

ROMANS 16:21-24 • ROMANS ROAD TO RECOVERY

The Blueprint of Gospel Fellowship

Trading the isolation of individualism for deep spiritual interdependence

Romans 16:21-24: The Blueprint of Gospel Fellowship

Subtitle: Trading the Isolation of Individualism for Deep Spiritual Interdependence

Main Idea: The Christian life is not a solo mission; advancing the gospel requires the shared burden of deep, interdependent fellowship.

Companion Scripture: Colossians 4:7-14

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INTRODUCTION

The Myth of the Self-Made Hero

We celebrate the lone ranger.

We guard our autonomy and call needing help weakness.

But God's Kingdom runs on a different economy.

The camera angle shifts

Paul turns from the people he writes TO in Rome to the people he writes FROM in Corinth.

INTRODUCTION

If there is one myth that is deeply hardwired into our American DNA, it is the myth of the "self-made" hero. We celebrate the lone ranger. We idolize the solo pioneer who pulls himself up by his bootstraps against all odds. We are culturally conditioned from birth to protect our autonomy, guard our personal boundaries, and rely on absolutely no one but ourselves. We are taught that needing help is a sign of weakness, and that success is something you achieve on your own.

But the Kingdom of God operates on a completely different economy.

A couple of weeks ago, we looked at the first half of Romans chapter 16. We looked at "The Unsung Heroes of Grace." We talked about the holy exhaustion of everyday faithfulness as Paul greeted all the believers serving in Rome. But today, as we look at Romans 16:21-24, the camera angle shifts. Instead of looking at the people Paul is writing to in Rome, Paul pans the camera around the room to show us the people he is writing from in Corinth, serving God's Kingdom Economy. With your permission, let's first look at these names Paul lists.

Romans 16:21–24

"Timothy my fellow worker greets you, and so do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen. I, Tertius, who write this letter, greet you in the Lord. Gaius, host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer greets you, and Quartus, the brother. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen."

Not filler. This is the scaffolding that held up the greatest missionary in history.

READ THE TEXT - Romans 16:21-24

"21 Timothy my fellow worker greets you, and so do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen. 22 I, Tertius, who write this letter, greet you in the Lord. 23 Gaius, host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer greets you, and Quartus, the brother. 24 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen."

At first glance, this text just looks like the ending credits of a movie. It looks like a list of hard-to-pronounce ancient names that we usually skim right past on our way to the end of the book. But if we do the historical digging, we discover that these names are not just filler. They are the living, breathing scaffolding that held up the greatest missionary in church history.

Paul didn't change the world alone. He couldn't. Because the Christian life was never meant to be a solo mission.

MAIN IDEA

Paul Did Not Change the World Alone

"The Christian life is not a solo mission; advancing the gospel requires the shared burden of deep, interdependent fellowship."

1

The Burden of Shared Risk

Jason

2

The Burden of Shared Legacy

Lucius, Simon & Rufus

3

The Burden of Laid-Down Status

Erastus & Quartus

Companion Scripture: Colossians 4:7–14

MAIN IDEA

Advancing the gospel requires the shared burden of deep, interdependent fellowship. If we are going to survive, if we are going to leave a legacy, we have to trade the isolation of our individualism for deep spiritual interdependence.

This morning, we are going to look at three vivid pictures of this Kingdom Economy for gospel fellowship. But instead of just giving you their names and reading the list upfront, I want to step into the history. I want to tell you their stories, the stories of men behind the scenes, operating with a heart and eyes yielded to the economy of God's kingdom.

Here are Three Stories of exactly what it cost them to stand in that room with Paul and Three Kingdom Economies that we can identify for ourselves and God's church today.

The Man Who Took the Fall

He opened his door

He gave the ministry team a place to sleep, eat, and work. The church exploded out of his courtyard.

The culture pushed back

Jealous leaders raised a mob, kicked in his door, and dragged him before the city officials.

He paid the price alone

Accused of treason for preaching another king. He paid a crippling bond — then Paul was smuggled out.

Years later he stands beside Paul — not bitter. His name is JASON.

