



Closing Announcements (part 1)

Colossians 4:7-11

- 1. Be a faithful servant (like Tychicus)**
- 2. Do the right thing (like Onesimus)**
- 3. Be willing to suffer (like Aristarchus)**
- 4. Never give up (like Mark)**
- 5. Trust the Messiah (like Justus)**

It is our custom at Rock Valley Bible Church to close each of our worship services with a brief time of announcements. At the conclusion of our last song, we often bring someone up here to close our worship service by going over the important items in the bulletin. We inform you of upcoming events, of ministry opportunities, of things taking place, introduce visitors, and commend you on your way. This morning, we will see Paul doing much the same thing. Appropriately, my message this morning is entitled, "Closing Announcements."

Admittedly there are times when the closing announcements of a church service aren't the most exciting thing going on at church. Lest you think that our text is going to be like that this morning, I need to tell you of something that took place in my seminary years. One of the upper level Greek classes that I took was a class on Colossians. It was a great class. Before we came to class on the first day, we had been given an assignment to translate the entire book from Greek to English. We also were told to read through the book thirty times, in English, before class started. On the first day of class, each of us were given a section of the book that we would have to study extensively. We were given the assignment of combing through all of the commentaries that we could find and recording as much exegetical material as possible. We defined every word. We gave details about every syntactical point in our verses. At any point we noticed a divergence of opinion about any lexical or syntactical point, we were to list all of the views that were given, as well as pointing out all "pro's" and "con's" of each view. For the first half of the semester, we worked through the Greek text of Colossians. For the last half of the semester, we worked through the book again, but this time, each of us students presented our research that we had done on the passages that we had been assigned.

I remember on the last day of class, a fellow student had been assigned this last portion of the epistle to study (chapter 4, verses 7-18). When he got up to present his research, I remember the first words out of his mouth. He said something to this effect, "On the first day of class when we were all given different passages to research, I was given chapter 4, verses 7-18. At first, I was disappointed, because it didn't contain any great points of doctrine or theological insight. All it contains is a series of instructions to people. But, as I was studying the text, my opinion changed greatly. Because, I found this passage to be extremely interesting. And, I also found that this passage was very edifying to my soul, as I caught a glimpse of the early church." And so, as I read this portion of Scripture for you, I encourage you to listen attentively, for there are many lessons for us to learn in these verses.

Colossians 4:7-18

As to all my affairs, Tychicus, our beloved brother and faithful servant and fellow bond-servant 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 about the whole situation here. Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, sends you his greetings; and also Barnabas's cousin Mark (about whom you received instructions; if he comes to you, welcome him); and also Jesus who is called Justus; these are the only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are from the circumcision, and they have proved to be an encouragement to me. Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God. For I testify for him that he has a deep concern for you and for those who are in Laodicea and Hierapolis. Luke, the beloved physician, sends you his greetings, and also Demas. Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea and also Nympha and the church that is in her house. When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea. Say to Archippus, "Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it." I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand Remember my imprisonment Grace be with you.

In these verses, we see Paul mentioning ten different people. Their names are (1) Tychicus (verse 7). (2) Onesimus (verse 9). (3) Aristarchus (verse 10). (4) Mark (verse 10). (5) Justus (verse 11) (6) Epaphras (verse 12) (7) Luke (verse 14) (8) Demas (verse 14) (9) Nympha (verse 15) (10) Archippus (verse 17). Six of these people are with Paul and send their greetings to those in Colossae (Aristarchus, Mark, Justus, Epaphras, Luke, Demas) The next two of these people are in Colossae and are given specific instructions (Nympha, Archippus). Two of them will travel to Colossae to deliver this letter (Tychicus, Onesimus). All ten of them have lessons to teach us. I want to shape my message around these ten people, learning the lessons that they have to teach us. We will only get through the first half of this list this morning.

