Colossians 4:10–14 — A Day of Small Things

Aristarchus, Mark, Jesus called Justus, Epaphras, Luke, and Demas

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Scripture Reading: Colossians 4:10–14

> *"Aristarchus, my fellow captive, salutes you, and Mark, Barnabas's cousin, concerning whom ye have received orders, if he come to you, receive him.*
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> *And Jesus called Justus, who are of the circumcision. These are the only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who have been a consolation to me.*
>
> *Epaphras, who is one of you, the bondman of Christ Jesus, salutes you, always combating earnestly for you in prayers, to the end that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.*
>
> *For I bear him witness that he labors much for you, and them in Laodicea, and them in Hierapolis.*
>
> *Luke, the beloved physician, salutes you, and Demas."*

A Greeting and What It Means

These three men — Aristarchus, Mark, and Jesus called Justus — are joined by the fact that they salute the brethren at Colossae. That is how their names appear in the Bible. They sent their greetings. It seems, at first glance, a small thing. But consider what it means for a believer in Rome to send his greetings to believers in Colossae, with the understanding that there is one body and that they are part of it. This is not the same as a general friendliness. It is a practical expression of the truth that there is one body of Christ, and that submission to that principle is

the ground on which such greetings are sent.

Jesus Called Justus: A Name and a Testimony

The name Jesus is not a Gentile name. In the Hebrew it is Yeshua — Joshua — meaning Jehovah the Saviour. In the Greek it becomes Jesus. It is, therefore, a Jewish name of the highest significance. Yet this man was not called Jesus among the brethren. He was called Justus — a Latin name, connected to the word justice, meaning the just one.

Why the Latin name? Because we know of only one person truly worthy of the name Jesus. And so among the Christians this man went by the name Justus. What a testimony that implies — that the people around him called him by a name that spoke of his conduct and character. And in holding that Latin name alongside his Hebrew one, he held his ancestral culture with, at the very least, a light touch. He might have been known as Jesus who is called Moses, or Jesus who is called some good Jewish name from the Old Testament. But no: he was called Justus.

These Only: A Day of Small Things

The end of verse 11 is one of the most sobering statements in the epistle: “These are the only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who have been a consolation to me.” These only. Three names. There should have been a hundred, or a thousand — a list so long it would not fit on the page. But there are three short names, and that is the whole of it.

The apostle Paul, imprisoned in Rome, reduced by his circumstances, gives a little list. We ought not to despise the day of small things. All the features mentioned in verse 11 — fellow workers, kingdom of God, consolation — came together in just these three. Paul did not write this to imply that others were not faithful; he wrote it to describe a particular, distinguishing combination of features that marked these three men out as a very special company. But the

number is three, not three hundred.

Mark: Departure and Recovery

It is almost certain that this is the same Mark — John Mark — who appears in Acts 13 and 15. On the first missionary journey, he had turned back to Jerusalem partway through, which Paul judged to be a failure in the work. When Barnabas proposed to take Mark along on the second journey, Paul refused, and the contention between them was sharp enough that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark; Paul took Silas.

That Mark went back to Jerusalem is understandable from a human point of view — he was of the circumcision, and Jerusalem was the natural reference point for such a man. But Paul's entire ministry was characterized by the charge to go forth to the Gentiles. The man who wrote the epistle to the Hebrews could not simply return to Jerusalem. Paul knew that Mark was not the right man for that second journey, and he said so.

But here in Colossians 4, Mark has been restored — and it is Paul, not Barnabas, who presents the restored Mark to us. The apostle Paul is now a prisoner. When Mark had abandoned him he was a free man, out in the work, on a good day. For Mark to be restored, he had to come and find the apostle Paul in prison, when the circumstances were far less pleasant. And when he got there, he had to be a comfort to him. In the scriptures, restoration is always by return to the point of departure. Abraham went down to Egypt and got into trouble; he was restored when he came back to Bethel. Mark departed from the work; his restoration came by coming back to that very work and to that very man.

There is also the matter of the orders in verse 10: "concerning whom ye have received orders, if he come to you, receive him." This is stronger than a general exhortation to receive one another. It comes with apostolic authority: if this man comes, receive him. Reception of a restored believer is one of the most precious privileges the assembly of God has, and it is exercised on the ground that God

has received us in the person of His Son.

There are many Christians who could find their way back from spiritual departure if they followed in the footsteps of Mark: return to the place from which you departed, find the brother you wronged, and comfort him. Not through profound philosophy or mystical experience or the worldly traditions of men — none of those things helped Mark. It was simply this: he came back.

Epaphras: Laboring in Prayer

Epaphras is one of them — a Colossian himself, as verses 12 and chapter 1:7 both indicate. He is called a bondman of Christ Jesus, and what is said of him is remarkable: he was "always combating earnestly for you in prayers, to the end that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God."

Notice what he was praying for. The problem at Colossae was that they thought they needed philosophy and vain deceit, the rudiments of the world, and human tradition — something in addition to what the scriptures reveal of the will of God (Colossians 2:8). Chapter 2:10 answers it: "Ye are complete in him." Epaphras was praying for exactly that — that they would stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. His prayer was not off in left field. It was directed precisely at the trouble the church had.

He also bore this burden for the believers in Laodicea and Hierapolis — not just his own assembly, but the wider region. And though he may have been physically elsewhere when Paul wrote this — possibly in Rome itself — he had not moved on in his heart. He was in his closet, on his knees, for them. There is a beautiful laboring together here: Paul, inspired by the Spirit, writes the epistle; Epaphras, in prayer, intercedes for the same assembly. They did not have the same role. But God used both together for the blessing of the saints at Colossae. When the epistle arrived and did its work, it was, among other things, an answer to Epaphras' prayer.

A note on Epaphras and the salvation of the Colossians: chapter 1:7 describes him as a faithful minister of Christ and notes that he made known the love of the Colossians in the Spirit. It seems likely that his ministry among them had to do with the unfolding of truth — not merely evangelistic preaching and moving on, but the kind of sustained teaching and pastoral care that Charles Stanley of Rotherham observed in revival: that what God most blessed in the salvation of the lost was the setting forth of the person of Christ and the work of the cross, without much in the way of direct exhortations to repent. Whether saved through him or built up by him, the Colossians were the fruit of his labor.

Luke and Demas

Luke, the beloved physician, sends his greetings. He receives the word beloved, as do Tychicus and Onesimus — but not the word faithful that marks the first two. Demas is mentioned without further description. Those familiar with Paul's later letters will note that in 2 Timothy 4:10, Paul writes of Demas: "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world." He is here, sending his greetings. But the absence of any commendation in this verse, read alongside what is written later, is a solemn thing.

They saluted the brethren. Some stood. Some fell. God knows how to keep what is committed to Him.