



# Message **Transcript**

## Who Can God Use?

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Well, thank you so much for choosing to worship with us today. And before I begin, I just want to thank you guys for being such a generous church. We've always finished our year strong and just really appreciate you're giving so generously and so faithfully to BRAVE Church. Just as a reminder, we have services on Tuesday and next weekend. Any gifts you want to be receded for this year need to be postmarked by the 31st. Just wanted to bring that to your attention. So thank you so much for your generosity. And with that, let's go before the Lord and let's prepare our hearts for what he has to say to us today that we would clearly hear him Would you pray with me?

Lord Jesus, we give you all the glory, all the honor and all the praise for who you are. And Lord, as we've sung about your lordship this morning, as we've sung about the fact that you are worthy to be praised, Lord, we thank you for this book, your living and active word, that when it's faithfully proclaimed, Lord, you speak to us. And so, Lord, we don't take for granted that the God of the universe wants to talk to us this morning. And so, Lord, our invitation is speak, Lord, for we are ready to hear, though we want to hear who you say that you are and how we're to respond in light of your glory and, Lord, that you would have your way with each and every one of us.

And now for all of us who are gathered here who desire to hear the Lord speak directly to you and who by faith will put into practice what he shows you, would you agree with me this morning by very loudly saying the word amen? Amen. Well, this morning is a special day. We're going to finish the Book of Colossians this morning, Lord willing, and our purpose in this Gospel or in this book has been to talk about the Gospel of Jesus Christ and what it looks like to have a life that's focused and centered

on the person and work of Jesus. We've been talking about the Gospel throughout this entire Book of Colossians, and now, God loved us so much that he sent his only begotten son, Jesus, to die for us and rise for us.

And by faith, we've been transferred from the dominion of darkness and transferred in the kingdom of his beloved son in whom we have redemption and the forgiveness of sin. And if that wasn't enough in the Book of Colossians, we saw the mystery of the Gospel unveiled which is this, Christ in you, the hope of glory. When you by faith trust in Jesus Christ, it's not just that he forgives your sins and takes you to heaven, he uses your body to house his Holy Spirit and he comes to dwell in and through you until he meets you. We learned that Jesus is the creator of all things that all things were created by him and for him.

And then we began to take a look at, because of that and in light of that, how we take off our old self and we put on our new self and we took a look at it in family relationships and work relationships, how we work all this out. And then last week, we talked about missional alignment, what it looks like to seek the Lord in prayer, what it looks like to walk our talk, what it looks like to have speech that resembles the Lord Jesus Christ. But I don't know about you, I can hear a book like this, I can study a book like this, I can faithfully hear a book, preach like this and say, "Yes, I love Jesus and I want to be a part of that and I want to be used by him," but in the back of my mind, I say things like this, "Yeah, but I'm just a," and then I fill in the blank.

I don't know that I'm really one of those people that God could really use. I'm

just, we fill in the blank. I want to be used by God, but I'm just pretty ordinary. I don't know that God would actually use me the way he used people that I read about in his word. And if you've ever felt like "a just", if you've ever felt like less than, if you've ever felt in the kingdom when it comes to church that you can hear a pastor tell you that you can be something significant for God, but deep down in your soul, it goes off and like, "I don't really feel like I'm that," then today God has a word for you because he wants you to know, no matter who you are, that he has got purpose and plans for your life.

I encourage this morning open up your Bible to Colossians Chapter 4. We're going to begin in Verse 7. I'd like to read through this last section of scripture and then we will unpack it together. Here's what the Apostle Paul writes. He says, "As to all my affairs, Tychicus, our beloved brother and faithful servant and fellow bondservant 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' 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 the will of God for I testify for him that he has a deep

concern for you and for all those who are in Laodicea and Hierapolis.

Luke, the beloved physician, sends you his greetings and also Demas. Greet the brethren who are on Laodicea and also Nympha and the church that is in her. 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 in 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." Now I don't know about you, but when I do Bible study or when I'm looking at God's word, I believe that every part of God's word is true.

And yet, oftentimes, if we're in a Bible reading plan and we get to a section like this in the scripture, we start reading and we see big words like, "Onesimus, Archippus, a lot of people, the end. Let's move on to Thessalonians, right? What's the point of this anyway?" But if we believe that God's word is true and then all of it has benefit for us and it's worth proclaiming this morning and it's worth hearing and really what I believe that God is talking about here is he's talking about all of Paul's ministry companions. One thing you need to know from the beginning is this. All ministry is relationships. All ministry is relationships.

At the end of the Book of Romans in Romans 16, there's even a longer section of scripture where different people get mentioned in that context and he's talking about the ministry that they have shared together. And really, there's such great insight into this text, because if you've ever felt like "a just" or an ordinary person or somebody God can't use, he's going to highlight for us some different groups of people that God

significantly blesses and uses. And I hope when you hear these groups this morning, there's a couple of three of them that you find yourself in and you say to yourself with great hope, "Maybe the Lord really is using me."

Now for this message, it's different than others. The message is about as long as it usually is, but there are not two points or three points or four. There are 10, okay? There are 10 groups of people we're going to talk about the God uses and blesses. Now I just watched some of you recoil in your seat like, "10." So what we're going to do is this, each statement, each word that God uses, I'm going to use two words for each of the 10. When I give those two words, here's what you're going to say out loud and loudly, "Praise the Lord." So I'm going to say, "God uses in blesses," I'll give you two words and you're going to say, "Praise the Lord." Can we do a practice round? "God uses and blesses," I'll give you two words, you're going to say?

Praise the Lord.

And you're going to get louder and louder at that during the entire message. That's how I know you're tracking, okay? The other services went really, really well and people participated, so stay in the game. God's going to show you how he's using you. And when you see these things too, you're going to meet people in ministry. When you do your work, they're going to say to you someday, "I don't know that God's really using me. I'm just a," and you're going to be reminded of this message and you're going to be able to bring hope to that group of people as well. So no matter who you meet, no matter who you are, there's a message of hope in here for everybody. You

ready to go, ready to practice? Number one, you ready? Everybody ready? God blesses and uses trusted servants.

