Psalms - Commentaries by Clifford Henry Brown

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Psalm 87:6 and Colossians 4:7-18

We are all going to be written up. That process is going on now. In the close of the epistle to the Colossians we get a little foreshadowing of that kind of thing. The Spirit of God has been pleased in the verses referred to in Colossians 4 to give us a few remarks about some of the brethren. These remarks are the estimate that the Apostle Paul by the Spirit of God put upon them. You will notice that no two of these men are characterized alike. Each one has that that is distinctly his. No two of us are expected to be duplicates. The Spirit of God has been pleased to put these records here that we might pick up a bit of profit from them.

If the Lord tarries and you live for several more years, what kind of a record will God be able to write of you at that time? If the Apostle Paul were going to close one of his epistles and wanted to mention you, what kind of a record would he be able to give?

Tychicus has a nice recommendation. Here is a "beloved brother." There was something about that man that made him very dear to the heart of Paul. He was a beloved brother. There are some of our brethren whom we can scarcely speak of without using that word. We always think of them as beloved brothers. Perhaps there are others about whom we would not be so ready to speak in that way. Of course, we are all beloved of the Father, but that is not the side of things before us here. It is not what we are in Christ, but what is manifested in our practical everyday life.

"A beloved brother, and a faithful minister." Wouldn't we all like to be that? I believe our hearts ought to long for that kind of thing. You would like to be that some day, wouldn't you, dear young Christian? That kind of thing is made up of a lot of very small threads. It is like one of the great hawsers that they use on the ships. They are as big as your arm ; but if you were to examine that great rope, you would find that it is made up of lesser ropes, and these are made up of still lesser ropes ; and finally you get down to the fibers. Our Christian character is like that.

Why do you think that Tychicus was a beloved brother

and faithful minister, and fellow servant in the Lord? How could the Spirit of God call him that? His life had been made up of daily faithfulness. Day by day he had been weaving that cord, that rope of testimony and service. Now he is rather mature in his Christian experience, and the Apostle can call him "beloved brother, and a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord." He did not suddenly become that. That was the result of a life of pruning. How nice that he could be spoken of in that way.

Are you faithful? Are you faithful in the little things God gives you to do for Him? Faithfulness is a great thing. It is a great thing to be faithful to the meetings. Have you a seat at the reading meeting, and are folks disappointed if you are not there? Would they miss you if you were not at the prayer meeting, or would they be surprised if you were there ? Faithfulness is made of small obediences. It is woven of individual acts of faithfulness—faithfulness for Christ in the least bit of responsibility that falls across your path. Perhaps there are some here this afternoon who had some little bit of service you were discharging for Him, and you were happy in it; but you have let it slip. Would the Lord have liked you to give it up, or was it spiritual sloth? Did you become cold in your soul? Oh, if there is anyone here like that, go to the Lord about it and ask Him to freshen up your affections. When you go back home, take up that little service for Him. If He has given it to you, it is your individual responsibility—it has your name attached to it. Someone else might step in and do the work, but that will not be discharging your responsibility.

Onesimus is another faithful man, another beloved brother. It doesn't say anything about his being a fellow servant, but he is a faithful and beloved brother. We read quite a bit about him in the epistle to Philemon. He had not always been a faithful and beloved brother ; he had been a very unfaithful man. He had run away from home, and perhaps helped himself to his master's funds. He probably thought he had worked hard and got no pay, and was entitled to a little cash. Anyway, he ran away from his master, arrived in Rome, and got converted there. That man was transformed by the grace of

God into a beloved and faithful brother.

