

WANTED: LITTLE GIANTS

Colossians 4: 7-18

I have an experiment I'd like you to help me with this morning. It involves a few questions I'd like to ask all of you, and I'd like you to raise your hands if you know the answer to each question. Here's the first one. If you know the name of the head football coach at Alabama, raise your hand. There are 11 assistant coaches on the U of A staff. How many of you can name two? There were well over 100 American generals who had various positions of leadership in WWII. Other than Generals Dwight Eisenhower, Douglas MacArthur, and George Patton, how many of you could name two more? Most all of us know that Franklin Graham is the CEO of Samaritan's Purse, which conducts the Operation Christmas Child shoe box campaign every year. How many of you can name one of his managing assistants at Samaritan's Purse?

Now, what does that little experiment prove? I think it is obvious. In a big organization, a tremendous amount of the work, in fact, most of the work, is done by people that are almost unknown. But if they are not on the job and doing the work, day in and day out, whatever the endeavor may be it is doomed to fail. Bible teacher John MacArthur shares the value of such people to the apostle Paul. He says, "...these people were indispensable assets to (Paul's) his ministry. He knew well that he could not do it alone; no one can. God's leaders have always depended on others to support them in their work".

And as it was with Paul, so it is with every church of Jesus Christ. If the work of God gets done at Grant's Creek, it won't be because it gets done through the lives of Mike Griffin, Jerry Keel, Marty Montgomery, Jackie Montgomery, and Don Springer. It will happen because it happens through the lives of every one of us who truly knows Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord. For every job is important and every worker is essential. And today we are going to

meet some people who are little known to most Christians, probably to most of you. But they were little giants. And our Lord would have us to follow their example and become giants that change our world just as they did.

Turn in your Bibles, please, to Colossians 4:7-18. In our text this morning we are going to take a brief look at five people that God used in a great way to advance His kingdom, five little giants. And the first one is a man named Tychicus. The two words that best describe Tychicus are the words “**trusted associate**”. Paul first met Tychicus while on his third missionary journey (Acts 20:4), and he invited Tychicus to travel back to Jerusalem with him and help build a bridge between the Gentile believers outside of Jerusalem and the Jewish believers there. The distance was around 900 miles, on foot and by ship. But whatever Tychicus might have been doing at the time, he left it all, along with his family and friends and stuck out with Paul. And by the time that Paul wrote Colossians from a Roman jail cell, Tychicus had been with him for perhaps as many as four years (MacArthur). He had been with Paul through His narrow escape from death by a hostile mob in Jerusalem. He had been with him through his trials before Felix and Festus. He had been with him on the angry Mediterranean Sea and the shipwreck on the island of Malta. His life was in jeopardy just like Paul’s, but in all of these trials he never wavered in support his friend. It’s no wonder that Paul called Tychicus a beloved brother, and a faithful minister, and a fellow servant.

Here’s how much that Paul trusted Tychicus as his associate. It was Tychicus that Paul chose to deliver the letters to the churches at Colossae and Ephesus, which he wrote from his prison cell in Rome, which also came to be the NT books of Colossians and Ephesians. And it was Tychicus that Paul chose to send to comfort those churches on his behalf. If Tychicus doesn’t come through for Paul, his ministry to the churches at Colossae and Ephesus doesn’t happen. That’s how critical God’s call was upon his life.

Beloved, other than the presence of the Holy Spirit in his heart, there is nothing more valuable to a spiritual leader than to have a man, or a group of men, to stand by him as Tychicus stood by Paul. That's what Aaron and Hur did as they stood on each side of Moses and held his arms up as Joshua led Israel in battle against the Amalekites. And as long as Moses' arms were up Israel was winning the battle. What if Aaron and Hur had failed on the job? That's how Barak stood with Deborah, Israel's only female judge, as he led Israel into battle against the Canaanites. That's how David's three mighty men, Adino, Eleazar, and Shammah, stood with him, as they broke through enemy lines to bring him a drink of water from the well of Bethlehem. That's how Jonathan's armor-bearer stood with him as they went out and together slew twenty Philistines. The Bible doesn't even tell us the armor-bearer's name, but Jonathan would never have gained that victory had not the armor-bearer been with him.

