

### The Conclusion of Paul's Letter to the Colossians

#### Colossians 4:10-11

Colossians 4:10-11 - *"Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, with Mark the cousin of Barnabas (about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him), <sup>11</sup> and Jesus who is called Justus. These are my only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are of the circumcision; they have proved to be a comfort to me."*

#### Background Notes

Colossians 4:10-11 continues the conclusion of the book of Colossians. Let's look at a background note for three more of Paul's fellow workers: Aristarchus, Mark and Justus. Paul says that these men were *"my only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are of the circumcision."* In other words, these fellow workers were Jewish, and they were a comfort to the apostle Paul. The word "comfort" denotes an encouraging and soothing or consoling effect. There are many frustrations and irritations in life (even in the ministry!), and it's a great help when we can be comforters and encouragers for one another.

#### a. Aristarchus

Aristarchus is mentioned five other times in the New Testament. These references tell us that he was from Thessalonica; he was with the apostle Paul on his third missionary journey; he was arrested at Ephesus and dragged into the theater there (Acts 19); he went with the apostle Paul to Jerusalem after the missionary journeys were over (Acts 20); and he was on the ship voyage when Paul was taken to Rome as a prisoner (Acts 27).

Paul called Aristarchus *"my fellow prisoner"* (v10). Some commentators take this to be a figurative description - that he was simply a "prisoner of the Lord" in the same way that we're "servants of the Lord." However, I take this description quite literally. I believe that Aristarchus may have voluntarily made himself a prisoner to help the apostle Paul in his ministry, while Paul was under house arrest in Rome (see the end of Acts 28).

So Aristarchus may have volunteered to assist the apostle Paul in his ministry, maybe as his secretary, and he made himself a prisoner along with Paul. Philemon 23 says the same thing about Epaphras. So it seems that a couple of men voluntarily became prisoners to help the apostle Paul in his ministry.

Would you submit yourself to house arrest to help someone else's ministry? Actually, many of you may do something similar when you counsel at a summer camp! You voluntarily make yourself a prisoner to a cabin full of kids for a week or two, to serve the Lord in the ministry of that Christian camp! You're being an Aristarchus!

## **b. Mark**

What do we know about Mark? This was the same “Mark” who wrote the Gospel of Mark. He was the “John Mark” who accompanied his cousin Barnabas and the apostle Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey, but when they landed on the coast of what is now Turkey, Mark quit and went home to Jerusalem. *“Now when Paul and his party set sail from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia; and John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem” (Acts 13:13).*

Why did he quit? Was he sick, or homesick? Was he afraid? Back in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, that area (now in the country of Turkey) was dangerous. Maybe Mark felt that Paul was taking leadership of the team rather than his cousin, Barnabas, and Mark didn't like that. We don't know why he quit, but he left the missions team and went back home to Jerusalem.

Some time later, when Barnabas wanted to take John Mark on their second missionary journey, Paul said an emphatic “No!” Because they disagreed, Paul took Silas with him on his second missionary journey, and Barnabas took Mark to Cyprus (Acts 15:36-40). As far as the apostle Paul was concerned, Mark was a quitter.

But now Mark was back in Paul's good graces. We know this positive relationship continued, because Paul mentioned Mark in his final letter. 2 Timothy 4:11 says, *“Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry.”* Paul wrote 2 Timothy from a dungeon in Rome, about five years after his letter to the Colossians.

## **c. Justus**

Colossians 4:11 is the only mention of Justus in the New Testament. It has been suggested by some commentators that Justus changed his name slightly, so as not “lower” the name of Jesus.

## **Doctrinal Point**

### **Failure is not final.**

Mark had failed. He quit. The great apostle Paul wouldn't allow Mark to go with him on the second missionary journey. Acts 15:38: *“But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them to Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to work.”* It seemed that Mark was shelved.

But now Mark made a comeback! He proved himself to be faithful and valuable in the ministry. He didn't throw in the towel permanently - and he now worked side by side with the apostle Paul. And at the end of Paul's life, he asked for Mark to come to him!

Mark was not just approved by the apostle Paul – he was approved **by God!** How do we know that? We know it because God chose him write the Gospel of Mark - and the great theme of that Gospel is: Jesus Christ, the obedient Servant! So God picked up the pieces and made something beautiful of Mark's life.

Failure is not final - and that comes through loudly and clearly from the life of John Mark.

## Practical Application:

### Your failure is not final!

Maybe you feel you have failed the Lord in some way - in fact, maybe you already *have* failed the Lord in some way. Maybe you were given a responsibility in your church or in another ministry - and you quit. You threw in the towel, and you let the team down – and now you feel that God has probably shelved you.

Here's the good news: failure doesn't have to be final! God will pick up the pieces - if you let Him. What about moral failure? Maybe some of you have sinned in the moral area, and you think there's no way God can use you again – that you'll be a "second class Christian" from now on. No! Failure is **not** final!

God can pick up the pieces. Even following moral failures, if we repent and get our lives straightened out, God can use us. Our moral failures may keep us from reaching our full potential for God. Think of Samson, and all his potential for serving the Lord - but because of moral failure, he did not reach his full potential. God can still use us when we repent and turn our lives over to Him.

Although scars may remain in our lives because of our failures, God is the great Healer. He can work all things together for good (Romans 8:28). That verse doesn't say "all things are good." No – but it does say that God will "work all things together for good." God can bring good, even out of failure.

God may have to use tough discipline in our lives, but He will work even the discipline for our good. And the "good" that God has in mind is found in Romans 8:29. It's not popularity or worldly success, but to be more and more conformed to the image of Christ!

Maybe you're thinking back on your past, and you recognize that you were far from perfect. In fact, you really messed up on more than one occasion and you feel that God can no longer use you. From what we've seen from the life of Mark, the good news is that your failure is not necessarily final. God can pick up the broken pieces, and He can still make something beautiful of your life.

Here's an illustration. We're all like uncut gemstones - diamonds in the rough. When we fail, it's as though there were some bad fractures in the gemstone, but God is chipping away to make something beautiful of us. God can still pick up the fractured pieces and make something beautiful, even from the broken stone. Diamonds don't get glued back together again, but God can take the fractured pieces and continue His work to make something beautiful. After failure, we may not ever be able to reach our full potential - but God can still pick up the pieces and make something beautiful of our lives.

God won't leave us on the shelf! When we repent of our sin, even the worst of failures is not final. Your failure is not final! That's a tremendous encouragement for us.