

# Coming in First Place – the preeminence of Jesus Christ

“... so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything”(Colossians 1:18).

## Coming in First Place – The Book of Colossians

*The Christian's Experience – Putting On: Sanctified Fellowship (4:7-18)*

### **Sanctified Fellowship (4:10-11) – Mark, Jesus Justus**

*10 Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, sends you his greetings; and also Barnabas's cousin Mark (about whom you received instructions; if he comes to you, welcome him); 11 and also Jesus who is called Justus; these are the only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are from the circumcision, and they have proved to be an encouragement to me.*

In Ephesians 5:25-27 we read the familiar words of exhortation offered to husbands; words heard often at weddings or in counseling with husbands and wives. We read:

***25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, 26 so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.***

And while any husband in his right mind must honestly stand in awe of the task of loving his wife even as Christ loved the church, I think we miss the point when we point this passage at husbands charging them with their responsibility toward their wives and then neglect to see just what it is that this passage is impressing upon the readers. And what is this grand impression? What is it that Christ Jesus loves so much that He was ready and willing to give up His very life? The answer is obvious, Christ Jesus loves the church, He loves the gathered, assembled fellowshiping members of those who have looked to Him alone as Savior and Lord. Christ loves the church.

And just what is the church? Beloved, the church is not a building but rather is the people of God, the people belonging to God. In the good providence and provision of God, He has called together each one of us, each one who possess a special and unique gifting of the Spirit of God, not so that we can be unique or isolated or even so that we can stand out among others; but rather each one of us who gathers with other brothers and sisters in Christ is to do so for the express purpose of blending our experiences and our gifts to corporately exalt and glorify God.

As we gather week after week, let us never lose the wonder of what it is we are supposed to be striving for as we worship God together, as we sing together, as learn God's Word together as we pray together, as we serve one another and edify one another – for as we do all these things, we are ultimately being shown a tiny glimpse of heaven. Whether we do this well or not, the closest experience of heaven any of us can ever have during the week is in our corporate worship experience, in times like this. Is it any wonder that we ought to prepare our hearts, pray for the services, for one another, for the Pastor as he preaches, for those who will serve in the nursery, in Jesus Club, in serving the meal? Jesus loves the church; this corporate gathering.

But we know as well that loving the church even as Jesus does is not just a Sunday thing. I often tell both premarital and marital counselees that their loving one another is not a feeling, but it is a daily choice. There are days when a spouse may not feel like loving their husband or wife; but at that point he or she must choose to love. And in like manner, for a variety of circumstances, there will be times that you and I may simple not feel like loving the church and

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specifically this local expression of it. We may feel this way for a number of reasons. We may feel left out, neglected, rejected, spurned, unappreciated or otherwise diminished. Or we may feel like we are above any needs, any accountability, any responsibility to one another. But either way, such are simply “feelings” and we are not called to feel love for the church; we are called to express, via real, tangible, meaningful efforts, love for the Church. Jesus never said, “I feel so much love for the church that if I had to prove it, I would go to the cross.” Rather Jesus simply demonstrates His love for us by going to the cross.

And so, while we, as the church, have the great responsibility to evangelize the lost, let us remember that nothing should bring us greater joy than to be around other believers, fellow brothers and sisters in God’s family. It is in our gathering together that we must talk about what God is teaching us, we can share our common frustrations and struggles, and we can pray together. For whatever are our differences and pursuits in this life, there is one love and one desire that is common to each of here; our love for Jesus and our learning to love what He loves. And what does He love? Jesus loves the church! Why are we constantly challenging one another to read the Bible, to pray for one another, to share the gospel with others and the like? We do this, beloved, because of the simple truth that the richer our fellowship is individually with God, the richer our fellowship will be corporately with each other. This is the true essence of Christian fellowship.

This morning we come to the next two names in our list of what Paul considered to be rich relationships with other believers. We have already seen the lives of Tychicus, the faithful man who co-labored with Paul; of Onesimus, the fugitive man who was restored first to God, but also to Philemon; of Aristarchus, the fearless man, the one who stood by Paul no matter how difficult the times to bring him “encouragement” and comfort. This morning we will look mainly at the life of Mark, whom I have called “the forgiven man”. We look at Mark primarily because we have several references to him in the New Testament. But we will also look briefly at Jesus Justus, the “friendly man” and see how these two, like Aristarchus, proved to be an encouragement to the imprisoned Paul.

Let me remind you once again why we are working through this list of names mentioned by Paul. First, we know that the Holy Spirit of God has included these people for a reason; that there are lessons for us to learn from their lives. And second, the context of Colossians 3 and 4 has been “sanctification” or putting off the old man and putting on the new man; of seeing more and more of sin eliminated from our lives so that more and more of Christ may be emulated by our lives. To that end, we find in each of these people listed little portraits of Christlikeness; lives that live by Christlike principles that we can learn and imitate.