And God is saying to every one of His saints today, join in with your leaders, move out to do great things, and then watch what I will do. That's what Tychicus did. Listen to what Deborah and Barak sang together in Judges 4:2, on the day that Israel defeated the Canaanites: "When leaders lead in Israel, when the people willingly offer themselves, bless the Lord!"

There is another little giant that we see in our text. V. 8 tells the Colossians that along with Tychicus, Paul is sending to them Onesimus. The two words we use to describe Onesimus are "**forgiven slave**". Because Onesimus is the runaway slave of Philemon, and Paul wins Onesimus to faith in Christ from his Roman cell. And you also know that the book of Philemon is actually a letter from Paul to Philemon, urging him to completely forgive Onesimus, and receive him just as he would receive Paul himself.

Now, I want us to learn two lessons from Onesimus today. First of all, I want us to see the **restoration that comes through forgiveness**. Onesimus was a new Christian. He was a fugitive from justice. But notice how Paul addresses him in v. 9. He is a

faithful and beloved brother. When he called Onesimus a beloved brother, it was the same thing he said about Tychicus. And when he called Onesimus a faithful man, it was the same word he used to describe Stephen, who was one of the first unofficial group of deacons (Acts 6:5). In other words, Paul was saying, "Onesimus is a Christian brother with the same standing in God's eyes as any other saint. So forgive him and accept him completely". And to further affirm this former criminal, Paul actually gives him a mission to fulfill when he arrived at Colossae. He is to join with Tychicus in giving the Colossian church an update on how Paul was doing in Rome. Imagine how this lifted Onesimus' spirits. To be forgiven, and on top of that, to be entrusted with a task on Paul's behalf. What joy this brought to his heart.

I wonder, is this how you and I treat those who've lived a life of sin and then have come to Jesus? Do we welcome them with open arms? Or do we operate by the corporate model, and make complete a sixty day probationary period before we give them full-fledged fellowship? Make them join a Sunday School class or cut their hair or give up their Bud Light. Now, we certainly can't make a new Christian the chairman of the deacons the first week he is saved, but beloved, we can give him just as much respect and just as much love as the chairman of the deacons, and we should.

But there is another lesson that we can learn from Onesimus. Not only restoration, but also **the resolve that comes through forgiveness**. When Onesimus was saved he knew that the right thing to do was to make things right. He knew that he should go back home, confess his sin to Philemon, and ask for forgiveness. And he knew that if he went back to Colossae with Tychicus he would be seeing Philemon for sure, because Philemon was a member of the Colossian church. And seeing Philemon could be good or it could be very bad. For in Roman culture when a runaway slave was captured he faced two options. One was to be branded on the forehead with a red hot iron with the letter *f*, standing for *fugitive*. And the other was to be crucified. So when Onesimus left

to go back home to face his master, he knew that unless Philemon submitted to Paul's request and forgave him, he would pay for it with his skin or with his life. But he said, "It doesn't matter what Philemon does to me. I'm going to do what is right". And he did.

That reminds me of another forgiven sinner who made things right. When Zacchaeus experienced the cleansing power of Jesus in his soul, the first thing that he said was, "Lord, I'm giving half of what I own to the poor. And if I've cheated anyone on their taxes I'm going to repay them fourfold". And Onesimus also said, "I'm not going to let this issue with Philemon stop me from doing what Paul asked me to do. I'm going to help Tychicus give that report about Paul to the church". And he did.

Oh, friend, if you are washed in Jesus' blood today, if you are His child, be like Onesimus. Resolve to do what is right! If you owe someone some money, pay your debt. If you've slandered someone or lied to someone, go to them and ask for forgiveness. Listen, mark it down. Getting right with God will always, always, **always** mean getting right with your fellow man. And for the glory of God, don't dare let your past stop you from serving God in the here and now! Sure you've sinned and sure you're guilty, just like Onesimus. Sure you deserve to be punished. But just like Onesimus, you are a forgiven Son of God, washed in the blood Jesus! Jesus has accepted you and you are under no condemnation. And never let Satan tell you that you are not worthy to serve in the court of King Jesus!

Well, we've seen that Tychicus was a trusted associate, and that Onesimus was a forgiven slave, and now let's look at a third little giant named Epaphras. Epaphras is a **tireless intercessor**. Look at v. 12 & 13. Of all of the great themes of the Christian faith, there is none that is more important to grasp and practice than prayer. We talk much about prayer because the Bible talks much about prayer.