Before we begin, I want to take a moment to explain to you the vast difference there is between studying ancient history and studying modern history. Though both of these disciplines have the same area of study, namely history, the difference between these two is huge. The difference has everything to do with the amount of material available to us to study. In studying ancient history, it is often the case that you

are able to read every original document that is available to mankind. The task of the historian is to fill in the gaps in the details and to make known the most reasonable conclusions based upon all the data available to you. However, in studying modern history, the situation is much different. The data that is available is much more. In some cases, it might take a lifetime to read through all of the available material.

For instance, during the New Year's holiday, my wife and I took advantage of the day off and left our children at home with their grandparents and traveled down to Springfield, Illinois. While in Springfield, we took the opportunity to study the life of Abraham Lincoln. We visited his tomb. We visited the Old Capitol building, where Lincoln spent much time. We visited the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum. In studying the life of Abraham Lincoln, the volume of material is immense. There are records of speeches he made, correspondence that he wrote, legislative documents during Lincoln's presidency, newspaper articles about the circumstances surrounding the day, diaries relating of personal interactions with Abraham Lincoln, and a plethora of other documents relating to the Civil War. The data available to studying the life of Abraham Lincoln (or any other relatively modern figure) is vast!

But, on the other side of that, we come this morning to an ancient document, where the data is really quite small. In fact, Paul will mention some people here in Colossians, chapter 4, that are only mentioned this passage (Justus, Nympha). This is all that we know of them. With others, there are only a handful of verses in the Bible that mention these people. Within five minutes, we are able to exhaust everything that we know about these ten people. And so, this morning, we are studying ancient history. It will be our task to exhaust the data that we have on each of these individuals, and draw the appropriate conclusions from the lives of these people. ^[1] There are certainly lessons to be learned. Let's begin by looking at Tychicus (verses 6-7).

The lesson we learn from Tychicus is for us to ...

1. Be a faithful servant (like Tychicus)

Paul's description of Tychicus comes in **verses 7 and 8**, "As to all my affairs, Tychicus, our beloved brother and faithful servant and fellow bond-servant 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." Tychicus is mentioned only five times in Scripture. We don't know anything about when he was saved or how he came to know the apostle Paul. He comes on the scene in **Acts 20:4**, where we find him mentioned as one of Paul's traveling companions. We don't know exactly how much time he had spent with Paul during these days. It may well be that he spent several years learning from Paul and ministering with him. Due to the lack of information we have about him, it is more likely that he had been off ministering to others, but, had tracked down Paul in his imprisonment to help him in his distress.

His dedication to the Lord and to Paul earned him the three descriptions here in verse 7. Paul calls him a "beloved brother." This merely indicates that he is a fellow Christian, who is loved greatly by the apostle Paul and by others. Paul also calls him, "a faithful servant." This calls attention to his willingness to help and serve others. Paul's third description of him is a "fellow bond-servant." This is probably talking about his vertical relationship with the Lord. He is a bond-servant of Christ along with Paul.

These sorts of descriptions show the love and care and trust that Paul had in Tychicus. In fact, he is the one chosen to be the mailman for this letter to get to Colossae. Tychicus was also mentioned in Ephesians, with almost the same words as we find here in Colossians. Listen to **Ephesians 6:21-22**, "That you also may know about my circumstances, how I am doing, Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will make everything known to you. I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know about us, and that he may comfort your hearts." This gives us a hint as to the historical situation behind each of these letters. When Tychicus was carrying Paul's letter to the Colossians in his pouch, he had another letter in his pouch as well: the epistle to the Ephesians. In reading the letter of Philemon, you can also determine that he delivered that letter on the same trip as well. So, Tychicus was given the task to deliver Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon to their prospective destinations. In Colossians 4:16, we read of another letter that Tychicus was carrying, which was written to the Laodiceans. However, some say that this is the same as Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Perhaps Tychicus had other letters as well. So, as he did his job of delivering these letters of Paul, there were three (and possibly more) letters that he was delivering.