THE FIRST STORY IS ABOUT THE 'BURDEN OF SHARED RISK'

To understand the first name on Paul's list this morning, we have to look back at the historical record in Acts chapter 17. In Acts 17, the historian Luke describes what happened when Paul and his ministry team first brought the gospel to the city of Thessalonica.

Let's put ourselves in the shoes of a certain homeowner in that city. He has a reputation to maintain, a family to protect, and a livelihood to secure. When Paul arrives, he hears and believes Paul's message of the Gospel of Christ, so he does what Christians are called to do: he opened the door of his home to Paul and his ministry. He gave Paul and his team a place to sleep, a place to eat, and a headquarters for their work.

For three weeks, it is incredibly exciting for him. Acts 17 tells us that a massive number of prominent Greeks and local leaders surrender their lives to Christ. The church was exploding right out of his living room - his courtyard, according to the cultural practice of the day.

But then, "culture" pushes back. Acts 17 says the established religious leaders became furiously jealous. They didn't just want to argue theology; they want to incite terror. The text says they deliberately went into the marketplace, gathered some wicked men, and formed a mob to start a city-wide riot.

One afternoon, the mob zeroed in on one target: his own home. They surround his property. They start pounding on his door, screaming for him to bring Paul out so they could tear him apart. But Paul wasn't there. You see, when the mob realized they couldn't find the preacher, they kick his door in, and they grabbed him instead. They dragged him out of his own home, hauled him through the dirt of the streets, and threw him down in front of the city officials.

The crowd screamed a lethal accusation: "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also, and this man has welcomed them! They are acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king named Jesus!" This was no longer a religious dispute; in the Roman Empire, declaring a rival king is treason. The entire city was thrown into chaos, and his life was literally on the line.

The city officials decided not to execute him on the spot. Who knows why? Maybe they lacked the authority, maybe they lacked the courage, or maybe it was just God's hand, protecting His plan, but Acts 17:9 says they instead demanded something called hikanon - a massive financial and legal bond. It was a crippling ransom. The ruling was absolute: if Paul caused any more trouble, he would lose his wealth, and he likely would lose his freedom, if not his life itself and that of his family. He was forced to pay it.

And because his life was on the line, Acts 17:10 tells us that very night, under the cover of darkness, the church smuggled Paul out of the city. Paul left, and this man that put everything on the line for Paul and his ministry was left behind holding the bag. He was left to face the angry city officials, the hostile neighbors, and the financial devastation entirely on his own, for the time being. He took the fall so the preacher could escape.

In our modern, individualistic culture, this is the exact moment resentment might take root. This is the moment we might wash our hands of the ministry and say, "I love Jesus, I love Paul, but I am never sticking my neck out for that guy again. I took the fall for him, and he left."

But that is not the impact the gospel had on this man. Fast forward several years. We are hundreds of miles away, in a room in Corinth. Paul is dictating his letter to the church in Rome. And standing right beside him - not bitter, not hiding, not holding a grudge for being left behind - is the very man who took the fall for him in Acts 17. The trauma of that riot didn't sever their fellowship; it forged it in fire. He hasn't backed away from the danger; he has traveled into it. He is standing shoulder-to-shoulder with the man who brought a riot to his house, sending his personal greetings to the Romans.

Who is this man? Look at verse 21 of our text in Romans 16. His name is Jason.

We Share the Risk and Absorb the Cost

"We cannot advance the gospel if we abandon our brothers and sisters the moment we have to take the fall for them."

- **Your fight becomes my fight. Your burden becomes my burden.**
- Fellowship isn't sharing a meal. It's sharing the cost.
- But real interdependence spans decades.

KINGDOM ECONOMY 1: Interdependence means we share the risk, and we absorb the cost. We cannot advance the gospel if we abandon our brothers and sisters the moment we have to take the fall for them.

- Trading individualism for interdependence means your fight becomes my fight. Your burden becomes my burden. Jason proves that gospel fellowship isn't just about sharing a meal; it's about being willing to share the cost.

- Jason shows us what gospel fellowship costs in the heat of the moment. But true interdependence doesn't just survive a single crisis; it spans decades. It spans generations. To show you what that kind of long-haul fellowship looks like, let us consider together...