2 Chron. 7:14 – “If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land”.

1 Chron. 16:11: “Seek the Lord and His strength, seek His face continually.”

Ps. 105:4: “Seek the Lord, and his strength: seek His face evermore”.

Isaiah 55:6 – “Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near”.

Our Lord Jesus Christ said, “Ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find, knock, and it shall be opened unto you”. And He also said, “If you ask anything in My Name, I will do it”. Paul wrote to the Ephesians, “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit”. He wrote to the Philippians, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God”. He wrote in Col. 4:2, “Continue earnestly in prayer”. He wrote to the Thessalonians, “Pray without ceasing”. Peter quotes the psalmist when he said, “For the eyes of the LORD *are* on the righteous, and His ears *are open* to their prayers...” (1 Peter 3:12). James says, “The prayer of a righteous person has great power...” (James 5:16, ESV), and he also says, “You have not because you ask not” (James 4:2). Jude urges believers to pray in the Holy Spirit (v. 20).

Beloved, prayer is the absolute means, the only key that God has given us to release the power of God on our lives, the lives of others, or in our church, and here’s why. God’s work is supernatural work. There are many human techniques to get a man or child to change his behavior and improve his life. Two generations ago mama used a peach tree limb. One generation ago mama used

“time out”. And today mama uses negotiation and bribery. For adults the Twelve Step Program is used to change behavior, or weight watchers, or a personal trainer or personality coach. And all of these techniques will work at least on some people. But none of them require the power of God, not even the Twelve Step Program, because it will let your “god” be your hamster if you chose it to be. And none of these techniques will prepare anyone to gain Heaven and miss Hell. At best they will give someone a better life for a few short years. But the only thing that will prepare a soul for eternity is the supernatural power of God, when the Holy Spirit of God descends and regenerates that soul through faith in Jesus Christ and that soul is born again. And the only thing that will cause this to happen is prayer.

Furthermore, there are some things in this life that will never change except by prayer. Some marriages will never be healed except by prayer. Some prodigal children will never repent and turn back to God except by prayer. Some abusive or negligent parents will never change but by prayer. Some job situations will never change except by prayer. And no church will ever have revival except by prayer!

Epaphras was a man who understood this. vs. 13 says that he labored fervently for the Colossians in prayer, and we saw several weeks ago that these words in the Greek means that he agonized in prayer. It is the same word that Luke uses to describe Jesus’ prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, when as He prayed He sweat great drops of blood. vs. 14 says that Epaphras had a great zeal for the Colossians, and one translation (HCSB) puts it, “....he works hard for you...” Friend, Heaven shaking prayer is not a “Now-I-lay-me-down-to-sleep” prayer. It is a “Now-I-sit-me-up-all night” prayer if necessary. Like Jacob we wrestle with God in our prayers, and sometimes we’ll wrestle as long as it takes until we get an answer. So beloved, if you want to lay up treasures in Heaven and make an impact on earth, you must, you must start with prayer!

So beloved, I urge you, make time for prayer. It is the prayer warriors who are the real giants in the Kingdom of God. If you're too busy to pray then you are just too busy. For God would not command you to do anything that He would not give you the time to do. So ask God for a burden to really, really pray, and ask Him for strength to make the time to do it. Jesus rose up in the morning while it was still dark to pray. And if the Son of God thought important to begin His day in prayer, sounds like a pretty good idea for you and me. I'm not saying that you have to get up at 4:00 a.m. like Price Pate every day, but there's no better way to start your day, no matter what time you get up. But if that won't work at all, just make sure you have that special, uninterrupted time to talk with God. And that's not while you're driving or exercising or cutting your grass or fishing, even though you can pray while doing all those things. Here's what Jesus said, "But when you pray, go into your private room, shut your door, and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you" (Matt. 6:6, HCSB).

There is another little giant we need to meet this morning, and he is found in v. 15 (read). Nymphas was a man who likely lived in Laodicea, which was 10 miles from Colossae. But wherever he lived, the church in his community met in his house. So the words that describe Nymphas are **gracious host**. You see, there were no church buildings in the first century. Church buildings were not built until the church came out from under government persecution. And many times the early believers had to meet secretly as well. But Nymphas was so concerned that the church have a place to meet that he was willing to open up his home, possibly at great personal risk.

