

**EFC Bemidji 5.12.24**  
**Romans 16:21-24**  
**Verses Missing from the Bible!**

*“21 Timothy, my co-worker, sends his greetings to you, as do Lucius, Jason and Sosipater, my fellow Jews.*

*22 I, Tertius, who wrote down this letter, greet you in the Lord.*

*23 Gaius, whose hospitality I and the whole church here enjoy, sends you his greetings.*

*Erastus, who is the city’s director of public works, and our brother Quartus send you their greetings*

*24 May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with all of you. Amen.”*

As we look at today’s text, it might be something that we often skip over when reading our Bibles. Usually, the beginning of letters and ending of letters we just view as formalities. Paul starts most of his letters with some sort of greeting and ends them with a farewell. We view them like email signatures. We gloss over them and don’t even give them a second thought. If I sent you an email, would you even notice if I changed my signature from “kind regards, Pastor Douglas” to “Hasta la vista, Pastor Douglas”?

So, when we get to a text like this, just a collection of people who are with Paul and tagging onto the end of the letter to say hi to the church in Rome, should we just skip over it? Or is there something that we can glean and learn from this text? Is there a reason that God would include this in his Holy Scriptures to us?

Obviously, the answer is yes, otherwise this would be a very short sermon. This is important for us because Paul is letting us know and the church in Rome know, that it is not just Paul who is doing this ministry. He lists for us 8 other people who are his co-workers.

Timothy we probably are the most familiar with. He is the same Timothy who Paul wrote two New Testament letters to.<sup>1</sup> Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater are the three other Jews, along with Timothy, that are sending their greeting.<sup>2</sup>

Paul also mentions 4 gentiles that are with him. Tertius has a special opportunity in verse 22. We see that Paul is allowing him to greet the church in Rome personally. The reason for this is that Tertius is working as Paul’s amanuensis, which is to mean his scribe.

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<sup>1</sup> He joined Paul on his second missionary journey. He was with Paul on his third missionary journey and was with him during his imprisonment in Rome. Paul lists Timothy as a co-author for 6 of his letters.

<sup>2</sup> Jason is most likely the same Jason from Thessalonica that housed Paul during his time there. Sosipater is most certainly the Sopater of Berea. These Jewish men were most likely the delegates from the churches throughout Asia Minor and Greece who were collecting money for the poor in Jerusalem that Paul mentioned in chapter 15.

Paul regularly wrote using a scribe to take down the letter. We know this because at least four times he signs off at the end of a letter with a greeting which he says is in his own hand, implying that the rest is in the hand of his secretary (1 Corinthians 16:21; Galatians 6:11; Colossians 4:18; 2 Thessalonians 2:17). In Galatians, he mentions how he writes with large letters.

So, we could speculate on why Paul uses a scribe. It could just be that because he had large and perhaps sloppy handwriting, using a professional amanuensis provided a better copy to send to the churches he wrote to.<sup>3</sup>

But here is the thing about Paul using a scribe. We know who the true author of Scripture is. We know that 2 Timothy 3:16 tells us that, “*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness.*” What this means is that the words that Paul is speaking and that Tertius is writing down are coming from the Holy Spirit. So, whether Paul took the time to write them down or if he dictated it to another, this all is God’s word. And so, Tertius taking a verse to write personally from him does not make us question Scripture because the same God who inspired Paul can divinely direct Tertius as well.

The way this verse is actually written in the Greek would be read, “Greet you I Tertius the one having written down this letter in the Lord.” So, the “in the Lord” may not actually modify the greeting, but the writing. What Tertius is saying is that this whole process of the Holy Spirit speaking to Paul, Paul dictating it, and my writing it down is all done by divine effort of the Lord and not human effort and will. This is all one big transitive property that God’s words to transferred down to Tertius’ writing.

Now along with Tertius are Gaius, Erastus, and Quartus.<sup>4</sup>

While it is nice to know more about these men who were with Paul and helped Paul, what does this have to do with us. The fact remains that while Paul is the one who gets all the notoriety, he did not do this alone. We talk about Paul’s letters and Paul’s missionary journeys and Paul’s ministry but none of this was Paul’s alone.