Praise the Lord.

Praise the Lord. He uses trusted servants. Notice what he says. He says, "As to all my affairs, okay?" So someone that knows everything that's going on with Paul, "As to all my affairs, Tychicus, our beloved brother and faithful servant and fellow bondservant in the Lord, will bring you information." Now think about how this guy Tychicus is referred to. He's referred to as a beloved brother which means he's dearly loved by Paul. He's referred as a faithful servant which means that he's been faithful to the things of God and he's a fellow bondservant which means he's on mission.

Could anything be greater set of you and your life? If you really serve the Lord, to be known as a beloved brother, a faithful servant and a fellow bondservant in the Lord, is there anything that could be greater said of you? Now Tychicus is simply this. He's a trusted servant of the Apostle Paul. We read about him in Acts Chapter 20 and Verse 4 as well as we're going to read about some of the other guys. When there was an offering taken to travel back to Jerusalem, Tychicus was one of the guys that went back to Jerusalem and took the offering which may not sound like a big deal, but in the first century travel, it looked different than it did today. You didn't board a plane or get on a train or get in a car. It was dangerous walking. There were robbers and bandits on the way.

To accompany somebody on a journey was extremely difficult. Now we see

Tychicus go with him. Now what is Tychicus known for? What did he do? What was God's big purpose for his life? You know what it was? Letter carrying. That's all he did. He really didn't do anything. He just walked with Paul. And when Paul needed a letter delivered, he delivered a letter. If you go back to the Book of Ephesians, just a couple of books back in Ephesians Chapter 6 and Verse 21, you see that Tychicus was the one that delivered the Book of Ephesians to the church in Ephesus and says, "But 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."

So what did Tychicus do? He brought the Book of Colossians, the letter to the Colossian people. He brought the letter of Ephesians to the Ephesians people. We also see in the next verse here in Colossians, he brought the book of Philemon about Onesimus at the same time. So he's responsible for carrying the letters of Paul. Now think about this, just think about it for a moment, most of us stew over, if we're Christians and worry ourselves like, "What's God's purpose for my life? I want God to have big plans for my life," and oftentimes, we pray over people, but we pray, "I know, brother, God's got big plans for your life. Sister, God's going to do amazing things with your life."

If you are praying that over Tychicus, here's what you'd say, "God's got amazing plans for you. You're going to walk with Paul and carry three letters. That's your job. That's why God put you on planet Earth." That's all he did, that's all he's known for, but let me argue there is not one person listening to my voice has had more impact on the kingdom of God than Tychicus because Tychicus is responsible for the Book of



Ephesians, carrying the Book of Colossians, carrying the Book of Philemon. I would argue those books in the Bible alone have had more impact in the kingdom of God than any of us personally today.

And yet, on this side of heaven, Tychicus wouldn't have known any of that stuff. What was he? He was a trusted servant. He served. Do you know that God uses and still uses trusted servants? Sometimes in our desire to do all these big things for God, we forget that if we will just bloom where we're planted that God will do more significant work in us than us trying to figure out the next best thing. It means you find somebody that's in need and you serve them. If somebody needs encouragement, you bring them encouragement. If somebody needs served, you serve.

In our church, there are myriads of ways where you can use your gifting just to serve the body of Christ. Maybe you serve in our cafe, maybe you serve with kids, maybe you serve with our students, maybe serve with their young adults. And maybe you serve in a small group. And maybe you serve as a greeter or an usher or work in parking and you might think, "Well, nobody ever notices and it doesn't really make a difference anyway." But if you do it with the heart of Christ, God multiplies that and does significant things in your life. Just think for a moment. Who are the people that have impacted your life the most? Chances are it's not celebrities. Chances are there's a person or two or three that come to your mind that were significant in their service for you when you needed something, when you needed encouragement, when you needed resources, when you needed to be built up. That's what Tychicus was.

We don't know really much more about him than he was Paul's companion who

carried some letters. That's what he did. Did God use him? Absolutely, and in an astounding way. Notice what Paul says in Verse 8, why did Paul send him? "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 was a faithful companion of the Apostle Paul. Paul's in prison at this time. Tychicus is coming back, delivering this letter of encouragement, sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ with all these people and what's he do? He's bringing encouragement to the body of Christ.

Why? Because he was just a trusted servant. He was just a trusted servant. God uses trusted servants. God can use you as a trusted servant. You're a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ no matter what you do and what God wants you to know is there's great hope that even if nobody else sees "big things that you're doing", if you are a trusted servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, he's doing way more for you and way more through you than you could ever imagine. I'm thinking if I were Tychicus in the first century and God spoke to me like, "Dude, you're going to deliver three letters that are going to be inerrant scripture, they're going to change people's lives for all eternity by the millions," Tychicus would have got a big head. He probably would have had a big, "I'm like US Post Office guy. Look at me, I'm Tychicus."

He wasn't. He just served. He did something, he didn't know he was carrying the word of God at the time. He was just carrying a letter for his friend to encourage some other Christians. That's all he was doing. And in doing that, God was using him for something far more significant than he could have ever known. See, it's in the little

things that God is using who you are to touch people. Don't ever say, "I'm just a servant." No, you are a trusted servant of the Lord Jesus Christ that God wants to use. God blesses and uses trusted servants. Amen. You ready for number two? You're going to participate? Ready to help me out? God blesses and uses known sinners.

Praise the Lord.

Praise the Lord for that, right? Look at this, "And with him," Verse 9, who's also with Tychicus, "And with him, Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother who is one of your number, they will inform you about the whole situation here. So I'm sending Onesimus. Now if we were reading this in the first century, we're like, "What? Onesimus?" Here's what on this and this is known for in that region. He was a slave to Philemon. He ran away. He deserted him. He went on his own. It would be the equivalent today of if you were employed by somebody, leaving them, abandoning them, not finishing your job, not doing what's right. He flees. Onesimus flees.