The Cross He Was Forced to Carry

A father from North Africa brought his two sons to Jerusalem for Passover.

Roman soldiers seized him from the crowd and forced the cross onto his shoulders.

That moment of shared suffering changed his bloodline forever.

The web runs deeper

- Mark names his two sons to the Roman church.
- Cyrene men planted the church at Antioch.
- His wife fed Paul and mothered him.

STORY 2: THE BURDEN OF SHARED LEGACY

To share this story, I need to tell you upfront that while we cannot be one hundred percent dogmatically certain, when you lay the historical documents of the New Testament side-by-side, virtually every biblical historian agrees that we are looking at the exact same family.

Decades before Paul dictated this letter, a Jewish man from North Africa traveled to Jerusalem for the Passover. He came from a region with a massive Jewish population, a people so devoted that they had built their own dedicated community hub right in the Holy City - the Synagogue of the Cyrenians. When these North African Jews made the long, dangerous pilgrimage to Jerusalem, they stuck together. They shared the journey.

And on this specific Passover, this man didn't travel alone. He brought his two boys with him. Imagine the scene. They stood in the crowded, dusty streets of Jerusalem. It was a family pilgrimage, the holiest week of their faith. But suddenly, the air was shattered by the chaos of a Roman execution. They watched a bloody, beaten rabbi being marched toward His death.

Now, Roman execution squads were brutally efficient, and they had zero empathy for a condemned man. They would never intervene to help a prisoner out of pity. The only reason they would halt a procession is if the prisoner was physically incapable of keeping the execution on schedule. Because of the catastrophic blood loss and tissue damage from the Roman scourging, this rabbi might have reached absolute physiological failure. Although the Bible does not tell us this, it is very possible that He simply could not continue to move the heavy wooden beam at a pace that the Roman soldiers wanted to keep. It's also possible that they simply feared that he would slow down the pace. Scripture does tell us of

some brief conversations this Rabbi had with loved ones along the route, so it is also possible that, if He had other conversations with those along the route, that itself was slowing down the procession.

Under Roman military law, soldiers had the right to conscript any bystander into forced labor to get their job done. The soldiers, for whatever reason, must have grown impatient. They turned to the crowd. And right in front of his two terrified sons, the soldiers violently grabbed this North African father. They forced the heavy, splintered, blood soaked wooden beam onto his shoulders and forced him to physically carry the cross of Christ up the hill.

That single moment of forced, shared suffering changed this African man's life and bloodline forever.

Decades later, when the Gospel of Mark was written specifically to the church in Rome, the author wrote about that crucifixion scene - and he explicitly name-dropped the cross-bearer's two sons. In the ancient world, you only name-drop someone's kids in a document if the reading audience personally knew them. Those boys who watched their dad carry the cross weren't just names on a page anymore; it seems that they had grown up to become pillars in the Roman church.

But the web of gospel fellowship goes even deeper. The North African community that this cross-bearer belonged to - the men of that Cyrene Synagogue - became some of the greatest missionaries in early church history.

Who Were They?

Simon of Cyrene

Carried the literal cross of Christ.

His wife

Fed and mothered the man who wrote half the New Testament.

Rufus

Grew up to carry the church in Rome.
(Rom. 16:13)

Lucius of Cyrene

Still in the trenches with Paul on the missionary road.

"The brother standing next to me sends his greetings, too." — Romans 16:21

They traveled to Antioch and boldly planted a church. And when a young, zealous former Pharisee named Paul needed a physical and spiritual home, a place where he himself would be ministered to, it was this North African community in Antioch that took him in. In fact, the cross-bearer's wife invited Paul to her table. She fed him, she cared for him, and she became a spiritual mother to him. Now, we need to bring it all the way back to this room in Corinth where Paul is writing the book of Romans. Paul was looking around at his ministry team. He looked at a man who was one of those original church planters in Antioch - a man who didn't just ordain Paul and stay safely at home, but who had traveled with Paul, suffered with Paul, and was still in the trenches with him years later. Paul looked at this man standing beside him, and then he looked down at the letter going to Rome. In Romans 16:13, Paul says: "Greet Rufus [the son of the cross-bearer]... and greet his mother, who was a mother to me as well." And in verse 21, Paul writes: "The brother standing next to me sends his greetings, too." Who are they? Who were these men that were like brothers to the Apostle Paul? The brother standing next to Paul in verse 21 is Lucius of Cyrene. The son he is greeting in Rome in verse 13 is Rufus. And the man who carried the cross of Jesus Christ... was Simon of Cyrene, likely Rufus' father.

