



Sermon – September 19, 2021
Phillip Bethancourt

Verses Covered This Week

Colossians 4:7 – 9

2 Timothy 4:12

Philemon 1:10 – 12, 15 - 16

Let me invite you to open your Bibles with me to Colossians 4 in verse 7. We're going to center our hearts on God's word to see the way that that man of sorrows is exalted because the tomb is empty. And that empty tomb changes everything. If you're a guest with us this morning, whether you're watching online or in the room, welcome home. We come together to venture into God's word, seek His Spirit to change us. And I want you to know, if you're a college student with us today, you're going to get a Bethancourt double-dip. Because after we're done this morning, I'm heading over to the College Gathering to spend the next four weeks with y'all, teaching through our College Gathering. So I want to invite you to join us in the FLC gym right after this time is over.

Now let's remember what's happening in Colossians. See, last time we were in this passage, we saw the way that Paul called us very specifically to be faithful in our culture as salt and light. And now this morning, we're going to see the way he calls us to be faithful in our mission. Let's see the way he talks about that beginning in verse 7. He says this:

⁷Tychicus will tell you all about my activities. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. ⁸I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts, ⁹and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you of everything that has taken place here.

Let's pray together.

Father, as we walk into this room this morning, I'm sure there are heavy hearts all around us that are weighed down by the cares of this world. Discouraged by the trials of life, uncertain about the future. And God, as we come to Your word right now, we are praying along with what Paul says here. That You would use Your word to encourage our hearts, to bind up the broken, to

bring healing to those who need it. And that we might find our hope in Jesus alone, in whose name we pray. Amen.

Well, yesterday a vehicle about the size of a minivan crashed into the Atlantic Ocean and it made history. This wasn't some family that was out on a joyride that made a wrong turn and plunged into the sea, instead this was the capsule from the latest SpaceX launch of the Dragon Spaceship. And it had just come back from spending three days orbiting the earth at over 300 miles above our earth's surface. And as it landed, it made history, as one of the participants said soon after it last night, he said, "This started a new chapter in space flight." Why is that? What was different? What was different is for the first time in human history, all four participants in this space flight were amateurs. No professionals. No trained astronauts. No elite that had studied for years and prepared for this moment. Instead, it was an entrepreneur, an engineer, a physician's assistant, and a community college professor. And the four of them for the first time made history into what many think will be the future for space travel. That it's not limited to just to the elite. But that instead, if you have enough desire, and if we're being honest, enough money, you can have that opportunity too. That it takes things out of the hands of a few and makes it available to the many. And as Paul begins to bring the letter to the Colossians to a close, he is showing us the way that the Gospel of Jesus Christ has a similar spiritual effect in the church. That the advance of the Gospel, the mission that we are called to, is not limited to some elite few, the trained leaders, the prepared pastors, the equipped ministers. Instead, it is for all of us. It is for everyday Christians just like you and me. And as we look at this text this morning in verses 7 through 9, Paul is going to tell us the story of two men who were everyday Christians connected to the Colossian church. And what we're going to find is that as we look our way through this, we're going to see the way that Paul is also calling us to embrace the everyday mission of God in our lives. You see, Paul is writing here at the end of this letter, he's bringing it to a close to the Colossians and he is sending it on to them. He tells us that it comes through two men, Tychicus and Onesimus. There was no Amazon two-day shipping back in that day. There was no easy way to get a letter from here to there. These letters would have been rare, memorable, noteworthy. And these messengers come to give a sense of the Gospel story that Paul is calling each one of us to. And what we're going to see is that as we look at the lives of these letter carriers, they are calling us to embrace the mission of God for our lives. And what that mission looks like is to serve God faithfully as we celebrate God joyfully.

So notice how the text begins back in verses 7 and 8. We're going to see the way that Paul starts us off by telling us that we must first serve faithfully on God's mission in our lives. So he talks there first about this man Tychicus. Who was this man? Well, the text tells us in verse 7, he'll tell us about all of Paul's activities. What we know about Tychicus from throughout the New Testament is he was from this region of Asia Minor where Colossae was located. And it seems like the Colossians were aware of him. That he might have been a scribe or a steward of Paul's words who is now being sent to him and to this church to bring this message. And why would Paul have selected Tychicus? Well, notice how he describes him there. In the middle of verse 7 he says, he will send him because he's a beloved brother, a faithful minister, and a fellow servant. In other words, Paul knew he could entrust his words with this man. There was no way for the Colossians to get an update about Paul apart from a steward like this. No e-mail, no text message, no video chat, or phone calls could bring that word. You needed to have a messenger you could trust if you were going to bring a message that would transform. And that's exactly what he sees in Tychicus, this one who's beloved, faithful, a fellow servant. You see, the way