Now, very few churches in the Western world meet in homes anymore. Most are like Grant's Creek, most God has blessed with large, comfortable buildings to meet in. But beloved, that is no reason that God's people should never gather together in their homes. So many times it is around the kitchen table or sitting in a living room that real, honest to goodness fellowship takes place,

where bonds of love are formed and where comfort and encouragement takes place. Like one of our members said not too long ago, God established the church not only to win the world to Jesus, but also so God's children would do life together. And so many times we do real life together in the home. But only in the homes where there is a gracious host or hostess that will open up their home.

Maybe you don't have the gift of hospitality as others do. Maybe your circumstances are not favorable for opening up your home for fellowship and ministry on a regular basis. But I challenge you, at least on occasion consider being like Nymphas, or as some translations have it, Nympha, which would have been a female. Yes, it takes a little time and energy. But you never know how God will use you. He used Matthew to win many to Jesus when he opened up his home to his friends. God used Mary and Martha to minister to Jesus. And Jesus said, when you've ministered to the least of these you've done it unto Me. And do you know what? There are going to be many precious saints who've been gracious hosts and hostesses, just like Nymphas, who will hear Jesus say one day, "Thank you for being so kind to Me and meeting My needs the way you did". And they'll say, "When did we do that, Jesus?" And He will say, when you opened up your home to Bill, and Sue, and Joe, and Wendy, and all the rest. Each time you did it, you ministered unto Me".

So we've seen that Tychicus was a trusted associate, that Onesimus was a forgiven slave, that Epaphras was a tireless intercessor, and that Nymphas was a gracious host. But I want us to look at one more little giant before we close. His name is Archippus. Look at v. 17. Archippus' name appears only one other time in the NT, in Philemon v.2, where he is mentioned along with Philemon and Apphia, who were likely his parents. But Archippus was a Christian man whose charge from Paul speaks a word to us all. The words that describe Archippus best are the two words **chosen vessel**. In Acts 9:15 Jesus says that Paul was a chosen vessel of

His to go and preach the gospel to the Gentiles. And though we do not know what it was, God had chosen Archippus for a ministry as well. And so Paul exhorts him, “Take heed to your ministry, Archippus. Pay attention to it, and make sure you fulfill it”. And the words are a command in the Greek language. For Archippus not to take his ministry seriously was serious business.

Beloved, let me say to you, the Bible is clear that each and every child of God has a calling. Paul wrote to the Ephesians, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them”. God has a special task for every one of us, just as He had a calling for Tychicus, or Onesimus, or Epaphras, and Nymphas. And it is a calling to be a giant, whether little or big. And friends, God does not play around with His call. He wasn’t just teasing Moses in the burning bush. He didn’t speak to young Samuel, or to Isaiah, or to Saul of Tarsus on an insincere whim. When God calls you can be sure He means it!

So, do you know what God is saying to you today, child of God? He’s saying, “Take heed to your ministry that God has given you! Make sure you fulfill it.” I ask you, are you heeding God’s call today? You might say, “But I don’t know what it is”. That’s no problem. God is surely big enough to show you. Just ask Moses or Isaiah or Paul. The question that you and I must answer is, “Am I willing to obey?”

It was about this time in my life 30 years ago that I was struggling with God’s call. Janice and I were at Ridgecrest Baptist in town, where I was serving as their Music, Youth, and Education Minister. And we were extremely happy in that church. But in my spirit I was not at peace.....And so I told the preacher, Curtis Kelley, that God was calling me to preach, and it was also a call to missions, and that I was resigning and going back to seminary. So the resignation day was set – July 11, 1984.

Well, the day came, the day that Janice’s and my life would take on a new direction forever. Was I doing the right thing? I sure prayed that I was. Anyway, as I do the first thing every morning, I

opened my Bible to have my quiet time. And it just so happened that my reading that day was in Colossians, Colossians 4. I certainly didn't remember all the verses in that chapter. But if I ever had a morning quiet time that I'll never forget, that was the one. For when I got to verse 17, the Lord spoke to me that day just as clearly as He spoke to Archippus 2000 years ago. He said, Mike, "Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you fulfill it". And God gave Janice and me the grace to take heed, and the blessings He's given us since that day are more than can ever be told.

But here's the deal. The call didn't end 30 years ago. It is just as strong today as it has ever been. The call to serve our Lord never ceases as long as we draw breath. So I ask you again. Have you answered God's call at one time? And if you have, are you still pursuing it?