

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

For reply: Email: truthfortoday@aol.com

Broadcast Date: 19 September 2004

No. T0333

Speaker: Mr. George Stevens

Paul's Companions: Jesus-Justus and Epaphras – Colossians 4:11-12

Have you kept copies of your school reports? Every now and again, we can pull these out and review what our teachers had written about us. We may have a good laugh at some of their comments, but we may also be saddened by others. We may even say 'If only...' in response to an overall report. The comments are usually brief and may be related to subjects, behaviour, effort and attendance.

Now consider what kind of report God would give you related to the way that you live out your Christian life. What kind of grade would you get for the following subjects?

- Studying God's Word;
- Prayer;
- Worship;
- Stewardship; and
- Service.

Then there follows:

- Attitudes;
- Behaviour; and
- Church attendance.

While a captive in Rome, the apostle Paul wrote to the Colossians (among other churches) mentioning in his greetings the names and commendations of some of those close to him. For example, in Colossians 4:10-13, we read: *"Aristarchus my fellowprisoner saluteth you, and Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas, (touching whom ye received commandments: if he come unto you, receive him) and Jesus, which is called Justus, who are of the circumcision. These only are my fellow workers unto the kingdom of God, which have been a comfort unto me. Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you, and them that are in Laodicea, and them in Hierapolis."*

Today, we shall take a peep at the reports about Jesus, who is called Justus, and Epaphras.

JESUS-JUSTUS

The Jesus-Justus of these verses is not to be confused with the Joseph Barsabbas surnamed Justus of Acts 1:23 who was proposed as one of the disciples to fill the position of Judas Iscariot. Nor should he be confused with the devout Justus of Corinth whose house was joined to the synagogue (Acts 18:7). This Jesus-Justus was a Christian found in Paul's company in Rome. He is with the apostle sharing in his enduring work so revealing his spiritual maturity. He possessed an affection for the Lord's people in that he sends them greetings. Above all, he had confessed Jesus Christ as his Lord and Saviour, and bears testimony to the Lord's supremacy and grace by supporting the letter Paul has written to the believers in Colossae. Therefore, we shall consider:

- a. his name and its meaning;
- b. the fact that he was a Jew;
- c. what is meant by his being a fellow worker of Paul; and,
- d. in what sense he was a comfort to Paul.

a. The Meaning of His Name.

Both the name Jesus and the surname Justus were common among Jews. The Hebrew equivalent of the name is Joshua. The Greek name Iesous springs from the Hebrew meaning 'Jehovah who saves'. Indirectly, it reminds us that the all-powerful God is able and willing to save people from the torments of hell and for the joys of heaven. Directly, it reminds us of the Son of God who became flesh in order to save His people from their sins. The angel who spoke to

Joseph said, *“And she (Mary) shall bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”* (Matthew 1:21).

Imagine sharing that majestic name given to such a lowly Person. Every time Jesus-Justus heard his own name, he would be reminded of the One who was the mediator between God and man - the One who had loved him and had given Himself for him.

Youstos is of Latin origin and means 'just'. It reminds us of the Son of God who knew no sin, did no sin and had no sin in Him. We read in 1 Peter 3:18: *“For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit...”* Peter's preaching, recorded in Acts 3:14, condemns the Jews saying: *“But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you...”* In Acts 7:52, Stephen's words to the Jewish council included: *“Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers...”* Messages such as these would have struck Jesus-Justus because he himself was a Jew. Now he was continually reminded of this Just One by his own name. He may have even been aware that God the Father had committed all judgment to the Son (John 5:22). He did so because the Son of God is also the Son of man (John 5:27).

b. A Jew

Jesus called Justus was one of those 'who are of the circumcision'. This refers to those who were of Jewish stock who had believed the gospel and were members of the one body. Aristarchus and Mark are also named as such.

The children of Israel were and are the chosen people of God. The fact that God is at the moment, calling out both Jew and Gentile to faith in Christ, does not change this. Those who believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God are members of His church. Both *believing* Jews and Gentiles are part of this. The church will soon be leaving this earth. It is then that God will recommence the prophetic clock in respect of Israel. The nation will be born again spiritually. It will be at the centre of God's rule when Christ reigns as King of kings and Lord of lords. Jerusalem will be the metropolis of the earth. Israel's land will ultimately stretch from the Mediterranean across to the River Euphrates. This is a God-given promise. Those who resist this, resist God.

However, Jesus-Justus was part of a greater promise. As a member of the body of Christ, he was a true Jew. Galatians 3:26-29 state: *“For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.”* Furthermore, Romans 2:29 states: *“But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.”*

As a Christian, the inheritance of Jesus-Justus will be a heavenly one. Peter records that we are begotten to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for us (1 Peter 1:4). Jesus-Justus will reign with Christ in a future day until the point when there is a new heavens and a new earth. From then on, he will be with Christ eternally. There can be no greater privilege than this!

c. Fellow Worker of Paul unto the Kingdom of God.