Paul praises him is not on the basis of his qualifications but his qualities. Not on the basis of his credentials but his character. He knows this is a man of trust. And what we're going to find is that as we see him talking about Tychicus in this text, and as we look at the way that the New Testament describes Tychicus to us, what we're going to see is the way that he is a picture of what faithfully serving in the mission of God looks like. And that's going to show up in several ways. You're going to notice it first here in the way that Tychicus models for us that we serve God faithfully when we support Gospel work. So that's why he calls him there a beloved brother. He is speaking about how he is part of the family of God. You don't need to turn there you can see these words on the screen, but we see Tychicus mentioned elsewhere, all the way back in the book of Acts, chapter 20. There's a long list of people who are accompanying Paul on his journey to Jerusalem. He spent several months with him in Greece and Macedonia. And you'll notice that at the end of this list of names, it describes two men that it calls the Asians, Tychicus and Trophimus. Tychicus was with Paul in order to support the work. He was this man from Asia Minor, right here where Colossae was located. And at that time, earlier in Paul's ministry and earlier in Tychicus' development as a believer and as a servant of God, he is there to support. He is walking along side. And the purpose of this trip to Jerusalem was to take the money that had been given by the Gentile churches and deliver it to the church in Jerusalem to enable them to flourish in the ministry. Paul, Paul and Tychicus walked together, side-by-side. Tychicus was lifting up his hands supporting the work he was carrying out.

Now I imagine a number of you were at the A&M football game yesterday. And maybe you've noticed this season as we've been at Kyle Field, there's some markers on the field designating the fact that this is the 100th year anniversary of the 12th Man. That it was a hundred years ago that E. King Gill started that tradition of standing in the seats, always being ready. I don't know about you, when I look around the stands, I'm not sure there's a lot of us that would be fit to get down on that field if there was some need. Maybe on the student section we've got more people who are capable. But the idea is there. That through your voice, through your energy, perhaps most of all, through your money that you pay for those tickets, you are supporting the team. You're coming alongside them to support them in the work. But think about the image of that stadium. You've got 22 exhausted players on the field and 100,000 people around them either excited or exasperated depending on how things are going. There could be a real danger in the church for us to have a similar mentality. That we think that our role and how the church is served and what we're called to do is limited to a few people. And that all we're supposed to do is sit on the sidelines and watch and tell them "good job" and give our money and go home. As if God is simply asking of you to show up on Sundays, write a check, and go home. But we see here with Tychicus this different picture. That he was there with Paul. He's serving. He's pouring himself out in a way that calls us to the same reality. Paul speaks in Colossians 4 of him as a beloved brother, part of the family, and guess what? Family members are bought in to support their family. They serve the mission by supporting the work.

But notice the next description that Paul uses there in verse 7. Not just as a beloved brother, but as a faithful minister. See, we see Tychicus shows us that we, that we serve faithfully in our Gospel mission when we share the word. He talks about him there as a faithful minister. This guy is forgettable, but faithful. He's the kind of guy that comes and goes and you may not know much about him, but he is consistent at making the word available to other people. That's exactly what's happening here in Colossians. He is bringing this letter from Paul. He is speaking to the people. He has done the exact same thing in the book of Ephesians. Ephesians

6:21 shows us how he is sharing the word there as well. He is not the author, but he is the messenger. And by his faithfulness, he is not speaking with his own authority, he is bringing the authority of God to the people of God so that they might be made more like the Son of God. That's the call that we have on this mission. To share God's word faithfully. Now imagine if I told you there was a mission trip opportunity that you could take. I know we're not really able to do international mission trips right now. But imagine this one. Imagine you could go on a mission trip to reach someone from another culture, and there would be no jetlag. There'd be no weird food. There'd be no language barrier. But even better than that, if I could guarantee you before you ever left on this mission trip, there would be someone there waiting on you who had approached you asking for a Bible and asking if you would be willing to read the Bible with them so they could understand who Jesus is for the first time. Would any of you be up for a mission trip like that? I know I would. That sounds like a no-doubter. None of the challenges, all of the opportunity. Can I tell you a mission trip like that happens every Friday on the campus of Texas A&M? We've got a group of our college students who go out and they set up a table on campus handing out Bibles. And in the last couple weeks since the semester started, they've had people from Indonesia, Korea, India, China, Russia approach them asking for God's word in their heart language. And some of them even asking the question, would you read this with me so that I can understand what it says and know more about who Jesus is? These opportunities to share the word don't happen only thousands of miles away. They're happening right on our doorstep and what Tychicus is modelling for us is that our faithfulness to serve the mission that God calls us to should be done by sharing the word. Sharing it on campus. Sharing it in your homes. Sharing it in your office. Sharing it at your life groups or in Zeal or in Awana or on Wednesday nights. In every setting we share the word. We are messengers of God's truth just as Tychicus was. He was a faithful minister, verse 7 tells us.

