

# Unsung Heroes (Faithfulness Behind the Scenes)

Ephesians 6:21-24

February 19, 2017

As I was planning out the sermons for the final chapter of Ephesians, I'd originally considered ending our study last week, with Paul's call to prayer. But, I think we would have missed something really important if we'd stopped there. Ephesians 6:23-24 ends the letter saying, "Peace to the brothers and sisters, and... Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love." This is a fitting end to the same letter that began with "Grace and peace to you..." in Ephesians 1:2. Also fitting, is the fact that the letter began with a glance back in time before the creation of the world when God chose us in Christ and now it ends with a glance forward in time to the undying love that believers will enjoy into eternity future.<sup>1</sup>

But the thing we would have missed, is something else worth noting about Paul's closing words. He is aware that there are all kinds of Brothers and Sisters in Christ out there, who love the Lord just as much as he does. He highlights one of them in particular. In Ephesians 6:21, he writes about, "**Tychicus**, the dear brother and faithful servant in the Lord..." The Apostle Paul mentions an Unsung Hero that he appreciates. So, today we want to spend some time thinking about Unsung Heroes; the many people who work so hard day in and day out, behind the scenes. They are vital to the success of any family, business, school, or ministry. And yet, they are often unseen and under-appreciated. Perhaps you are already thinking of someone you know who has this kind of a role in our society. Perhaps a janitor or a nursery worker or a secretary. The rock stars always get the spotlight, while the roadies (the people who carry all the equipment and set up the stage) are the people who work hard behind the scenes, to make sure that the show succeeds.

We can think of Unsung Heroes in terms of dynamic duos like Batman and Robin, Frodo and Samwise Gamgee, or the news anchor and his/her camera operator. None of these lead roles or point people could effectively do what they do, without the faithful help of those working behind the scenes. Tychicus is a Brother in Christ who worked hard behind the scenes. We could easily miss him if we don't slow down and do a little investigating.

**Who was Tychicus?** First of all, we should figure out how to pronounce his name! It looks like it might be pronounced "tie CHIC us" but it's actually pronounced "TIK ih kuhs."<sup>2</sup> Go ahead and say that out loud. How many times do you think "Tychicus" is mentioned in the New Testament? 1, 2, 3 times? Try FIVE! He is mentioned by name in Acts 20:4, Ephesians 6:21, Colossians 4:7, 2 Timothy 4:12, & Titus 3:12. One thing that we'll actually learn together this morning is that, in one sense, Tychicus is not an unsung hero. The New Testament sings forth his heroic deeds several times.

But, there's this tendency sometimes, in the church, to skim over guys like him. We get so distracted and enamored with the apostles and the prophets and the pastors, that we can fail to recognize the vital role people like Tychicus play. Now, to be fair, it is easy to miss him because he's often standing next to more well-known figures, like the Apostle Paul. Tychicus was a real person of history. I have a pottery shard that a friend of mine recently acquired while visiting Ephesus. This was plucked right from the ruins of ancient Ephesus. Ephesus is a real place, with real history, and real pottery fragments. And Tychicus, was someone who traveled around in Ephesus and in all kinds of other places as well.

Tychicus was commended as a man of godly character. Ephesians 6:21 tells us he is a, "... dear brother and faithful servant in the Lord..." Colossians 4:7 tells us he is, "a dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord." Scripture describes him as one of those guys who brings a ministry of encouragement to those he visits. Ephesians 6:22, "I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage you." Colossians 4:8, "I am

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<sup>1</sup> See John R. W. Stott's discussion, pp. 290-1, in *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, IVP, IL, 1979.

<sup>2</sup> Which means "fortunate."

sending him to you for the express purpose that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts.”

Encouragement is always of vital importance to God’s work in the world. When we think about encouragement, many of us probably think of the name Barnabas; he’s another Unsung Hero. Perhaps you’ve read about the incredible ministry of Paul and Barnabas in the book of Acts. Paul is the one we’d probably consider the “BIG” name. But, without Barnabas, Paul would probably have been toast. I say this because we learn in Acts 9:26-27, “When [Paul] came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how [Paul] on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus.”

Something else we learn about this Unsung Hero, Barnabas, is that he also has an interesting name. Acts 4:36 tells us that Barnabas’ name was actually Joseph, but they called him Barnabas. “Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means ‘son of encouragement’).” Apparently, the name “Barnabas” was a better fit for him. So, once again we see another Unsung Hero who has a vital ministry of encouragement behind the scenes. A brand-new ministry that our church will be starting soon are what we will call “Barnabas Teams.” Our GCT is organizing plans to create support teams around each and every one of our Global Partners. So, for example, a few of us will form a team around each particular partner and then support them with a ministry of encouragement. Through prayer, correspondence, and kindness, we want to bless our Global Partners with consistent and genuine love and support. Be watching for more information on Barnabas Teams in the near future.