Interdependence Is a Generational Commitment

"The gospel did not advance through a single superstar; it advanced through the shared burden of a faithful community."

- **Burdens we carry today plant churches we will never see.**
- Trade individualism for shared legacy.
- The greatest threat is not a mob. It is our pride.

KINGDOM ECONOMY 2: Interdependence is a long-haul, it is generational commitment. The gospel didn't advance through a single superstar; it advanced through the shared burden of this faithful community from Cyrene.

Simon carried the literal cross. It was likely his wife who nurtured the man who would write half the New Testament. It was likely his son, this Rufus, carried the church in Rome. And his countryman, Lucius, carried the burden of the missionary road. God uses the burdens we carry for others today to plant seeds for churches we will never see.

We have to trade our individualism for a shared legacy. But building that kind of shared legacy is impossible as long as we are obsessed with building our own earthly kingdoms. Often, the greatest threat to gospel fellowship isn't a violent mob, and it isn't the passage of time.

- The greatest threat is simply our own pride.

The Treasurer and "Number Four"

ERASTUS

Top of the pyramid

City treasurer of Corinth. He paved the streets with his own money so people would walk on his name.

QUARTUS

Bottom of the pyramid

No real name — just the Latin word for "Fourth." To the empire, property, not a person.

Two different universes — until the gospel put their names in one sentence.

STORY3: THE BURDEN OF LAYING DOWN OUR STATUS

To understand the final two men in Paul's letter this morning, you have to remember, how we talked about throughout this study in Romans, that the ancient Roman world was absolutely obsessed with status. Society was rigidly divided into a social pyramid. You did not mix with people below your class. I want you to picture a man at the very pinnacle of that pyramid. We are in the city of Corinth - one of the wealthiest, most decadent, and most powerful trade cities in the Roman Empire. And this man is the Director of Public Works. He is the city treasurer. He holds the purse strings for the entire metropolis. He is a man of immense wealth and massive ego. In fact, he is so rich and so eager for public recognition that in 1929, archaeologists excavating the ruins of Corinth actually found a massive paving stone near the city theater with his name carved deeply into it. The Latin inscription brags: "In return for his civic office, he laid this pavement at his own expense." This is a man who literally paved the city streets with his own money just so people would walk on his name. In the secular world, he is an untouchable elite.

Now, I want you to picture a second man in that exact same city. But this man is at the absolute bottom of the social pyramid. In fact, he is so low on the social ladder that he doesn't even have a real name. He is simply named the Latin word for "Fourth." In the Roman Empire, if you had a lot of slaves, you often didn't bother giving them names. You just numbered them. One, two, three, four. To the empire, this man isn't a person; he is property.

If these two men passed each other on the paved streets of Corinth, the politician would never even make eye contact with the slave. They lived in two completely different universes. But then, the gospel of Jesus Christ came to Corinth, and it

completely shattered the social pyramid in the lives of these men.

Interdependence Requires the Death of Pride

"You cannot have deep spiritual fellowship if you are holding onto your worldly status."

- **At the foot of the cross, the ground is level.**
- The CEO and the man making rent share one table.
- To the world: Number Four. To Erastus: my brother.

Stop carving your name in stone. Start washing feet.

I want you to look inside the room where Paul is dictating this letter to the Romans once again. Look at who is standing shoulder-to-shoulder, sharing the burden of the ministry. The elite politician has walked away from the pride of the city square. He has laid down his status. He walks into a room with a Jewish tentmaker named Paul, and he sits down at the exact same table as the slave named "Number Four."