Paul must have felt lonely at times. He was in prison, but continued to preach the Gospel. Hence, Aristarchus, Mark and Jesus-Justus are called his fellow workers. They had fellowship with Paul in the work. In this sense, they shared his commission which is outlined by the apostle in Acts 26:15-20: *“And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.”*

The phrase '... unto the kingdom of God' refers to the time when the Lord Jesus Christ will reign on earth (see Matthew 25). This kingdom supersedes all other kingdoms. In Daniel 2, we read of a stone cut out without hands that struck the image (symbolising the main empires of the world) on its feet. The image was destroyed and the stone became a great mountain that filled the whole earth. Daniel interpreted this as God setting up a kingdom that will never be destroyed. We might say that the Kingdom of God is where the King is (Luke 17:21). In that future day, the Lord Jesus Christ will reign gloriously. Today, because Christ dwells by the Spirit in the hearts of Christians, then the character of that coming kingdom is visible through them. In Romans 14:17, we read: *“For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.”* Christians should be marked by these things. Entrance into this kingdom is by new birth (John 3). Furthermore, as one suffering with Paul, Jesus-Justus

could take Paul's message to the persecuted Thessalonians to heart, namely: "...*That ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer.*" (2 Thessalonians 1:5).

However, we must note the warning given relative to the kingdom of God in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10: "*Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.*" If you are found in this list, then the only way to be saved is to sincerely confess your sins to God and ask the Lord Jesus Christ to take over your life knowing that He died to put away your sin at the cross. Then you too, will be amongst those who inherit the kingdom of God.

d. A Comfort to Paul.

Aristarchus, Mark and Jesus-Justus are said to have been a comfort to Paul. The word used here for comfort is a medical term which denotes a soothing or relief from pain. These Christians gave encouragement to the imprisoned apostle. It was as though their presence and help healed him in some way. So Paul appreciated their presence, service and devotion, and gave them a place in the Word of God declaring their faithfulness. Do you know a servant of the Lord who is in a difficult circumstance? If s/he is within travelling distance, then s/he would appreciate a visit and even some assistance. Loneliness can become one of the worst enemies of a faithful and persecuted servant of Christ. If you can't manage a visit, then a letter, email or phone call would help.

It is now time to think about EPAPHRAS

In his commentary on Colossians, Thomas Bentley writes: "Epaphras is one of the three Gentile believers Paul has with him at the time of writing. There is a significant balance in the company surrounding Paul; three Jewish believers and three Gentile believers, all endorsing the ministry. These stand together as a testimony to the truth of the pre-eminent Christ..." Hence, Paul is able to address a mixed ethnic audience in this letter to the Colossians. The fact that Epaphras is mentioned first in the second group suggests the apostle's respect and affection for him. It seems that Colossae was the birthplace or residence of Epaphras. So he would have been known to many of the city. We will examine the following:

- a. the meaning of his name;
- b. his being a fellow servant of Paul and minister of Christ;
- c. his prayerfulness; and,
- d. what it meant to be a fellow prisoner of Paul.

a. The Meaning of His Name.

It is difficult to ascertain the meaning of the name Epaphras. There are some who would say that the name is a shortened version of Epaphroditus. The latter means "lovely" or "comely". It reminds us that the Lord Jesus Christ is the altogether lovely One, the fairest of all to our souls.

However, it is more likely that Epaphras means 'covered with foam'. '*Epaphrizo*' is used in Jude 13 where we read of ungodly men who have infiltrated the church as being: "*Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame...*" Such is the power of the verb relative to the greatness of the shame. But in the case of Epaphras, the power of the foam would be relative to the greatness of the Gospel. To be covered with the foam suggests that he not only preached the Gospel of God's Son, he also lived his life according to it.

b. A Fellow Servant of Paul and Minister of Christ.

Epaphras evangelised the cities of the Lycus Valley in Phrygia under Paul's direction and helped found the churches of Colossae, Hierapolis and Laodicea. He had a heart-felt care for all the Christians there and endeavoured that none would be overcome by the erroneous teachings of the day. It seems that he was responsible before God for establishing the doctrine surrounding the name of Christ in these cities. Paul witnesses to Epaphras when he declares, I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you, and them that are in Laodicea, and them in Hierapolis. The Revised Version translates 'great zeal' as 'labour'. It suggests labour that demands all that a person can give. So Epaphras used all his strength and wisdom to accomplish the task in hand.

He visited Paul while he was a prisoner in Rome and the result was the Epistle to the Colossians. Paul calls Epaphras 'a servant of Christ' or, as the Revised Versions puts it, 'a servant of Christ Jesus'. This term is used by Paul of himself (Romans 1:1) and of Timothy (Philippians 1:1). Each was a servant of the resurrected Christ - the Man in the glory. So what are the qualities that fit a servant of Christ? One has written:

*The servant of Christ is righteous,
Marked by fervent prayer,
Constantly tracing God's answers
With his soul laid bare.*

*The servant of Christ is humble,
With tears, bowing low;
Earnestly asking protection
From the devil's blow.*

*The servant of Christ is honest,
Toils with his own hands;
Urgently charging, strengthening
Saints in nearby lands.*

*The servant of Christ is loving
Seeks the best for all;
Tirelessly preaching salvation
Through his Master's call.*

*The servant of Christ is faithful
True to the word of light,
Sincerely teaching God's children
Arms them in the fight.*

The high commendation of Paul for this faithful servant shows us something of his spiritual maturity. He was both a preacher and a teacher of the Colossians (1:7). Paul's commendation shows his approval of the teaching of Epaphras. The fact that he calls him 'our dear fellow servant' shows that Epaphras was well loved by all. He could be called 'the fellow servant of their love' in a similar way to 'dear Son' being translated 'the Son of His love' with reference to Christ and the Father in Colossians 1. This endearment would be a result of Epaphras practising what he preached. His manner of life brought honour to the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

c. Prayerful.