So it doesn't make any difference what our past has been, if the grace of God comes into our lives, all the privileges that belong to any children of God lie before us. We can appropriate them. Don't be discouraged by thinking how bad you have been. Onesimus certainly had a bad name. Probably they said some very harsh things about him where he came from, but here the Spirit of God is pleased to record, "Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother." His name means "profitable." He certainly had not lived up to his name in the early part of his life. He had been unprofitable. He had been a liability to his master. Now he goes back—no longer unprofitable, but profitable. I wonder how the Lord would write you up—as profitable, or unprofitable? In one sense we are all unprofitable servants, but we want to distinguish between things that differ. That doesn't mean that we are to slump down, fold our hands, and say, "I am an unprofitable servant," and stay still. That scripture does not mean that we should not have an earnest desire that we might be enabled to do something to please the Lord, something that He can own as for Himself.

Aristarchus—"my fellow prisoner." He had endured hardship for Christ. He knew what it was to suffer for Christ. He had identified himself with a man of God. At the close of his own life, Paul said, "I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." Those wounds and scars that Paul had in his body showed that he had suffered for Christ. Aristarchus had the honor of sharing some of those sufferings for his Lord and Master. Oh, young folks, that is a privilege. If we suffer, we are going to reign. Have you ever had the privilege of suffering for Christ? I wonder if we try to

avoid it. Oh, remember, "Unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake." Shame on us if we seek to avoid that path. Shame on us if we keep our mouths closed when we should speak. Shame on us if we would rather not be associated with those who are godly, if we are ashamed to be characterized as a saint.

Marcus, or Mark. There is something very encouraging here. Have you ever made some kind of a blunder in that little meeting where you come from? Have you ever made a mess of things? Have you ever been humiliated in the midst of your brethren? Take courage. Here is a man who has done the same thing. His name was Mark. He started out to serve the Lord, and he became weak-kneed. He got homesick and turned back. That was a sad thing. He certainly missed the mind of the Lord in that. At the time the Apostle Paul was very much disappointed in him, and did not have much confidence in him. He had turned his back on the work of Christ. Isn't it nice to find the Apostle Paul here, near the close of his life, telling the Colossians that Mark was coming, and if he came, to receive him. In a later epistle he says, "He is profitable to me for the ministry." Mark recovered himself, or perhaps I should say the Lord recovered Mark. Because he had made a colossal failure, that was no sign that the Lord was through with him.

I remember saying to a brother a good many years ago, "How is it that we never hear your voice in any addresses to the young folks, or any ministry?" "Oh," he said, "I tried it once and made a miserable failure, I made up my mind I would never try again." I sought to encourage him and tell him that because he failed once was no reason why he should always fail. That brother became one of our most valuable and esteemed brothers-one of our most able brothers. We do not need to think that God is through with us because we have failed. Paul did not hold against Mark his past failures.

Jesus, or Justus. Paul gave him his full title-Justus the just one. That man's outstanding characteristic was that he was a just man. Well, that is not to be despised. We should all seek to be just. If there is anything that should characterize a Christian, it is moral integrity-downright honesty -by the grace of God to speak the truth and be men of our word-to be those that can be trusted-those upon whom our neighbors can look as honest men-men who pay their debts-men who have no unfulfilled obligations.

Epaphras-"a servant of Christ." We are all servants of Christ in a sense. If you are a Christian, you are a servant of Christ. Oh, what a privilege! There is no such thing as an unnecessary member of the body of Christ, as a useless member. In biology they try to tell us that we have certain things in our bodies that once were functional, but they have ceased to be so-they do not mean anything any more. I am not saying that I agree with the biologists. There are no needless remnants hanging to our bodies. So in the body of Christ, every member has a functional responsibility. We are all servants of Christ-not servants of men, but servants of Christ-and our orders come from up there. You cannot go to a brother and ask him what you should do. You have to get your directions from Christ. Epaphras was a servant of Christ. What did he do ? He was a mighty man of prayer. He was a laboring brother in a very special sense, and you can be a laboring brother or a laboring sister in this sense. This is an avenue of service open to every Christian, and it is a most valuable one.