Somewhere in Rome, he comes across the Apostle Paul who has seemingly led him to Christ. And now the entire Book of Philemon is sending this letter back with Tychicus and Onesimus, sends the Book of Philemon back to Philemon who's been cheated by his own slave, letting him know this, "This guy is now one of us. He's come to know Christ. And while he's of great value to me and I'd love to keep him in Rome, because of his service to you, I'm sending him back." And by the way, Philemon, I know you'll do the right thing and I know you'll not only welcome him back, you're going to welcome him back as a brother. And I'm so certain of that, make a bed for me because I'm going to be coming to see you too because, man, I'm just trusting you to

do the right thing."

Paul's persuading him the entire time. And here's why this is important. God uses known sinners for his glory. Praise the Lord. Now, this shouldn't come as a shock because of this reason, "Who else would you have to pick from? All he's got is us. And all of us are known sinners." Here's the problem. If you've been Christian more than a day and God's began to purify you and God's began to change your heart, you begin to think you're better than the known sinners that you know. And you forget that you were one time a notorious known sinner too. I don't know about you, but after I became a believer and I started walking in the things of God and God started cleaning up areas in my life, then you would see people and then they would have more radical testimony that when I had. And they would share about all their encounters in the world and then how God had rescued them.

And I'm like, "I don't have that big of a story. Mine is not that built up." And I would read the scripture in the Bible where Jesus says, "He who is forgiven much, loves much." And I would hear these wild testimonies, I'm like, "Wow, they were forgiven tons. No wonder they love Jesus so much." My response to that was, "I think I need to go beef up my testimony because if I go sin more, then I'll understand the love of God better." That's not what that means. What it means is this, if you will put yourself in front of the glory of God and say, "God, search me and try me and show me what it is that you've forgiven in my life. Show me the depth of the sin that I have inside of me," you will realize and you will articulate like the Apostle Paul articulated to Timothy, "Of all the sinners of whom I am the worst."

When Paul was writing to Timothy, he wasn't saying, "There's nobody who's ever lived that's a worst sinner than me. What Paul was saying was, "I've come to the realization of the depth of my depravity and all that Jesus Christ has forgiven and I know how notorious I was in my sin. And the longer I walk with Jesus, the more I know he's forgiven of me and I know I'm completely cleansed and completely forgiven. And boy, do I love God." Now, here's what the good news is this morning. If you're coming to church this morning, you've never trusted Jesus Christ and you think that, "Church isn't for me. I could never be welcomed there. I'm not one of those church-type people. There's some things in my past nobody knows about and there's just deep stuff in my life," here's what I would tell you, "God knows it all. He was there when you sinned it. He's aware of it.

Not only is he aware of it, he loved you so much, he sent his only Son, Jesus Christ to die on a cross, shed his blood for all of that in your life, he rose from the dead, he'll offer life to you which means no matter who you are, as a known sinner, no matter how much people in the world say, 'Man, that person is really a sinner,' God would welcome you in a moment because of the great love that he has for you." Is that good news or what? That's the Gospel. The good news is also this, if you've trusted Christ, his love for you never changes and he wants to remind you formerly you were a known sinner and now you're a saint, washed, cleaned by the blood of Christ.

Now, why is it so important? I'm a pastor, I'll tell you why it's important. Because we'd love to tell people that no matter who they are, they're welcome to come to

Christ. If I were to say, "Would you guys want to see more and more people come to know Christ?" If I were to say, "Wouldn't it be great if this place were filled up with another 2,000 people that came to BRAVE Church who recently and radically were converted to Christ? Would you say that's a good thing?" Man, it'd be awesome and we'd love it until they got here. Because what we tend to say is, "Yeah, we totally want you to come to Christ and you're totally forgiven, but you got some major problems. We don't want you to hang ... You can come, but just sit over there. Don't sit over by me because I don't want to really associate with people like you."

Now, here's what he's saying. He's saying to the people that, "An SMS that's been sent back and he's part of the family of God and that when you come to Christ, you're as welcome to be part of the family of God as anybody. There's no levels to the fellowship that you can have in the church. If you're forgiven, you're welcome and you're part of the family of God." Is that good news or what? It means no matter who you are, you have full access not only to God, but to his family called the church. And we see it all the time. This year in 2019, some of you may know the singer Kanye West who has given his life to Christ and he's come out with an album called Jesus is King. And I'm watching him speak in prisons and in different churches and watching what he says.

And the things that are coming out of his mouth now are very different than things that were coming out of his mouth a few years ago. And as I'm listening to him, I'm thinking to myself, "That's the same spirit of God that's inside of me and that's the same Jesus that I serve and that's the same heart and hunger for the Gospel that I

have, and yet, how many Christians are like, 'Well, we're just going to wait and see if he's really converted or not. I don't know. This just might be a show.'" Really? Kanye is welcome here anytime because we're all part of the same family, amen? That's what I'm talking about. Anybody, anywhere and anytime, there's a known sinner can be completely forgiven of his or her sin and have fellowship in the family of God.

It's not just, "Come get saved and stand out in the lobby until you get your life right and then you can be like one of us," it's, "No, give your life to Christ and you're part of us." And in case you're here this morning and you don't know Christ and you're like, "Yeah, but I'm not like one of you guys," just look around. Every single person you see was at one time a very known and notorious sinner. Every one of us. All we are people that have been saved by the grace of God who have recognized our need for the Lord Jesus Christ. And we love you because God loves you and you're welcome to respond to his grace, amen? God loves and blesses and uses trusted servants and known sinners. You ready for number three? Ready to participate? God blesses and uses loyal companions.

Praise the Lord.