But notice how it also describes him there in the middle of the verse. He's not just the beloved brother, a faithful minister, but what does it say next? A fellow servant. If we want to serve the mission of God faithfully it also includes showing the way. Showing the way. Paul is demonstrating for us how Tychicus is a model. He is a servant alongside him. He has elevated him to that status as one who has made himself a slave of Christ. We see that show up elsewhere in the New Testament. You know, you can see it on the screens. In 2 Timothy 4:12, listen to the way that Paul, in his very last letter, talks about what he has sent Tychicus to do. He says this:

¹²Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus.

He says, "I have sent him to Ephesus." And the reason he is going there is not simply to bring another letter from Paul, but to extend the ministry of Paul. To advance it beyond where Paul currently is. So just think about this progression. It starts in Acts 20 where Tychicus surrounds Paul and supports his work as he walks with him. Then it goes on in Ephesians 6 and here in Colossians 4, Tychicus shares the word. He is sent out on behalf of Paul. And now Paul has grown him, developed him, prepared him so faithfully that he can now send him out to show the way. He goes to Ephesus to minister, to invest, to see transformation happening. And he does it for this very reason that Paul sends him here to the Colossians. And you'll see the way he talks about that in verse 8. Why did Paul send Tychicus to them? Look back at what it says.

⁸I've sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts,

In other words, there are two purposes for what Tychicus is doing. It's for both information and inspiration. What's happening in this message is that he's bringing both a word that enlightens and encourages. He is wanting them to know how things are going with him while he's in prison. But more than anything, he's wanting to encourage their hearts. Now why would the Colossians need encouragement? Just remember, we've been working our way through this letter and what we've seen is how they are embattled on all sides. They are facing opposition from an external culture that is hostile to them, that rejects their faith. But they are also facing challenges from within. From these false teachers that seek to lead them astray from the gospel. They are facing all of this opposition around them. And in the midst of that difficulty, in those moments of hardship, God brings someone into their life with a word from the Lord to deeply encourage their hearts. You ever notice how God's encouragement sometimes shows up at the perfect moment? When you find yourself low, when you're not sure how you're going to go on, and maybe it's that friend that sends you an unexpected text. Or that hallway conversation with somebody you looked up to who had that word. When's the last time you've done that for someone else? When's the last time you demonstrated what Tychicus displayed here? The desire and intentionality to encourage the hearts of others. See, what's going on in this text is that if we want to serve God's mission faithfully, we need to embody the realities that we see in Tychicus. But he's not the only one Paul talks about in this passage.

What you're going to see here in verse 9 is that he turns his attention from Tychicus now to this man Onesimus. And what we will see in the last part of this passage is the way that Paul is calling us to celebrate joyfully about God's mission in our life. So notice how he says it there in verse 9.

⁹and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you of everything that has taken place here.

So Tychicus is not the only one Paul sends. He also sends Onesimus. And Onesimus doesn't just carry the message of Paul. He is carried by the message of Paul. What we're going to find is that as we learn about this man is this. The Jesus that is at the center of Paul's message to the Colossians has now become the center of the life of this one who is from the Colossians himself. Onesimus. Notice how it speaks of him there. That he is faithful and a beloved brother who is one of you. He describes Tychicus in similar ways to Onesimus, being faithful and beloved. But what's different here is he talks about how he's one of them. He's from amongst the Colossians. It'd be like him pointing out somebody who was from Anderson or Iola or Caldwell or Hearne or right here in Bryan/College Station. It's one of their own that is being sent back with this message from Paul. I'm not sure if you recognize the name Onesimus. It doesn't feel like it's a very common name in the Bible. But did you know there's an entire book of the New Testament that talks about this guy, Onesimus, that you may feel like you've never heard of? If you've got your Bibles with you, hold your spot here, but slide over with me to the book of Philemon. So start turning to your right. If you get to Hebrews, you've gone too far, and there's this one chapter book that speaks about this man, Onesimus, that Paul is talking about here. What we learn is that his story is both more complex and more compelling than it may seem when you first look at it in Colossians 4. And there's a good chance that when Tychicus and Onesimus brought this Colossian letter to the church at Colossae, they may have also brought this personal letter to Philemon at that time. And I want you to see the way that Paul talks about Onesimus in