There is a brother present who said something to me a number of years ago, and I have never forgotten it. He was speaking about prayer and how to pray ; and he said, "Well, the best way to learn to pray is to pray." You will never learn to pray by reading a book on it. You will learn to pray by praying. Here is a man who prayed, and it says he labored earnestly. It takes real purpose of heart to pray, and the fact that we do so little of it proves that. Oh, how Satan likes to keep us from our knees. What will our service amount to if it is not sanctified by prayer? A prayerless life is a barren life. You may be so active in Christian service that you have no time to pray, but it will be a barren life regardless of all activity. Epaphras was not satisfied to see every believer brought to the Lord's table. The burden of his heart was that they might stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. Don't we all need praying for when we look at it from that angle?

Luke, the beloved physician. Isn't that a lovely title ? I suppose Luke's business was that of a physician, but he discharged this business responsibility in such a way that he could be spoken of as Luke, the beloved physician. His secular occupation was not out of keeping with his Christian profession. One meshed right into the other. There was no inconsistency ; he carried Christ with him into the sickroom. He was Luke, the beloved physician. Perhaps you are a carpenter, and you might be the beloved carpenter, because you carry Christ with you ; or you might be a stenographer, but you could be the beloved stenographer, because you take Christ with you to the office. You do not divorce your secular employment from your Christian profession. They both go together. They run parallel, like the two rails that carry the train across the continent. If one left the other, you would have catastrophe. So there will be catastrophe in your Christian life if the rail of your profession leaves the rail of your practical godliness.

Demas. Ah, there is pathos there. When it comes to Demas, all we get is "and Demas." Thereby hangs a tale. It was not so long afterward that Paul had to write, "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world." 2 Tim. 4:10. No doubt Paul was apprehensive at this moment. He knew there was something wrong. Perhaps he did not know what it was, but all he could say was, "and Demas." Oh, dear young Christian, that is very sad. Nothing could be said. There was just the mere mention of his name. As we go about the country, we come to a meeting where we have not been for a year or so, and we say, "Where is So-and-so?" Oh, didn't you hear that he left the meeting?

And Demas! What can you find that will attract you more than Christ? What do you think will ever be presented to your soul as long as you are in this scene that will compete with Christ in your affections ? Do you think anything can ever be offered to you that is comparable to that precious name? What causes young folks to drop out of the meeting? Christ has lost His charm to the soul. Perhaps they have not given Him up, but they want "Christ and-." We could mention a hundred different things. Perhaps it is Christ and service. I hear of some who have left the place where Christ is in the midst of two or three gathered to His name, because they wanted to be in places where they could serve Him better. What a sad thing to let service rob you of loyalty to Christ! Remember, "To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." Others drop out because they find the world attractive. I suppose if I were to canvass this meeting, I would be told of some who dropped out since I was last here ; and you might say, "He wanted this," or "She wanted that." It might be service; it might be marriage; it might be popularity ; but it was something else than Christ. Demas loved this present world.

Archippus. "Take heed to [fulfill] the ministry which thou hast received." Oh, dear young Christian, how is it back in your little gathering? Are you fulfilling the place where the Lord has put you ? Are you walking before His eye? Are you taking heed to fulfill what has been committed to you? It is possible for us to have received a distinct commission from the Lord for a certain work we are to do for Him. It is possible to receive that, and not do it. Archippus was in danger of becoming careless and giving up. Perhaps he was thinking, "This little work I am doing is not very important after all." He was slipping, and the Apostle by the Spirit says, "Archippus, Take heed."

Now suppose you put your name in there. Let us every one put our names in there this afternoon. Everyone has his bit to do in the path of witness and testimony for Christ; just as when this building was erected, each one came and did his bit. Perhaps one man worked here for months, and another for ten minutes. Each one was necessary in order that this great structure might be here today. So it is in the work for our blessed Lord. Now is the time to do it. He is coming, and what we leave undone we will never be able to do. Remember, the only place to testify for your blessed Lord is here. You can't do it in glory. Now is the time to seek to witness for Him and to live for Him.

Going back to Psalm 87-"The LORD shall count, when he writeth up the people." We are all being written up. Let us hear the word to Archippus. C.H.B.

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