Praise the Lord. He blesses loyal companions. Sometimes, it's hard to find them, but when you find them, they're so special. Notice what he says in Verse 10, Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, sends his greetings to you." Now, why is Aristarchus a prisoner? We get to meet him in Acts Chapter 19 and Acts Chapter 19, Verse 29 is really where he comes on the scene. And what's been going on is Paul and some of his ministry companions are in Ephesus. In Ephesus, Artemis of the Ephesians is a god

that people are worshipping and silversmiths are making idols to Artemis. They're wanting to sell their idols, so that people will worship their idol.

What happens is, when Paul and his companions get to town and start preaching the Gospel, the idol industry starts decreasing. Less people start buying idols. They're not worshipping Artemis anymore, they're saying, "Jesus is Lord." The silversmith, one of the silversmiths is like, "This is bad for business. We're losing our money," so he starts to rally all the other in that industry and starts a riot saying, "The economy's going to tank." And even though they don't really believe in Artemis, they start stirring up saying, "We're all for Artemis. We're all for this city. And these strangers have come in here preaching another god and they're killing our business."

So guess what happens? In Acts Chapter 19, Verse 29, we see what happens, "The city was filled with confusion and they rushed with one accord into the theater, dragging along Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia." So check out, why did Aristarchus get arrested? Because he was loyal to Paul when Paul got arrested. Can you imagine a mob scene? People are coming to throw you into prison? Aristarchus could have been like, "I was just kidding. I was just kidding. Glory to Artemis. It was him. He said it. I didn't even preach. I'm just here. Take him. I'm not going to prison."

No, what does he do? He stands right by Paul, and even though he wasn't the one that was preaching, he was saying, "I stand with that message that Jesus Christ is Lord. I'm loyal to the man who's bringing the message because I'm loyal to the Gospel.



I'm willing to be arrested." Now, why is this important? You said, "Well, how does that even apply?" Well, just so you know, we live in a day and age that sometime in our future, I don't know when, probably soon, that the things that I preach from this pulpit because their biblical will be considered by some hate speech. And there may come a time where because of what I preach, people will tell me, "If you preach that, we're going to lock you up if you preach that outside of the walls."

There may come a time where people say, "If you go to that church where they're saying those kinds of things, you're going to lose your job, you're going to lose your friends, you're going to lose all this." And some people will be like, "That's fine. I'll just watch the podcast," right? But there's others that will say, "No, because of my love for Jesus in the Gospel, I will stand by what is being taught because I love him." That's what Aristarchus was. He was a loyal companion. He was a faithful follower. And here's the picture I get. The picture I get is in time and space when you're participating in a mission that's bigger than yourself, there's something special that gets built.

Every time I talk to ex-athletes or ex-military people, what they crave about their past when they go back, they always say some of the same things. Whether it's somebody that's enlisted that served for a year overseas or whether it was a World War II vet, they'll say the same thing. Whether it was somebody whose career in sports ended in high school or a professional athlete who's done, they'll say the same thing. What they miss is not the mission. They don't miss ... When I talked to World War II vets or have had the privilege to, they don't say, "Man, I wish we could go storm the beaches at Normandy again. That was a fun day." They don't talk about that.

They're talking about the fighting. They're talking about that.

When I talk to ex-athletes and they'll say, "Man, I wish I could get practice all day long. I wish I could get beat up," they don't talk about that. Here's what they talk about, "I miss the camaraderie I had with people who were giving their lives together with me to something far bigger than themselves. I miss the camaraderie. I miss the companionship. That's what I miss." What was Paul doing? Paul realized he was living on mission for something greater than himself. We as a church are living on something with greater mission than anything we could do in and of ourselves. And what was Aristarchus? He was a loyal companion in that mission and it was special, the relationships that are being built.

For some of you that have been around BRAVE Church since our launch nine years ago, you're loyal companions. I know you. We're friends. We've been through a lot. We'll go through more again, but there's special depth of relationship that's been built because of what we've gone through and because of what we've endured. And what he's saying is, when you have people that are loyal companions, God uses and blesses them. I'm so grateful for the loyal companions I've had over the years. So grateful for people that love me for more than what I do, but love me for who I am and love me because of the fact that I live for Jesus. Who's your loyal companions? You can be one.

I had a friend in town this weekend. He was part of our wedding when Kim and I got married. He spoke at our wedding. I haven't seen him in about 10 years since we moved out here to Denver. He was here this week and I spent the afternoon with him

one day this week and all he did was fill my tank with encouragement. Here's a guy, he's never heard me preach at the church, but he tells me I'm awesome. He has spent three hours just telling me I was awesome. And I was like, "Man, you sure you got to go? You can stay long." It's good to have people like that in your life, right? They just are loyal to you because of the way God's called them.

And guess what, here's the hope in the Gospel, you can be that for others. You get to be their loyal companion. You get to be the one that's going to hang out with him. Aristarchus, who knows anything about Aristarchus? Paul does and God does and God used him significantly. Because with all that Paul endured, did he need some people that could stand with him in the gap, that could go to prison with him, that can encourage him? Yeah, he did and God raised up some men and Aristarchus being one of them that were loyal companions. And God blesses and uses that. Ready for number four? Ready to participate? God blesses and uses, listen to this, ministry failures.

Praise the Lord.

Praise the Lord for that. Notice this, we tend to get this idea that once we come to Christ, we should get everything right from this point on. We should do it all correct and we should never have any setbacks and I'm just telling you, it doesn't work that way. Check out what he says now. After he talks about meeting, greeting Aristarchus and how he sends greetings, he says, "And also Barnabas' cousin Mark about whom you received instructions, if he comes to you, welcome him." Well, what was

Barnabas? Barnabas is known as the son of encouragement. What was Barnabas' spiritual gift? Make everybody feel better, just, "Love you. You're awesome. This is great."

Barnabas had a cousin. His name was Mark. He gets special instructions to the church in Colossae. "If he comes to you, you've been given special instructions, now welcome him." Now, why would the church in Colossae need to have special instructions about this guy Mark. Let me tell you where he comes up. On Paul's first missionary journey in Acts Chapter 13, what we discover is Paul is administering in a town and when he's doing this, the pro-council that's there is hearing the Gospel, but he's not totally believing it because there's a magician there named Elymas and Elymas is trying to distract Paul and do all this. And Paul gets so mad at him at one point. He says, "Because of your distraction of the Gospel, you're not going to be able to see for a while." And the guy goes blind and the pro-council believes.