this book beginning in verse 10. So look there with me. We'll read verse 10 through 12 first. It says:

¹⁰I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment.
¹¹(Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and to me.) ¹²I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart.

So here's this on, he's talking about Onesimus, and what you'll find if you do deeper research into this book of Philemon, is that Onesimus was Philemon's slave. And he had run away from his work. He had fled from his master. He had escaped with some of his possessions and he was now lost. And Paul acknowledges the fact that for Philemon, he would have felt useless to him. He had lost one of his best workers. It seemed as if so much had been taken away. And in that time period, there were no Amber Alerts for lost slaves. You didn't get some ding or message. There's no way to track them down. If they're gone, chances are they maybe lost forever. And I assume that's what Philemon would have felt in this moment. That this one who was near him is now far. But what Paul tells us is that God uses that escape to change his life forever. Do you see the way he talks about him there? He speaks about him in verse 10 as his child. Paul described himself as his father. And look down at verse 12. He describes him there as my very heart. Can't you see the connection, the passion, the relationship that must have been forged? We don't know all the details of how this happened. But what it seems like is that at some point while Paul is in prison, he gets connected to Onesimus. Maybe Onesimus was put in prison as well. We don't know for sure. But somehow they come together and Onesimus meets Jesus in a way that changes everything. And Paul begins to invest in him. And now he has raised him up to be ready to be sent back. And put yourself in Onesimus' shoes as you are heading back to Colossae. Paul calls you in and says, "Hey, I got this letter. Can you take it back to your hometown? Go with Tychicus." And I'm imagining there was a big gulp of uncertainty. "You want me to go back there? Do you know what they think of me? Do you know what might happen to me if I get caught along the way?" There would be all sorts of uncertainty and anxiety that might have filled his heart in the moment. And on the flip side, think about the Colossians. Maybe they got some advanced indication that some messengers were coming to bring a letter from Paul and you can imagine the excitement as they gathered together. They were surprised that it was coming. And when those messengers walked through the door, every face in the room, the jaw drops. It's Onesimus. What's he doing here? The last time we saw this guy was right before he ran away in disgrace. And yet he is back, sent by Paul. It would blow your mind. How could this happen? They would have been stunned by this. That's why it's so important to see the way that Paul continues to talk about him later on in Philemon. Look down in verses 15 and 16 where he talks about what happened in Onesimus' life. He says this:

¹⁵For this is perhaps why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, ¹⁶no longer as a bondservant but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother – especially to me, but now much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

Think about what's happening here. When a runaway slave who hits rock bottom meets Jesus, it changes his entire life for now and into eternity. Think about the nature of this contrast that Paul speaks of here. He goes from useless to useful. He goes from a betrayer to beloved. He goes from faithless to faithful. He goes from a slave to a son. Everything about who he is changes by the power of Jesus. My guess is that the Colossians that knew Philemon had written this guy off.

Traitor, sellout, can you believe it? And yet what they didn't realize is that that temporary freedom that Onesimus experienced in this world was setting the stage for an eternal freedom that could only come through Jesus Christ Himself. And you want to know something incredible about this man? There is a bishop that led the churches in this area of Asia Minor in the early 2nd century AD whose name was Onesimus. And many historians and scholars believe that this one that we are reading about right here ended up being a major leader in the church in the area that he had once deserted. I mean, think about this. To go from a bondservant to a beloved brother and now to a bishop. God raises him up to lead and to do it because he had changed his life through this total transformation. If the Colossians have given up on anybody in their world, it probably was a man like Onesimus. And I can't help but wonder this morning, are there people in your life that you have given up on spiritually? They're too far gone from you now. They seem too far gone from God in their sin. It seems as if there is no hope. That's the way many might have felt about this man and yet what Paul is reminding us of is there is no one too far gone that God can't rescue. Some of you can tell that story yourself. God did that in your life. Some of you are watching online because there's too much shame from the sin in your life where you're not even willing to step back in the room. You're not too far gone for God. The runaway slave, the prodigal son, the defiant teenager. There is no one who's beyond the grace of God to work in their life. Onesimus bears witness to this reality. God takes one who fled and instead raises him up to be a leader, to bring God's message, to support the work, to show the way.