Well, let’s get back to Tychicus. In addition to ENCOURAGEMENT, he did other things as well. **How was Tychicus important to God’s work?** He was an Asian believer who traveled all over Asia and beyond. We learn from the NT that he traveled to Greece, Troas, Jerusalem, Ephesus, Colossae, and possibly the Island of Crete. During these travels, he is assisting the Apostle Paul and serving alongside him in the ministry to many different local churches. His ministry was to encourage these churches but also to deliver some key letters that Paul had written. Tychicus was entrusted to deliver a letter to the Ephesians and one to the Colossian believers. These are two of our treasured NT epistles. So, one could argue, that were it not for Tychicus, we might not have the books of Ephesians and Colossians to read today. Paul entrusted him not only to deliver these letters, but also to “supplement their message with some personal news.” Tychicus is not just an errand boy. In essence, Tychicus is Paul’s official representative and is authorized to speak on Paul’s behalf as a faithful servant. Tychicus was an apostolic delegate whose fingerprints are all over the NT churches.

Tychicus also knew the runaway slave, Onesimus, and not only traveled with him but possibly made the difficult journey with him to return himself to his master, Philemon.<sup>3</sup> Some of you have heard Onesimus’ story; how he had run away as a slave and possibly even stolen from his master, Philemon.<sup>4</sup> Colossians 4:9 says, “[Tychicus] is coming with Onesimus....” Now, this doesn’t necessarily mean Tychicus went to the actual meeting with Philemon. But, it’s certainly possible that Tychicus, with his gift of encouragement, stood right alongside Onesimus as he faced his master. How many of us would like that commission? “Go back with Onesimus and help him explain to his master, Philemon, why he should forgive him.” Probably not many of us.

There is a lot that we can learn from this Unsung Hero, Tychicus. Let’s look at a few ways that he applies to our lives today.

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<sup>3</sup> See Philemon notes in *NIV2011 Study Bible*, p. 2059, by Zondervan. The date of writing for Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon are all probably around AD 60.

<sup>4</sup> See the *NIV2011 Study Bible* notes on v. 18.

## How does Tychicus apply to our lives today?

1. He is a helpful reminder that we need to notice and appreciate the important role that each one of us plays. Those who have the most thankless jobs are the ones who we need to thank the most. I think of our church custodian, Greg Mayer. He has served in our ministry, faithfully behind the scenes, for over 16 years. He empties our garbages, vacuums, mops, cleans our bathrooms, and so on. This is so important to the life and ministry of our church. It is very fitting for us to say “thank you” to people like Greg from time to time.<sup>5</sup>

The Apostle Paul took time to notice and appreciate the important role that Tychicus played in the Lord’s work. That’s a good example for all of us to follow.

2. Tychicus is also a helpful reminder that we need to stomp down our own pride and ego. James 4:6 teaches us that God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Romans 12:16 says to, “Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.” Early on in Paul’s letter to the Christ-followers living in Corinth, he feels the need to set things straight. He says in 1 Cor. 3:1-9: “Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans? For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not mere human beings? What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor. For we are co-workers in God’s service; you are God’s field, God’s building.” We can do great damage to God’s work and destroy our unity as fellow ministers of Christ, when we allow our pride and ego to rank each other as more or less important than one another. Let’s not make this mistake here at the Bemidji Evangelical Free Church.

3. Tychicus reminds us that as a Grace Community, we need to embrace a biblical model of “many parts but one body.” Romans 12:3-8 says, “For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.” We need to stay mindful of how each and every one of us is an important part of God’s work.

I did a quick Google search on Unsung Heroes and I found an interesting video out of Georgetown University. Now, keep in mind, this is not a church video. This was put together by a student there, who recognized the need to show appreciation for those who work hard behind the scenes at his school. You should check it out right now at:

<http://www.library.georgetown.edu/gelardin/showcase/entries/unsung-heroes>

Who is one of your favorite Unsung Heroes here in our church? What can you do this week to thank and encourage them? Perhaps you yourself feel like an Unsung Hero. Let me encourage you. Even if your service to the Lord doesn’t involve being up here on the platform or doing something flashy that lots of people will notice, don’t ever let yourself come to the conclusion that what you do for the Lord is unimportant or in any way less important than what others do. That is simply not true.

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<sup>5</sup> I still remember being at Ted Shutter’s funeral and hearing his son, Joe, talk about his dad emptying the garbage cans as part of his job. He mentioned how Ted appreciated it when someone would remember to wrap their used chewing gum in paper before throwing it into a garbage can without a liner. This is an example of one easy way to show respect to someone who works hard behind the scenes.

Today, I urge you to humbly celebrate the importance of your ministry behind the scenes. Be encouraged, that much like Tychicus, your role in ministry is a vital role! 1 Corinthians 15:58 urges you as Brothers and Sisters in Christ, to always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain. ***Amen!***

This sermon was preached at the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji  
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