So God's doing some special things on these missionary journeys, but check out what happened next. It says in Acts 13:13, "Now Paul and his companions put out to sea from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia, but John left them and returned to Jerusalem." Now oftentimes, we talk about mission trips today. We talk about, "Let's raise money. Let's make sure we're fully funded. Let's get on a nice airplane at a nice airport to fly to another airport where people that are there that know Christ will greet us. They'll welcome us. They'll take us. Maybe the food's not as good. Maybe the bed's not as warm. Maybe there's some spiders and different things, but they're going to be with us. We got traveling companions. We're all going to be safe. We're all

wearing the same T-shirt. We also know where we're from and then we get back on the plane and we fly back and tell our stories."

First century missions didn't work like that. It wasn't funded and whoever you went with were the only people that you had that were there to support you. And if they left, you lost everybody that was there because there were no other Christians to support you when you got to that town. John Mark, start seeing all the stuff that's going on. He's seeing the blindness of this guy. He's seeing people come to Christ and what's he want to do? "I've had enough of this man. This is scary stuff. I'm going back to Jerusalem. I need to see my mommy. I'm not up for this. This is way too hard. I didn't sign up for all this stuff." That's his heart, so he leaves.

So guess what happens a couple chapters later, in Acts Chapter 15? They get ready to set out another missionary journey and Paul and Barnabas get into it. And Barnabas is like, "Yeah, let's bring John Mark along with us," and Paul's like, "Are you kidding me? He ain't coming with me ever again. Did you hear what happened the first time? He deserted us and left us. No way he comes on this missionary trip. And Barnabas, being the son of encouragement, like, "Come on, man. Paul, you were like this too. Give the guy a second chance. Let's build him up." Paul's like, "Heck no."

So Barnabas takes John Mark and they go one way and Paul take Silas and they go another way and what does God do? Incredible ministry through both of them. Now who is right, Paul or Barnabas? They're both right. They're both right. Paul's like, "I'm not getting deserted by that guy again. He's no use to us," and Barnabas is totally right, "Man, there's a second chance for everybody. Let's let him go." Now at the end

of the ministry of Paul's life, he's writing to Timothy, talking about how John Mark has become useful to him. And how John Mark's folded back into the family of faith, presumably because of Barnabas' encouragement to him.

And he's writing the letter as he writes to Colossians telling, "He failed the ministry, but I want you to know, I gave you instruction about him. He's welcome back now. Not only just bring him into the church, but don't put his ministry failure in front of his mind. He's welcomed in the body." Because what do we tend to do if people had failed in ministry? We put them out to pasture and then we put big black marks over their life like, "He can never be used again." You said, "Well, how does that happen?" Because some people in church from time to time, they get divorced and then, "Oh, you're gone."

And some people in church go through situations where they make dumb decisions, "Oh, you can't do that. You're not being a Christian." Do you see what I'm saying? Ministry failures who are repentance are welcomed back and God uses ministry failures for his glory and the church is the place to build those people up. It means this, I'm not making you raise your hand. You just know in your heart. If this is a message for you and I'm speaking to you and the Holy Spirit's like that to you, you failed in ministry, God can still use you. As long as you're breathing, you're not done. God has purpose for you and you're welcome here at BRAVE Church and God can restore you and build you up. God uses ministry failures. Praise the Lord.

Did God use John Mark? We only have four men in the Bible, Matthew, Mark,

Luke and John that penned the Gospel. John Mark was one of them. Did God use him? Yeah, he's used him to lead many, many, many, many, many people to Christ and says, "Welcome him." Isn't that great news? Ready to keep going? Ready for number five? Participate with me now, God uses and blesses religious zealots.

Praise the Lord.

Now when I talk about religious zealots, I'm talking about those who are so steeped in their religion they have a hard time coming to Christ. Notice what he says in Verse 11, he goes, "And also, let me tell you about Jesus who is called Justus." God probably changed his name because he won't be called the same name as a Savior. "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." Now who are the guys? Aristarchus, Mark and Justus. He said, "These men are from the circumcision." What was the circumcision? The circumcision was a group of people who said, "Okay, we get it. You can believe in Jesus, but you also, if you're really going to be saved, you got to get circumcised. And if you're also really saved, you got to keep all the commandments. And if you're also really saved, you got to keep all the Jewish law because if you're not willing to do all of that, then you're not really saved."

But let me tell you what the Gospel is. The Gospel is not Jesus Christ plus a bunch of rules, rituals and regulation. The Gospel is Jesus Christ plus nothing. The Gospel is the grace of God that says, "You can't get to God on your own. God came for you. And if you believe that Jesus died on the cross for your sins and rose from the dead and you welcome him into your life in exchange for your sin, you are saved and

saved to the full and you don't have to keep any other commandments to be saved." That's the Gospel. Now, how hard is this? It's hard for religious people to get saved. It's the hardest group of people to share the Gospel with. It's the hardest group of people to share the Gospel because they're steeped in religion.

It doesn't matter what matter, whether they're Methodist, Baptist, Lutheran, Presbyterian and I'm not saying there aren't saved people in those denominations because there for sure are. I'm talking about those who placed denominational preference higher than the Lord Jesus Christ. I'm talking about those who would say, "Well, unless you believe what John Wesley believed, unless you believe what Martin Luther believed, hey, unless you believe John Calvin believed." No, unless you believe that Jesus Christ and him alone and his death on the cross and resurrection is sufficient, you won't be saved. He is the way, the truth and the life and no one comes to the Father except through him.