In those days, delivering a letter wasn't the sort of job that you simply gave to anybody. You want to give to a faithful man who will indeed deliver the letter. Travel in those days was difficult. It may have taken several months for Tychicus to travel the 1,000 miles from Rome to Colossae. Travel in those days was dangerous. In traveling, you were always susceptible to thieves, who want to take your money. Those who you gave letters to needed to be trusted people, who would indeed make the delivery. This is the great characteristic about Tychicus: he was a "faithful servant." He was ready and willing to do whatever it took to accomplish the ministry. If it meant delivering letters and being subjected to danger and difficulty, he was willing to do this. If it meant communicating details about Paul's circumstances (verse 8), he was willing to do this. If it meant encouraging the people of Colossae (verse 8), he was willing to do this. He was even willing to pastor a church, if needed.

In the other two references we have of him in the New Testament, we see him relieving the role of pastors, so that they could leave their congregations to visit Paul (for more training or instruction or encouragement). In **Titus 3:12**, Paul writes to Titus, "When I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, make every effort to come to me at Nicopolis." We get the sense here that the arrival of Tychicus will mean that Titus will be able to leave his ministry in Crete and come to see Paul. In **2 Timothy 4:12**, we read, "Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus." In the very next verse, we read of how Paul wants Timothy to come to see him (2 Tim. 4:13) once Tychicus arrives. I believe that the context is the same. "Timothy, when Tychicus comes, you will be relieved from your ministry for a season. So, come and visit with me before I die."

This is Tychicus. He was a faithful servant. Whatever it took to help others, he was willing to do it. I believe the lesson we learn from Tychicus is good for all of us to hear: "be a faithful servant." Be willing to do anything in the service of others.

Let's look at our next lesson. This comes from the life of Onesimus, in verse 9.

2. Do the right thing (like Onesimus)

Onesimus is mentioned in **verse 9**, "... and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of your number. They will inform you about the whole situation here." Onesimus is mentioned only one other place in the Bible. He is mentioned here in Colossians and in

Philemon, verse 10. In the letter to the Colossians, he is simply mentioned as a faithful and loved believer in Christ, who came Colossae. But, in Philemon, we find out a whole lot more about this man. He was converted through the ministry of Paul. Somehow, Onesimus came into contact with Paul while Paul was serving time in prison. He may have been a fellow prisoner. He may have been employed as a guard. He may have come to visit this man because at the bidding of other Christians, who wanted him to hear the apostles speak. We simply don't know. However, we do know that he became a Christian during Paul's imprisonment through Paul's words to him. But, at one point, he heard the saving message of Christ, repented of his sin and believed in Jesus.

As things came out, Paul began to learn of the background of Onesimus. He has been a slave in Colossae. His master's name was Philemon. At some point, he ran away. For years, he had been living a lie in a big city, seeking not to be found out. But now that he had embraced the gospel of Christ, he knew that this called forth his integrity. There were some things in his life that he needed to take care of. He knew that he had to go back and make things right with Philemon. With the support of Paul (namely in a kind letter that Paul wrote), Onesimus did the right thing. He returned to Philemon as a runaway slave. Certainly, this wasn't an easy thing to do. As a runaway slave, he was liable to be put to death. Perhaps he would receive 39 lashes from his master. It was unclear how Philemon would treat him. And yet, Onesimus was willing to face the consequences of his sin. Onesimus was willing to do the hard thing and make things right.

After we finish the book of Colossians, I plan on continuing on to Philemon, where we will consider this topic more deeply, and so, I don't need to linger much here. I simply need to ask you, "Are there things in your life that you need to get right?" Are there things you have said, that you need to seek forgiveness? Are there tests that you have cheated on, that you need to go and confess to your teacher? Are there things you have stolen that you need to return? Is there pirated software on your computer, that you need to pay for? Is there a relationship that's damaged, that you need to seek to restore? Have you cheated a previous company in some way that you need to make right? This is what Onesimus did. He risked his life to do be at peace. May Romans 12:18 guide you in this process. "If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men." This is the lesson that we need to learn. We are called to "do the right thing."