In the secular world, they are defined by their tax bracket and their social standing. But in this room, the ground is completely level at the foot of the cross. When Paul dictates verse 23 of our text, he puts their names in the exact same sentence.

Who are they? Who are these men that became like brothers, despite the cultural pressure on them? Paul says here in Romans 16:23, "The city treasurer greets you..." His name is Erastus. The man who paved the streets. "...and so does our brother..." His name is Quartus, Number Four. To the world, he was just "Number Four." But to the most powerful politician in the city, he was Adelphos - my brother.

KINGDOM ECONOMY 3: Interdependence requires the death of our pride. You cannot have deep spiritual fellowship if you are holding onto your worldly status. Trading the isolation of individualism means the CEO and the man struggling to make rent sit at the exact same table, share the exact same burden, and call each other brother. We cannot advance the gospel until we stop trying to carve our names in stone, and start washing each other's feet.

CONCLUSION

A Giant of the Faith — and Completely Dependent

JASON

to absorb the risk

LUCIUS

to carry the legacy

**ERASTUS &
QUARTUS**

to level the ground of
pride

**“Friendly” is not
fellowship**

We sit in rows, smile,
and retreat into private
lives. We hide
struggles, guard money,
protect status.

A solo mission is exhausting — and unbiblical.

CONCLUSION

Look back into that room in Corinth one last time. That room wasn't filled with casual acquaintances. It wasn't a religious networking event. It was filled with men who bled for each other, paid for each other, carried the cross for each other, and laid down their egos for each other.

Paul was a giant of the faith, but:

1. He was completely dependent on Jason to absorb the risk
2. He was completely dependent on Lucius to carry the legacy
3. He was completely dependent on Erastus and Quartus to level the ground of pride.

- Today, in the modern American church, we often settle for "friendly" instead of "fellowship."

- We come into a building, sit in our rows, look at the back of each other's heads, smile, and then retreat back into the safety of our autonomous, independent lives.

- We hide our struggles.

- We guard our bank accounts.

- We protect our status.

But living the Christian life on a solo mission is exhausting. And worse, it is entirely unbiblical.

THE QUESTION

Whose Burden Are You Carrying? Who Is Carrying Yours?

Will you absorb the cost

When pushback hits their door — or will you protect your peace?

Will you play the long game

Carry weight today so someone's children thrive tomorrow.

Will you lay it down

Your title, tax bracket, and pride — to call them brother.

Not a networking event. Men who bled, paid, and carried the cross for each other.

The gospel demands that we trade the isolation of our individualism for the messy, costly, beautiful reality of deep spiritual interdependence.

So, the question we must all consider this morning is simple: Whose burden are you carrying? And who is carrying yours?

- Are you willing to absorb the cost for a brother or sister in this room when the cultural pushback hits their front door? Or will you abandon them to protect your peace?

- Are you playing the long game like the men of Cyrene? Are you willing to carry a heavy burden today so that someone else's children - a modern-day Rufus - can thrive in the church tomorrow?

- And finally, look around this sanctuary. Are you willing to lay down your title, your tax bracket, and your pride to sit across from someone the world overlooks, and genuinely call them brother? Call them sister?

WE CAN ONLY DO THIS FOR ONE REASON

Because Christ Did It First

*We can only share the risk,
because...*

Jesus absorbed the lethal debt of our sin.

*We can only carry the burden,
because...*

Jesus carried the cross of our shame up Calvary.

*We can only lay down our
status, because...*

Jesus stepped off His throne and took the form of a servant.

He brought us into His family. The gospel requires each other.

We can only do this for one reason.

We can only share the risk, because... Jesus Christ absorbed the ultimate, lethal debt of our sin.

We can only carry the burden, because... Jesus Christ carried the cross of our shame up Calvary.

We can only lay down our status, because... Jesus Christ stepped off the throne of Heaven, made Himself nothing, and took the form of a servant to save us.

He didn't leave us in isolation. He brought us into His family.

It's time to drop the myth of the solo Christian. Stop trying to carry the weight of your faith, your family, and your struggles on your own. We need each other. The gospel requires each other.