And yet what does Paul say? Paul says this, "But these three, out of all my friends and the group that I grew up with, these three have proved to be encouragement to me because they've left all their traditions and all their religiosity and all their stuff and are completely submitted to the Lord Jesus Christ and that's a huge encouragement to my soul." Because Paul was saying, "I used to be one of them. I used to be steeped in all my religion and rituals, but now I consider rubbish to the surpassing knowledge of knowing Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Savior," which means this, some of us know people that are steeped in religion and I want you to know, God still has a purpose and can use them.



If religious people are the hardest group of people to meet, the second hardest group of people to reach is family. And when you put those two together and you have a religious family, it's a work of God's grace because they know you as known sinner. They don't know you as saint. And they're steeped in their religion and who are you to tell me? God's telling you, it's through Jesus and him alone that you can have life in his name, amen? Isn't it good to know that God still uses religious zealots? Let's continue, I'll give you number six, participate with me. God uses and blesses, listen to this, passionate prayers.

Praise the Lord.

Passionate prayers and I would say this, you're going to write down another word, I would say Gospel sharers because prayers and sharers go together. Notice what he says. He says, "Epaphras," we've heard of him before, we'll see him in a second. "Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnest for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in 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."

Now remember this, here we see that he's a prayer. He's a passionate prayer. Now, here's what it says about him. It's not that he prays, "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep." It's not that he's praying before a meal and saying, "God, thank You for this bountiful meal we're having before." Somebody is praying. He's laboring in prayer. Any of you ladies that have had babies know that you

don't go into the hospital and three minutes later come out and say, "Here's the child. It was such an incredible experience." There's a labor that takes place. He's laboring in prayer. He's working in prayer, for what purpose? That they would stand firm in the will of God and be assured of their faith.

Many of us who as Christians that know that we're saved and yet that voice from the enemy comes saying, "Are you sure? Are you sure? Are you sure you're in the will of God? Are you sure that you're really saved? Are you sure? What's he laboring for?" He's laboring in prayer that believers in Christ would truly understand that they're saved and they're saved to the full and no one can snatch him from God's hand and he's laboring for not only the church in Colossae but also Laodicea and Hierapolis. But what else do we know about this guy? What else we know about this guy is in Colossians 1:7, when he's talking about the Gospel being shared and how the gospel came to Colossae, we learned it was through Epaphras.

It says, "Just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved bondservant, who is a faithful servant of Christ, on your behalf." Can I tell you something about prayer and Gospel sharing? They go hand in glove. If you tell me I'm not a very strong prayer, I also know about you, you don't share the Gospel very much. And if you tell me I don't share the gospel very much, I also know you're not a very strong prayer. Because when you pray and you seek the heart of God, you begin to get the heart of God for the world which is that all people would know him and walk in his truth. And the more and more you pray and get God's heart, the more you got to share it with people.

The more you share the Gospel with people, the more you realize how much you

need God's help to share the Gospel, so the more you pray. The more you pray, the more you share. The more you share, the more you pray. If you don't believe me, then do this. Before the end of the day today, say, "I want to increase my prayer life. How do I do it, Pastor?" Go to Park Meadows mall and say, "I'm not leaving the food court today until I walk up and share the Gospel with three different people." Your prayer life will increase immediately. It'll just go to all sorts of new heights, right? And when you're sharing the Gospel, you don't know answers to things, your prayer life will increase. And the more you share the Gospel, the more you want to pray, the more you pray more, you want to share the Gospel. They go hand and glove. This is what Epaphras did.

What else do we know about him? He wasn't a pastor. He wasn't a preacher. He wasn't leading the church. He brought the Gospel to the people there and he prayed for them. That's all he did, but is there anything more important than that? Some of you in our church may not have positions of rank or notoriety or whatever. I'm telling you, the most important position you can have is if you're a person who prays and shares the Gospel with people. God honors that and he loves that. I don't take it lightly when some of you come and say, "Pastor Jeff, I was praying for you all week," or, "I pray for you every day," or "I've been praying for you and your family." Thank you. Need it. Want it. Desire it.

"Pastor Jeff, we've been sharing with our friends to come to BRAVE Church for Christmas." Love it. That's God's heart. That's how he builds his church. God loves

passionate prayers and Gospel sharers. The reason that you're here today if you know Christ is because somebody is praying for you long before you knew the Gospel. Reason you're here today is because somebody shared the Gospel with you. I know Gordie Smith and he led me to Christ. He prayed for four years that I go to Young Life Camp, so that we'd be on some raft somewhere where he could share the Gospel with me where I would totally reject it and say, "If that's what you think the Gospel is, I want nothing to do with that."

Also, that he can continue to pray with me and God would open up my heart and say, "Wait, wait, wait, that's exactly what I need. And if I don't have that, I'm going to hell." People in your life, and if you're growing in Christ, it's because people are praying for you too. God doesn't just call people just a passionate prayer. God uses and blesses passionate prayers, amen? Let's keep going. Let's keep going. Hang in there now. We're going to finish strong. Ready? God uses and blesses focused missionaries.

Praise the Lord.

Praise the Lord. Now think about this, because when you see this in scripture, you're going to say, "Where is he getting that from?" Notice in Verse 14, "Luke, the beloved physician, sends you his greetings." Well, where's the word missionary? You don't see it anywhere, do you? It's really interesting, because when Jesus called people, he called them to do something beyond what they were currently doing. When he called the disciples, the disciples, many of them were fishermen. And from the text, at least what I read in the scripture, none of them were very good because they never

caught anything. Every time Jesus was around, they never were able to catch anything. And yet, Jesus said, "You're really not good at your day job, but come follow me. I'll make you fishers of men."

We read about Paul in the New Testament that he was a tentmaker, but we have no indication that REI or Columbia were seeking his services to help them expand their business. We don't know how good of a tentmaker he was, but he just did it to make a little money, so he could do something greater. What do we know about Luke as a doctor? What kind of doctor was he? Was he like a cardiologist or a pediatrician or an anesthesiologist? What did he do? Who did he help and did he heal anybody? We have no indication of any of that stuff.