So then, let us begin by looking at the second of the Jewish workers who proved to be an encouragement to Paul, the man named Mark. As we did last week, I would like to first present to you the person of Mark and then follow this up with some principles we learn from Mark’s life.

## II. Mark (10b)

*Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, sends you his greetings; and also Barnabas's cousin Mark (about whom you received instructions; if he comes to you, welcome him)...*

Like Aristarchus, we are not limited to what we find in Colossians 4:10 for information about the life of Mark. In fact, we have quite a history of this man. The very first time we meet

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Mark we see him in veiled terms, but as you will see he is unveiled very quickly. Turn with in your Bibles to Mark 14:43-52. This is the account of the betrayal and arrest of Jesus. We read:

**43 Immediately while He was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, came up accompanied by a crowd with swords and clubs, who were from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders. 44 Now he who was betraying Him had given them a signal, saying, "Whomever I kiss, He is the one; seize Him and lead Him away under guard." 45 After coming, Judas immediately went to Him, saying, "Rabbi!" and kissed Him. 46 They laid hands on Him and seized Him. 47 But one of those who stood by drew his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his ear. 48 And Jesus said to them, "Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest Me, as you would against a robber? 49 "Every day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize Me; but this has taken place to fulfill the Scriptures." 50 And they all left Him and fled. 51 A young man was following Him, wearing nothing but a linen sheet over his naked body; and they seized him. 52 But he pulled free of the linen sheet and escaped naked.**

It is generally believed that this “young man” in the text who fled naked is in fact John Mark, the very author of the gospel of Mark. Evidently, when the mob went to search for Jesus, they started at the home of John Mark’s mother and eventually made their way to the garden. Being a “young man”, as Mark heard the commotion, he quickly got up and threw a linen sheet over him and rushed out to see what was taking place. Now, I share this first encounter with Mark for this reason; we see in Mark early on, a propensity to high-tail it out of a situation when things get tough. So hold on to that thought.

The next time we run into Mark is in the book of Acts. Turn in your Bibles to Acts 12. The account of Acts 12 details Peter’s arrest as King Herod was seeking to “mistreat” the church. If you are familiar with the story, Peter was chained between two guards. The church, which as we come to learn was meeting in the home of Mary, this Mary being the mother of the man we are looking at, John Mark, was fervently praying for him. We read in this text that some point, an angel of the Lord appeared and woke Peter, causing his chains to fall off. Peter thought he was having some kind of dream, but later realized he had been set free and he made his way to the home of Mary and John Mark (Acts 12:12). We read in Acts 12:11-12:

**11 When Peter came to himself, he said, "Now I know for sure that the Lord has sent forth His angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting." 12 And when he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying.**

This tells us that Mark was from a somewhat wealthy family, enough to have a home large enough for the church to meet in. Mark was a man of means and used those means to help the church.

Our next encounter with Mark is also found in Acts 12 as we learn that as part of the first missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas, the young Mark went with them. We read in Acts 12:25:

## Coming in First Place – the preeminence of Jesus Christ

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**And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their mission, taking along with them John, who was also called Mark.**

From here we turn over to Acts 15 and find a bit of that first fight of flight attitude of Mark. It is in Acts 15 that we come to learn that Mark seems to have been a huge disappointment. Mark had been blessed by being discipled by Paul and his cousin Barnabas. He had traveled with them on their first journey, but we come to learn that he deserted the missionary team in Pamphylia and returned to Jerusalem. So, when it came time for the second journey, Barnabas wished to give his cousin Mark a second chance. We read of this account in Acts 15:37-39

**37 Barnabas wanted to take John, called Mark, along with them also. 38 But Paul kept insisting that they should not take him along who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. 39 And there occurred such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus.**

Interestingly enough, this is the last we hear of Mark in the book of Acts. We are left wondering if the Lord ever used this young man full of so much potential. And, did Paul ever reconcile with Mark and Barnabas? But we come now to our text in Colossians 4 and read again in verse 10:

**Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, sends you his greetings; and also Barnabas' cousin Mark (about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him)**

This statement comes some seven to ten years after the falling out of Acts 15. But notice that Paul here is not ashamed to mention Barnabas, and Paul is not ashamed to mention Mark as a **“fellow-worker,”** as he is called in the next verse and in Philemon 24, we find that Mark is serving along side of Paul in Rome. At some point reconciliation was accomplished, and here in verse 10 Paul instructed the Colossian church to welcome Mark and avoid shunning him because of his previous failure. He has Paul's full confidence as is seen to be engaged in a most productive ministry to the church.