Now I want you to notice how this text ends. Because if you look down at the end of verse 9, Paul reminds us of why he sent Tychicus and Onesimus and he says this:

[They will tell you of everything that has taken place here.](#)

Everything. Paul leaves nothing on the table. There is a full transparency into his ministry, both the good and the bad. The hope and the hurt. The mountaintops and the valleys. He says, they're going to lay it all out to you. You're going to see it. He wanted to be transparent with them about the challenges and the victories that were facing his ministry as he labored in prison to see the gospel advance. And one of the reasons he does that is that Paul didn't see himself merely as a prisoner, but as a pastor. That those that were surrounded by him while he was in chains were not just soldiers, but a mission field that he had been given the opportunity to faithfully reach during that season that he was in chains. And that same reality is true for you and for me. That the reason that God has you in your home, or at your school, or in your work is to live a life on mission just like Paul. When you go to work, your life isn't just about what you make, but how you minister. When you're in your home, it's not just about how you serve, but how you shepherd. When you're at your school, it's not just about what you learn, but how you lead. Paul recognized this opportunity in his midst. Regardless of the circumstances, he was going all in for the sake of Jesus. And he wants the Colossians to know everything; the good and the bad. This past weekend, I wasn't with us here at Central. I was off in Denver and Cami and I got the chance to connect and go to the A&M/Colorado football game. But the main reason we were out there is that one of my close friends in ministry, a guy named J. T. English, was having his installation service at the church. We got the chance to be part of it. So if you were with us back in April, you remember that one year, on the one year mark of us welcoming me in as the new pastor, we finally got to have that installation service where in that moment we laid a stake in the ground where you as a church were calling me to walk faithfully as your pastor and Kyle Hoover was calling you as a church to walk alongside me in this ministry. Well, J. T. had that

chance this past weekend. You know, what's interesting is his installation service took even longer to have than mine. Because he's one of the only other guys I know who started his pastoral ministry at this church during the pandemic. If you remember, that search process last spring, him and I were swapping notes about, "Hey, how would you do an electronic vote? How do you preach to an empty room? Or what do you do to Zoom in with people to help them get to know you before it happens? We walk through that season together and we got to sit face-to-face for the first time in nearly 18 months. And I remember him looking at me while we were there and he says, "How are things going? Tell me everything." And I said to him, "These last 18 months have been the hardest but best months of my life." I've loved every minute of being your pastor. And I know I'm not alone in the hardships that this season has brought. Because this pandemic has affected everyone in a variety of ways. And so when Paul speaks here about the way that they're going to tell you everything, he's saying, don't hide the hard. Don't pretend like it's all hopeful. Let's be honest about what God is taking us through. You can flip through those photo albums but at home and someone is missing that was with you before this pandemic began. You can look around this worship center and you no longer see the faces of some of the people that were here before this pandemic began. We know the deep pain that this season has brought. But what Paul is reminding us of is that even in the midst of the pain there is purpose. Even in the midst of the darkness there is light. Even in the midst of the hardship, there is hope. And in the middle of these challenging seasons, he is pointing us to these two men, Tychicus and Onesimus, as a model for what it looks like to live on mission as a church, Central family. And what he's saying here is that the same grace that brought Tychicus through all of his trials so that he might serve faithfully and the same grace that brought Onesimus from being a runaway slave to a soldier for Jesus Christ, is the same grace at work in our hearts. And the call of the Gospel is to keep pressing on faithfully so that we can pursue the mission that God has called us.

Let's pray together.

Father, you said before us broken men, forgotten men, no one would even know the names of Onesimus or Tychicus if it was not for Your word preserving their momentary acts of faithfulness to carry out Your mission in their community. Lord, every one of us in this room will one day die and be forgotten. But my prayer, my cry for you, for our people, God, is that You would give us the kind of heart that was in these two men. That we might follow You faithfully. That we might celebrate You joyfully. And if there are runaway slaves in our midst, enslaved to sin, prodigal sons or daughters who have gone off to a far country, Lord. Would we not give up on them? Would You bring them home? Would You set them free? And would You do it even today? We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.