Next up in our text is Aristarchus (in verse 10). The lesson he teaches us is that we need to ...
3. Be willing to suffer (like Aristarchus)

Paul's testimony of Aristarchus comes in **verse 10**, "Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, sends you his greetings." Aristarchus is mentioned five times in the Scripture. When you piece his life together, you discover that he was from Thessalonica, (according to **Acts 20:4**). (According to Col 4:11, we know that he was Jewish). Certainly, when Paul came to Thessalonica, he was among the Jewish worshipers who heard Paul "explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying 'This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ'" (Acts 17:3). Certainly, Aristarchus witnessed how they dragged Jason out before the city authorities, threatening him for being sympathetic to Paul's message (Acts 17:6-7). He knew full well that such things may well happen to him as well should he decide to follow Paul. And yet, he was willing to join Paul in his traveling and preaching. And indeed, such things did happen to Aristarchus, when he was with Paul in Ephesus.

When Paul and his companions came to Ephesus, Paul began to do what he had done in every city. He entered the synagogue and was "speaking about boldly" about Christ (Acts 19:8). As was always his experience, some were hardened to his message, but others were convinced and became followers of Christ. With those who became followers of Christ, Paul remained with them for three years, teaching and instructing them the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27, 31). The result of Paul's preaching and teaching was that many repented of their sins and turned away from their idols and witchcraft to follow Christ. Aristarchus was one of Paul's helpers in seeking to disciple those in Ephesus. So great was the turning away from the false pagan practices, that "Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis" rose up and expressed concerns to his other craftsmen, whose livelihood depended upon idol worshipers. With so many people coming to Christ, they were in danger of losing their jobs (Acts 19:26).

And so, Demetrius stirred up a riot in the city. According to **Acts 19:29**, this mob of people rushed into the theatre, where Gaius and Aristarchus were teaching the people. They took these two guys and brought them into the crowd. They were in danger of being lynched by the crowd, losing their lives in the process. But, Aristarchus was willing to suffer for the sake of the name of Christ. Standing alongside Paul and traveling with him was sufficient to bring along these trials. He had seen this type of persecution in his hometown of Thessalonica. He was willing to experience this type of suffering as well. He never backed down. Rather, he remained faithful to Paul, throughout his travels and ministry.

Aristarchus is a guy we don't hear much of, but when you track him through Acts, you discover that he spent a long time with Paul as he ministered to others. Perhaps you remember when Paul was sent from Caesarea to Rome as a prisoner. In **Acts 27:2**, we discover that Aristarchus traveled with him in the boat the whole way. Here in Colossians 4:10, Paul's description of Aristarchus was that he was, "my fellow prisoner." These things point to the heart of Aristarchus, that he was willing to suffer for the cause of Christ. He was right there with Paul in prison, suffering with him for the cause of Christ.

The last reference to Aristarchus is in **Philemon, verse 24**, where he isn't described as being a prisoner. It may be for space reasons that Paul simply doesn't mention his circumstances. But, it also may be that Aristarchus was with Paul in prison, voluntarily. In the ancient world, prisons were much different than they are today, when people are given "three hots and a cot" (i.e. three meals and a bed) everyday. In the ancient world, you always needed a friend on the outside world, who could bring you food and whatever else you needed. Due to the lack of description of Aristarchus in Philemon, verse 24, others have concluded that he was serving Paul in prison, visiting him during the day as well as the night, giving him company, giving him food, running any necessary errand, and serving his every need.

Either way, we know that his circumstances weren't easy. But, it's the life that Aristarchus chose. Rather than choosing to live a life of pleasure, he chose to deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Christ. Perhaps he was held as a prisoner because he boldly proclaimed Christ alongside of Paul. Perhaps he was serving Paul in prison. In so doing, Aristarchus has become a great example for us. He was willing to suffer. Are you? The message of Jesus Christ is this: In the world, you will have tribulation (John 16:33). Paul told the new believers, (In Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch), "Through many tribulations, we must enter the Kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). Jesus called His followers to deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow Him. This isn't easy. It is hard. But it is worth it. "The sufferings of this present

time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us." (Rom 8:18). Are you willing to suffer? The life of Aristarchus calls us to suffer.