In Paul's last letter before his death, some five or six years after writing to the Colossians, we see the situation with Mark come full circle. In 2 Timothy 4:11 we read:

**Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service**

Whatever the previous controversies, Paul had forgiven Mark of his past failures and inconsistencies and their relationship was restored. Not only that, but they developed a partnership in ministry. Mark was not a failure any longer, but now was a noted servant for God's kingdom. In 1 Peter 5:13, Peter speaks of him as **“my son Mark.”** It is believed that Peter had much to do with seeing this man come to faith. And Mark, while maybe not the best traveling missionary, certainly proved valuable to the church as he would write the second gospel and according to tradition, would serve as the first Bishop of Alexandria in Egypt and would be martyred their for his faith.

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In considering some principles we might glean from this man’s life, two words come to mind, perseverance and patience. With the first word, perseverance let me remind you that while Mark fled from the scene in the garden at the arrest of Jesus; and while he deserted Paul and Barnabas in Asia Minor, we find that he was continually seeking ways to minister to the church. You know, sometimes we all have a vision of what ministry we think we would be good at, or that we should be involved in for the church. We might try our hand at a ministry here or one there; but if it doesn’t work out what do we do? We might sit back and say that there just isn’t any place for me. That is hogwash! Beloved, if you are a believer in Christ, if you belong to the church, then you have a ministry to be performed. You may have failed at previous attempts; you may not be doing what you thought you should be doing, but everyone is to persevere until they find that ministry in which they can excel. That is the principle of Mark. Truly he lived out 1 Corinthians 15:58 –

**Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.**

Let us therefore persevere in ministry. But there is a second principle we glean, really from the perspective of Paul and that is the principle of patience and forgiveness. For while Paul did not want Mark on that second missionary journey, it is evident that he continued to give Mark opportunities to serve the church, being patient and forgiving of Mark because Mark’s issues were not “sinful” as much as they were simply finding that place of proper service. And what Paul practices here with Mark is nothing short of what he has already exhorted the Colossians. For in Colossians 3:12-13 we read

***12 So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.***

Paul would say something quite similar to the believers at Ephesus. In Ephesians 4:32 he wrote:

***Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.***

Beloved, we will all fail at times in our ministries. And think about how many times you have blown it before God, and yet He is always there to forgive, to restore, to strengthen, and to give you another opportunity to be used for His glory. Truly He is a God of second chance. And we, created in His image as a reflection of His glory, should do likewise. Despite his previous failure, Paul patiently forgave Mark, and eventually restored Mark. The relationship was mended and Mark, alongside Paul, was used greatly by the Lord in ministry. To whom do you need to extend patience and encourage them to find ways in which to minister to the church?

Let us turn our attention then briefly to the man by the name of Jesus Justus. The only thing we know about this man is his name as found in this text for there is no other reference to him. His name is a compound of a Hebrew name, Jesus, or in Hebrew, Joshua, meaning “The

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Lord Saves” and a Greek name, “Justus” meaning “righteous”. Perhaps this man had been so changed by the gospel that his life reflected the righteousness of Christ. But beyond this name, we have nothing else said except that he was a “fellow-worker” who “proved to be an encouragement to me.”

The question for us is this, how does Jesus Justus picture for us Christlikeness? From what we see here in this lone text that mentions him, what are we to learn and emulate? While we do know a bit about men like Aristarchus, the fearless man; and Mark, the forgiven man, on what basis do I call Jesus Justus the friendly man? Whatever this man did, he was simply there for Paul. We know he did not write any New Testament books; we don’t know if he ever traveled anywhere else with Paul, but we do know that while Paul was in prison, this man was with Paul. And the principle I glean from all of this is simply this – sometimes all we can do is be with a brother or sister in Christ in their time of trial. We may have no words of wisdom; we may know of no actions to take, but we can simply come along side as say, “I am here for you.” How is this a picture of Christ? Turn with me to Matthew 1. Here we have the account of the birth of Jesus and follow along with me as I read Matthew 1:21-23 –

**21 She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins. 22 Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 23 “BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL,” which translated means, “GOD WITH US.”**

What do we have here but the name of Jesus meaning what? That He will save His people from their sins. The name of Jesus means, the Lord saves. And then in verse 23 we find another name, Emmanuel, which means what? God with us!” Jesus Justus pictures our Savior in that he was simply with Paul and encouraged him. Who do you need to come along side of this week and simply be there? You many never know just how much of a comfort that might be to someone. Perhaps this is a bit anticlimactic, but let me close with an illustration I read that involved Charles Shultz’ Peppermint Patty and her friend Marcie. Peppermint Patty said to Marcie: “I’d like to read this book, Marcie, but I’m kind of afraid. I had a grandfather who didn’t think much of reading.” She continued by saying, “He always said that if you read too many books, your head would fall off.” Marcie responded, “You start the first chapter, and I’ll hold onto your head!” Whose head do you need to hold and who can you encourage to do better in their walk with the Lord. Let us persevere like Mark, be patient like Paul, and be a friendly encouragement like Jesus Justus. For by such we reveal that we love what Jesus loves, the body of Christ, the Church!

*Soli Deo Gloria*

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