The Colossians may have known him as a preacher, but Paul knew him to be an intercessor also (as 4:12 indicates). The Greek word for 'labouring fervently' has the meaning 'to struggle' or 'to combat'. In this manner, both Paul (1:29) and Epaphras were continually struggling in prayer for the Colossians. Epaphras' exercise to pray in this way shows us how spiritually minded indeed he was. It is one thing to preach and teach, but the work of the Lord's servant is only fully blessed when accompanied by fervent, faithful prayer - especially for the saints. Prayer is the expression of dependence upon God and the desire to be in the will of God.

It was the earnest desire of Epaphras that the Colossian believers should: "...stand perfect and complete in the will of God." If they were able to stand, then there was stability through the grace of God. There was a dire need for strength to resist the error of the false teachers who were assaulting the testimony in Colossae. Such teachers were degrading the doctrine of the Person of Christ. The prayer of Epaphras desired that they would stand firm in the truth that the apostle was teaching them through this epistle, namely, the deity of the eternal Son for whom and by whom all things were created. Also the fact that He was the Head of the church. Any error within their local church could then be resisted.

Furthermore, Epaphras prayed not only for stability, but also for 'maturity' which is the meaning of the word 'perfect'. Epaphras was concerned about the spiritual growth of the Lord's people. It means that the truth presented should become the source of the lives of those who hear it. It should change their lives in such a way that they become Christ-like.

The third part of Epaphras' prayer was that they should be 'complete' in all the will of God. This word, 'complete' may be translated as 'fully assured'. The false teachers gave the impression that their teachings expressed the divine will, but Paul's letter showed how empty these teachings were. The truth Epaphras and Paul taught represented the will of God for the Colossian saints. Their teaching could be trusted and brought with it the assurance of faith. May we, like Epaphras, pray for all the saints that they may have stability in their lives established upon the Word of God; be mature in applying the teaching to their own lives and the surrounding circumstances; and, know the certainty of teaching that is truth in the absolute sense.

Unfortunately, there are professing churches in the forefront of society that are no longer relying upon the Holy

Scriptures to know the true will of God. They are rather influenced by the opinions, fads and fashions of this world system which are in direct opposition to the truth of the living God. Such churches declare: 'We must move with the times and developing culture!' The Bible refutes this. Christianity has its own culture and must be separate from an ungodly world and its politics. The Son of God tells us that we are in the world, but not of it (John 17:14-16). He also states (in the same scripture) that the world hates those who are His. He went on to pray that they should not be removed from the world, but be kept from the evil one.

May God give us the grace to "*contend for the faith once given to the saints.*" This will mean taking a stand against error. It may mean that faithful believers will have to leave ungodly churches to meet with Bible-believing Christians. It may mean that Christian politicians make a stand for Christ or leave parties that are leading the nation into ungodliness. It certainly means that the voice of Christ should be heard throughout our land. No longer can true Christians be complacent or passive. It is time to herald the Gospel of God's Son with renewed vigour and zeal. In the words of the hymn-writer, G Duffield:

*"Stand up! Stand up for Jesus!
The trumpet call obey;
Forth to the mighty conflict
In this His glorious day!
Ye that are men now serve Him
Against unnumbered foes;
Let courage rise with danger,
And strength to strength oppose."*

d. A Fellowprisoner of Paul.

The Epistle to the Colossians was written during Paul's first imprisonment at Rome. There he lived in a hired house under guard. Philemon 1:23 reveals that Epaphras was with him at the time: "*Epaphras, my fellowprisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you. As do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke my fellow-labourers.*" It would seem that Epaphras was also a prisoner with Paul whether as being identified with Paul or as a voluntary captive keeping Paul company. In whichever case, he was also suffering for the Gospel.

Acts 28:30-31 tell us what Paul did during that time: "*And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.*" No doubt, Epaphras assisted the apostle in this work. Today, in England, we can see legislation proposed that may hinder the preaching of the true Gospel. Should this be implemented, would we be prepared to go to prison for the name of Christ?

Well, we have seen the brief reports on two of the Lord's servants. What standard of Christian maturity and service have you achieved so far? Frances Ridley Havergal challenges us with words that Christ might use:

*I gave My life for thee,
My precious blood I shed,
That thou might'st ransomed be,
And quickened from the dead,
I gave My life for thee;
What hast thou done for Me?*

Please Note:

We encourage you to use this transcript for your personal or group Bible studies. This material should not, however, be used in any publications without the express permission from Truth for Today, whose contact details can be found on page 1. Large Print copies of this document are also available upon request.