What we see him as is the beloved physician who was a traveling companion of the apostle Paul, who God used to pen the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts. A significant part of the New Testament was penned by this doctor. See, for some of us, we think, "If I'm really going to serve the Lord, I got to be called to ministry. I got to be called to ministry." Now let me just tell you, whatever your daytime "job" is is what your ministry is as a missionary. If you're a student at school, you're actually a missionary at your school, okay? If you're a doctor, that's just giving you a paycheck, so you can be a missionary in the hospital as a doctor. If you're a businessman, that's just a paycheck you're receiving, so that you can be on mission for everybody that you meet in the business world.

If you're a stay at home mom and you don't get a paycheck, but you know you

deserve three times as much as what your husband makes, you understand this, that's your mission, for who God brings you into contact with, specifically your children and your husband. Do you understand what I'm saying? Luke is not going to be known when we get to heaven for his great doctor work, "Oh, what a great physician you are." Paul's not going to be known for what a great tentmaker if he wasn't a disciple. Certainly, he won't be known for what great fishermen they were. What are they known for? They were on mission for the Lord Jesus Christ everywhere that they went. They were focused in their mission.

See, so many of us are waiting for the next big thing, "And one day, I'm going to be," "And one day, I could be," "And in one day." Where you are right now, just be all that for the Lord Jesus Christ in praying for others and sharing the Gospel. That's exactly what Luke did who had no idea that amount of impact he would have had as a doctor. Don't look to switch vocations, just look to be your best for Jesus where you're at, amen? Let's keep going, keep going. Hang with me. Number eight, God uses and blesses unfaithful deserters.

Praise the Lord.

Now that may not seem like a, "Praise the Lord," but it is a, "Praise the Lord," because notice this last part of Verse 14. He says, "And also Demas." Demas, what do we know about Demas? Demas was one of those in Acts Chapter 20, Verse 4 that we're going to take the offering back. Demas was one who was doing all the same ministry as they were, and yet what we read about Demas in Paul's final letter to Timothy, in Second Timothy 4 and Verse 10, notice what Paul says about this same

man Demas who's been serving the Lord, seemingly doing all the same things everybody else is doing.

Here's what he says in Second Timothy 14, "For Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Having loved this present world." What was the love of Demas? He loved the world. He didn't love God. He loved the world. It means he was doing all the same things as everybody else that was involved in Gospel presentation, but he had no heart for God. Has that ever happened before? It seems to me that Judas Iscariot was one who was one of the 12 that Jesus had selected who had gone out and preach the Gospel. People were presumably saved under Judas Iscariot's ministry which would be interesting to meet some of those people in heaven.

People were healed under Judas Iscariot's ministry, presumably. People had demons cast out of them under Judas Iscariot's ministry and here's why we know that because nobody's surprised, everybody's surprised rather when it finds out that Judas Iscariot is the one that's going to betray Jesus like, "How can that be?" And yet, Jesus said, "One of you is a devil. One of you has always been a devil. One of you has never had relationship with me." Jesus says in Matthew 7:21, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven,' for on that day, many will say, 'But Lord, did we not prophesy in your name? Do we not cast out demons? Do we not heal people?' And then he will say, 'Depart from me, you workers of iniquity, for I never knew you.'"

Now, why is this important that God uses that? Because if you live long enough and you live in the Christian faith long enough and you've been in church long enough, you're going to meet people sometime. I'm not talking about people like John Mark that desert for a while. They get hurt. They go into another church and they leave and they do church at home for a while until they build their guts back up and then get back involved in fellowship. I'm talking about people that you know, that once were singing praise songs with you in church, that once were in a small group with you in church, that once were leading with you in church, they're not just gone from church, they're gone from Jesus. They want nothing to do with him ever again. That was Demas.

Did God use him? Yeah. You said, "Well, Jeff, how do you know that he really wasn't part of Jesus?" Because my Bible tells me so. In First John 2:19, it tells me what happens to people like that. It says that they went out from us, but they were not really of us. For if they had been of us, they would have remained with us, but they went out so that it would be shown that they are not of us. True believers don't leave Jesus. True believers stumble. True believers can get hurt. True believers can kind of distance himself. That can happen. True believers can change churches.

I'm talking about people that are done with Jesus, never liked him, never believed in him in anyway, "I don't believe in him anymore." It's not that they left the faith, it's that they never had any to begin with. And God still uses that. And God still used Demas for his own glory. In the Old Testament, we see Pharaoh. Pharaoh had nothing to do with the God of the Bible and yet God said, "It was for this very reason I raised you up, so I might show my glory in you." God uses everybody. So even if you're here



and you say, "I want nothing to do with Jesus. I'm not going to come to Jesus. I'm going to live my own life, my own way," God will demonstrate his glory in and through you by showing you that he's the King of kings and the Lord of lords. God uses all things for His glory, amen? Praise the Lord for that.

Let's do two more. Let's do two more. Hang with me. You guys are doing great. And this is a little different than a normal message. Notice also who God uses and blesses. God uses and blesses church supporters.

Praise the Lord.

He uses and blesses those that bless his church. He uses and blesses those that invest in his church. Look at Verses 15 and following, he says, "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 read also in the church of the Laodiceans. And you, for your part, read my letter that is coming from Laodicea." Now, we don't know exactly what letter was coming from Laodicea. Many scholars think it was the Book of Ephesians, but this can be debated until Jesus comes back. The Bible doesn't tell us what it is. Here's what he's saying, "Greet people who are serving the church well."

Can I just tell you something, church? There's always a great return on investment when you serve the Lord. When you find a place to serve in the church and you give it to the Lord, God blesses those who support the church. Why? Because he died for the church and he rose for the church and he's coming back for his church and his church are the people of God. And when you serve the people of God, God

blesses that. He says, "I'm blessing them from the church that meets in our house." Why they have to meet in their house? Because they didn't have any buildings in the first century. So they often met in the temple, of course, to pray and then they would go from house to house.