Let's turn our attention now to the fourth person that Paul identifies in his list of people. This is Mark. Of all the people in this list, I'm most encouraged by his story. His lesson is this:

4. Never give up (like Mark)

We read about Mark in the second half of **verse 10**. "Barnabas's cousin Mark [sends you his greetings] (about whom you received instructions; if he comes to you, welcome him)." Mark is mentioned nine times in Scripture. In **Philemon, verse 24**, Mark is simply mentioned as one who sends his greetings to Philemon. Here in Colossians 4:10, we see Mark identified as the cousin of Barnabas. We also see Paul commending him to those in Colossae, "if he comes to you, welcome him." That might not seem to be a big deal to you. Of course a fellow friend and companion with Paul would be received, right? Not necessarily. Because, Mark had a damaged reputation because of something that took place in his life.

We first hear of Mark in **Acts 12:12**, where we find a prayer meeting that is being held in his mother's house in Jerusalem. Peter was in prison, and the faithful in Jerusalem were fervently in prayer for him (Acts 12:5). We can only presume that Mark was among their number. A short time later, we read of how "Barnabas and Saul returned [to Antioch] from Jerusalem, ... along with John, who was also called Mark" (**Acts 12:25**). When they returned to Antioch, the leaders of the church were gathered together to seek the Lord's will as to their next steps. They were directed by the Holy Spirit to send Barnabas and Paul off on a missionary journey to spread the gospel! (Acts 13:3). Mark joined them on this trip, but later deserted them from Pamphylia. In **Acts 13:13**, we read of how "John [who was called Mark] left them and returned to Jerusalem." There is much discussion as to exactly why Mark left them. The bottom line is that things got too hard for him. Suffice it to say that this wasn't a good thing for him to return home. In some ways, he was viewed as a failure, and as one who simply couldn't handle the rigors of ministry.

A few months later, when Paul and Barnabas were considering a return visit to the churches they had planted and established (Acts 15:36), there was a "sharp disagreement" (Acts 15:39) between them. In **Acts 15:37** we discover that "Barnabas wanted to take John, called Mark, along with them. ... But Paul kept insisting that they should not take him along who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work" (Acts 15:37-38). The rift between Paul and Barnabas was so great that Barnabas "sailed away" with Mark by his side to visit the churches on his own (**Acts 15:39**). As Barnabas left of his own accord, Paul chose Silas to come with him, and the church sent them out (Acts 15:40).

Certainly, these events in the life of Mark had a damaging effect upon his reputation. When people heard Mark's name mentioned, they thought of his ministry failure. There are times when a man's failure is so well known, that it marks him forever. When you hear the name, "Benedict Arnold," you remember him as a traitor. The good things that he did are long forgotten. He was a war hero in the Revolutionary War. But, his defection to the British army several years later forever clouds his reputation. On the battlefield at Saratoga, a monument stands in memorial to his bravery in fighting there. In that battle, he injured his leg such that he should never be able to fight again. It reads, "In memory of the most brilliant soldier of the Continental army, who was desperately wounded on this spot, winning for his countrymen the decisive battle of the American Revolution, and for himself the rank of Major General." (But, it never mentions his name, because he was a traitor).

Likewise, when you hear the name, "Judas," all you can remember is his failings. Forever, he is known as being the one who betrayed Jesus (as all of the gospel writers are quick to point out). We all forget the beneficial things that he did as a disciple of Jesus, preaching the kingdom of heaven along with the rest of the disciples (Matt. 10). We all forget that he was also given authority to cast out unclean spirits and to "heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness" (Matt. 10:1). All we can remember for is betraying the Lord, and rightly so.

So, here stood Mark, as one who had failed in his ministry. The fame of his failure went far and wide. But, you can take heart this morning that he overcame his previous failures. In **2 Timothy 4:11**, we hear these amazing words of instruction to Timothy, "Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service." This verse tells us that Mark never gave up. Yes, he had failed. Yes, he had deserted Paul. Yes, Paul refused to trust him on the next missionary journey. But, over time, Mark was able to change his reputation. His faithfulness in ministry was known and experienced by the apostle Paul. He actually became useful to Paul. Paul wanted to see Mark before he died.

