian church as well (Eph. 6:21-22).

**Fifth** and finally, Paul makes it clear that both Tychicus and Onesimus will give a joint report of Paul’s affairs: “*They* will tell you of everything that has taken place here” (v. 9b). Imagine the seasoned veteran in the faith and the newly converted Roman slave standing together before the assembled church, bringing them news about the Apostle Paul while under house arrest in Rome. It’s a picture of God’s amazing grace.

One of the reasons Paul wanted the Colossians to know about his situation was so that they could pray for him. While it is true that some Christian workers use their adverse circumstances to enlist financial support, this was never true of Paul. He wasn’t begging for money or asking for sympathy. He simply wanted his friends in Colossae to know the facts and support him in prayer. He also wanted Tychicus and Onesimus to be the ones to share those facts.

The greatest ministry that Tychicus performed for Paul and the entire church was his safe delivery of the letters destined for the Colossians, Philemon, and the Ephesians. This was a long and perilous journey. But his spirit of devotion for Christ and his unswerving commitment to Paul “transformed an obscure and laborious task into a ministry of abiding spiritual value” (Hiebert). However, Paul not only thought of Tychicus as someone whom he could implicitly trust to deliver his letters; he also knew that his beloved friend and faithful servant had the ability to encourage the church and would therefore be able to further the cause of Christ at Colossae.

He proved himself qualified to carry out *both* of these important ministries in the work of the Lord. Neither he nor Onesimus might be in anyone’s spiritual Hall of Fame, but that wouldn’t have mattered to Paul. What impressed him was that they were “*faithful servants*” who deeply loved and zealously served the Lord Jesus Christ. They are the kind of people that we should seek out and support; they are also the kind of people that we should seek to be!