The reason we're able to gather like this because we have a building, so we teach the word of God. And then what do we do? Well, we gather from house to house in groups and we minister to one another, we help one another grow because we need each other in our lives to do that. He's like, "Greet those people and let them know what's going on and bless them." And then notice Verse 17, he said, "Say to Archippus." By the way, if in case you're looking for a biblical name for your kid, this is a great section of scripture because I find a lot of people that are naming their kids never go to Colossians 4 to name their child.

"Say to Archippus, 'Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord that you may fulfill it.'" We really don't know much about Archippus other than this, that Paul is telling him to take heed to his ministry. That means to fulfill your ministry. That means to do what you've been called to do. It means this, when you became a believer, God placed the Holy Spirit inside of you and he gifted you in unique ways that only you can do. He saying, "Be diligent in that and let God work out everything he wants to work out through you." It doesn't mean, "Go serve the Lord, so he's happy with you." It means, "Let God be full in your life and take heed to that and be diligent in that, that God can use your life for those reasons. That's how you support the church."

Now you won't remember the name Archippus, so put your name there. Put your

name there. "Say to Jeff, 'Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord that you may fulfill it.'" "Say to Justin, 'Take heed to the ministry that you have received in the Lord that you may fulfill it.'" "Say to Suzy, 'Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord that you may fulfill.'" Put your name there. It means God's entrusted you with a service. It means, when he saved you, he made a deposit in you and he's trying to bring things out of you. And people who support God's church by giving their best to him through their gifting, God blesses and uses them. And then finally, is this one. Be real strong here at the end. You guys are doing great. God uses and blesses called shepherds.

Praise the Lord.

God uses and blesses those who have been called to his ministry. Notice what he says, "I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my imprisonment. Grace be with you." There are some that God has called to be apostles and prophets and evangelists and pastors and teachers to equip God's saints for the work of ministry. If you've been called, there's a burning desire that you must do this and you can do nothing else. It doesn't mean that you can't do other things and be successful at them. It means when you've been called by God, you must do this.

And God has called men to these positions in the church to serve him. And God blesses those who have been called by him to faithfully serve him. He uses those not just to say, "Oh, I want to be a pastor and stand in front," because there's plenty of people in our churches around the country today that stand up, that don't believe in

God, that don't love God and don't believe his word and don't preach his word. They're everywhere. And I'm talking about those who have been called by God, that love God and that love God's people and want to see God's people flourish. God blesses that today, the same way that he's always done it.

Notice what Paul says, he says, "I write this with my own hand." It means this is personal. You can almost picture the Apostle Paul, as he's dictating this letter at some point in time, he's like, "Give me the pen. Give me the pen. I, Paul, write this with my own hand." Because why? "Because I love these people. I've never even met you all. I've never been to Colossae, but with what I'm hearing, we're part of the same family. I love you. I love you. I love you." Anybody that's called by God loves God's people. They love God's people. Even when they don't want to love God's people, they love God's people. You cannot love God's people and be called by God. It's an impossibility.

When you're called, you can't talk bad about his church because it's his church. You can see things in it that aren't always right, but you still love it. Personal, right? What else is it? It's hard. It's really, really hard to be called shepherd of God. Why? Notice what he says, "Remember my imprisonment. Hey, this is hard. I'm in prison because of what I'm doing." If you're called to be a shepherd of the Lord, you will go through hardship. You just don't get to pick what it is. You're going to have tough times. There's going to be those points and you're like, "Oh, if I could do anything else, I'd do something else, but I can't because I love God and love his church and knows what he wants me to do." It's hard. Paul's like, "Remember that. Please remember

me."

And then he says this, I love this, he says hard, it's personal, but he says, "It's worth it. Grace be with you." What's grace? It's God's unmerited favor. A called shepherd of the Lord is burdened by this, "That those who are lost would come to know Jesus Christ personally." A called shepherd is burdened by this, "That those who have come to know Christ would go to the fullness of who they are." A called shepherd would do this because they know that every single person they're talking to is going to appear before the Lord Jesus Christ to give an account for his or her life and they want to make sure they're prepared. A called shepherd of the Lord knows that they're going to be judged way harder on what they teach and what they share and know they have to give an account for the Lord Jesus Christ and everything and it's worth it. It's worth it.

And if you're being called by God and being called to the ministry, "I know my goal was. I want to bring as many people with me to heaven as I possibly can and I want to expand the kingdom as greatly as I possibly can with what little I have for the rest of my life." God uses called shepherds. And I think about this list because all of us would say, "I'm just, I'm just, " Can you identify with two or three of these? Hopefully you don't identify with number eight, as an unfaithful deserter. If you do, there's hope, there's grace for you. Come to Christ today, but do you identify with some of these?

Don't ever say you're a just. I love that song by Casting Crowns, it's out right now. They borrowed the language that's been around for years, "I'm just a nobody, trying to tell everybody about somebody, who will ultimately save anybody." You're not

just in anything. You're a son or daughter of the Most High God and he's using you in ways that one day when he reveals what he did for you and through you will blow you away. We're getting ready to celebrate a Savior in a manger, amen? We're getting ready to celebrate that Christ came for all, amen? We're getting ready to say, "Joy to the world because the Lord has come," and he came so that you can be part of his family. He came so you could be under his rule in his government. He came so that you can be used by him and he's worthy of all of our adoration and praise, amen?

So would you stand with me as we close in prayer today. Lord Jesus, we give you all the glory and honor for who you are. We say joy to the world for you have come. Lord, we celebrate you. If you're here today and you've never trusted Jesus and you're sitting in your seat or standing now saying, "How do I do that?" here's what you do. You said, "Lord, I know that I'm a sinner, but I believe that you died on the cross for me and rose from the dead, and right now, I'm going to repent on my sin. I give it all to you and I confess you as my personal Lord and Savior and I receive all your life."

If you're here today and you're already a believer, may the grace of God fill you up and overtake you again and again and may you be used mightily of him. And as we sing to the glory of the Lord, may you enjoy his presence among you, in Jesus' name. Amen. Can we give God some praise this morning?