I think that there is a subtle encouragement to be found in Colossians as to the usefulness of Mark, regardless of his reputation. Look again at verse 10, "Mark (about whom you received instructions; if he comes to you, welcome him)." I believe that these words were included to help Mark overcome his ill reputation among the churches. Rather than black-balling Mark, Paul was seeking to commend him to the churches., "if he comes to you, welcome him." And so, church family, I encourage you, to "Never give up." If you fail by falling to some great sin in the eyes of others, Don't give up. Don't lose hope. But, rather, press on and allow the Lord to vindicate you in His own time.

But, how do you do this? I suggest that you spend time with Peter. The only other verse in which Mark was mentioned that I haven't covered yet is found in **1 Peter 5:13**, where we find Peter calling Mark, "my son." I believe that Peter took Mark under his wings to help him and to encourage him. They had already established a relationship with one another before Mark's failures, as the place where the church was praying for Peter was Mark's mother's house. Mark was probably in the house when Peter came knocking at the door, having been miraculously saved out of prison in answer to prayer (Acts 12). Peter would have heard of Mark's failures. How easy it would have been for Peter to come along side this man and relate to him of his own failures: he denied the Lord three times! (Matt. 26:69-75).

After the crucifixion, I'm sure that there was a sense in Peter to want to give up. Rather than making disciples of men, he went fishing (John 21:3). But, the Lord was gracious and restored him on that beach upon the shores of the sea of Galilee (John 21:15-19). Peter may well have told Mark, "Mark, I know that you have failed in following the Lord completely. You deserted Paul and Barnabas when they needed you most. But listen, I failed the Lord, even after boasting that I would never deny Him, but rather, was willing to die along side of Jesus (Matt. 26:35). But, God was gracious to restore me to ministry. Never give up hope! Trust in His lovingkindness. Realize that the Lord is a forgiving God, who embraces all who come to Him by faith." And the Lord restored Mark as well. He has a gospel account that bears his name, because it

was written by his hand!

Never give up. Though you fail Him, continue to trust in the Lord and serve Him with all your strength, resting upon His grace to carry you through. Finally, ...

5. Trust the Messiah (like Justus)

Look at verse 11, "and also Jesus who is called Justus [sends you his greetings]; these are the only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are from the circumcision, and they have proved to be an encouragement to me." This is the only verse in all the Bible that mentions this man. We know nothing about this man, other than what we can decipher from **verse 11** (welcome to ancient history). In probing into verse 11, we find out that his name is Jesus, but he goes by the name, "Justus." (Both of these names were quite common in the days of Paul). Everything else that we know about Justus was also true of Aristarchus and of Mark. But, it's enough to give us a word of application. Digging a bit deeper into verse 11, we find out that Justus was a "fellow worker" with Paul. We also find out that he was a Jew (i.e. being "from the circumcision.") We know that this man was "an encouragement" to Paul. The application that I have dug out of this verse has to do with Justus being identified as a Jewish believer. As Justus trusted in Jesus as Messiah, so ought we to trust in Jesus as well.

The tone of Paul's words here indicate a frustration on his part, that there weren't many others from the tribes of Israel who were working with Paul on behalf of Christ in his imprisonment. It's not that they didn't have an opportunity to believe in Christ. Everywhere Paul went, he always preached first to the Jews, "to the Jew first and also to the Greek" was his motto (see Rom. 1:16). If indeed Paul was imprisoned in Rome when he sent this letter (as nearly everyone agrees), the Jews had a great opportunity to believe. Furthermore, the Jews in Rome had an excellent opportunity to believe.

Upon arriving in Rome, Paul came as a prisoner. However, he arrived in Rome before the news from the Jews in Jerusalem concerning Paul reached them. The Jews in Jerusalem hadn't heard anything bad about Paul (Acts 28:21), which put them in a perfect situation to hear Paul out, as they wouldn't have any preconceived notions as to his teaching. And so, there was a day in which Paul counseled personally with the leading men of the Jews (Acts 28:17, 23). "They came to him at his lodging in large numbers; and he was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets, from morning until evening" (Acts 28:23). Surely Paul would have taught them of the Messianic prophecies that pointed to Jesus, particularly those prophecies that spoke about how the Messiah had to come and suffer.

Among these would have been Genesis 3:15, which teaches of how the Messiah would come to crush the head of the serpent. However, before crushing his head, He too would receive an injury upon his heel. This pointed to the Messiah being struck down (but ultimately, not fatally, like a wound to the head would be). Certainly, Paul would have spoken about Isaiah 53 and the numerous verses that point to a suffering Messiah, who dies in our place for our sins. Consider a few verses, "He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. ... The LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him" (Isaiah 53:5-6). In verse 7, we read of how He is like a lamb being led to the slaughter. In verse 8, we read of how He was cut off out of the land of the living for our transgression. Perhaps Paul mentioned Zechariah 12:10, in which the people of Israel would look upon the one whom they had pierced and mourn for him. Perhaps Paul mentioned the cries of Psalm 22, and the mocking and desertion that took place upon the cross. Perhaps Paul spoke about Psalm 41:9 and how the Messiah would be betrayed by a close friend.

But, through all of these verses about the Messiah suffering, Paul certainly would have instructed these Roman Jews of how the Messiah would conquer death, by rising from the dead. Psalm 16 anticipated this, as David spoke of how God would not allow the Holy One to undergo decay. David decayed in the tomb, but Jesus didn't because He raised from the dead. Paul would also have addressed the divine character of Christ as well. He was far more than a mere human, though, indeed, He was a man, come into the flesh (John 1:14). He would be born of a virgin according to Isaiah 7:14, where it indicates that His name would be "Immanuel," which means, "God with us." Indeed, Jesus was "God with us." Psalm 110 spoke of how He would be greater than a man, for David spoke of his Son as being his Lord.

Paul would have discussed all of these things (and much more) with these Romans Jews who came to visit him in prison. As they heard these things for the first time, some were beginning to be persuaded (Acts 28:24). But, others simply didn't believe what Paul was saying (Acts 28:24). They had an argument amongst each other (Acts 28:25), and finally left Paul's presence. Before they left, Paul had the opportunity to speak one parting word to them. It wasn't a kind word. It was a word of rebuke.

Acts 28:25-27

The Holy Spirit rightly spoke through Isaiah the prophet to your fathers, saying, "Go to this people and say, 'You will keep on hearing, but will not understand; and you will keep on seeing, but will not perceive; for the heart of this people has become dull, and with their ears they scarcely hear, and they have closed their eyes; otherwise they might see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart and return, and I would heal them.'"

Such words would have sunk deep into the minds of the Jewish believers who had come to see and hear from Paul. They refused to believe it. And so, as Paul is sitting in a Roman prison, only three men are surrounding him from the Jewish race, from whom and to whom Jesus, the Messiah had come, and two of them weren't from Rome. We know nothing of where Justus was from. Perhaps he was from Rome. But, probably not. But, the point of application from verse 11 (of Colossians 4) has to do with our faith. Just as these three Jewish men had come to trust that Jesus was their Messiah, so likewise the example of Justus today calls us to "trust the Messiah (like Justus)."

And so, trust the Messiah, like Justus did. Trust in Jesus Christ, who "went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil" (Acts 10:38). Trust in Jesus Christ, who was hated by the religious leaders, who "crucified the Lord of Glory" (1 Cor. 2:8), though they didn't know what they were doing. Rather, they were carrying out the plan that God had decreed, long before time began. Herod and Pontius Pilate and all the Gentiles and the people of Israel simply carried out what the hand of the Lord and His purpose predestined to occur (Acts 4:27-28). The Lamb of God became our sacrifice, in exact accordance with the Scriptures, which the Jews should believe today.

Today, the exhortation comes clear to us. Believe what Jesus failed to believe. Believe in Jesus, the Messiah, who is the only One who can forgive sin and take you into glory!

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on January 7, 2007 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org.

[1] Throughout this sermon write-up, the bold fonts indicate all of the places in the Bible where we find out about these individuals.