Paul always had many people around him helping him in ministry. This was not a one man show. No ministry is meant to be a one man show, nor can it be one. Paul needed help. Paul was only gifted in so many ways. He needed others around him.

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<sup>3</sup> But we do know that it was common during this time for authors to have a scribe write out their dictation. But we are able to compare all of Paul letters to each other for style, word choice, and grammar and we can plainly see that although Tertius is writing down the words, they are clearly coming from Paul. Paul is simply allowing him to write his part personally.

<sup>4</sup> Gaius is the Gaius from Corinth where this letter is being written from. Erastus has some sort of role in the government of Corinth. The NIV here translates it to the city’s director of public works. Most likely he was a treasurer and quite possibly the same Erastus who we have an inscription for from the 1<sup>st</sup> century who paved the road at his own expense. So, he was an important member of the church as well as one who sought the welfare of his city. We also have Quartus who isn’t mentioned anywhere else and we have little information on him.

Look at what Paul said in Ephesians 4:11-13, *“11 So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, 12 to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”*

Paul himself knew that he could not do it alone and that Christ intention for the church was not for him to do it alone. What Christ has given the church here are different roles or positions in the church. The apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. We might think of these as the “professional Christians.” The ones who vocation is in ministry. We think of our three pastors or the global partners we support. We think of staff at Camp Oak Hills or Oak Hills Christian College. But what Paul is saying in Ephesians, and what we see put into practice in our passage from Romans, is that the role of ministry does not fall on these so-called “professional Christians.” The role of ministry falls upon you! Christ gave these roles to equip his people, the saints, for works of service.

It is not just that Paul is not the sole person doing the ministry, it is that Paul’s job is to train others in how to do ministry. It is not Jerry, Eric, Amy, and my job to do ministry here at E-Free, it is our jobs to train you to do ministry. If you are just coming to church on Sunday and singing songs and listening to the message but are not engaged in works of service for the whole body, you’re missing the point.

If you are not serving the church in some area, I want to lovingly call you to find a hole and plug in. If you don’t know what to do or how to do it, one of the pastors or elders or ministry leaders would love to train you and help you discover what your calling is. We’d love to help explore what areas the Lord has gifted you and how that can be of service to the church body.

If you are not sharing your faith with the people in your life, your family, friends, co-workers, and neighbors, I want to lovingly say to you again, that you are missing out on what it means to follow Christ. All Christians, not just the pastors are called to be active participates in evangelism. All Christians, not just the paid professionals are to be reaching out to the people around them. If you don’t know how to do that, I would love to sit down with you and help train you in evangelism.

But if we want to be a church that services one another, it means that you need to be a follower of Jesus that serves the body. If we want to be a church that is missional and reaches out to our community, it means that you need to be a follower of Jesus that is missional and reaches out to their community. This includes the 3 pastors but it does not stop at the three pastors. We all need to be people who do this.

Paul understands this. He isn’t just writing this down theoretically in Ephesians, but our verses in Romans show us that he is taking this seriously. He is not going on these missionary journeys

alone. He is not doing ministry alone.<sup>5</sup> He is training others to go out with him and go out long after he is gone.<sup>6</sup>

Now, I finally want to address the elephant in the room. If the title of the sermon didn't give it away, I was assigned to preach on Romans 16:21-24. I have only preached on Romans 16:21-23 so far. Depending on your translation, you may not even have verse 24 in your Bible. It is probably written at the footnotes saying that it may be in some manuscripts. If you are using the King James Version, it is included in the actual text of Scripture, which I'll address in a moment.

Now, many of us might not know what a manuscript is. Simply a manuscript is a document that was written by hand and not something that was printed. The first printing press wasn't invented until 1440 by Johannes Gutenberg in Germany. So, as you would assume, every document we have before that time was handwritten. These are called manuscripts which is Latin for hand writing.

What many of you might know is that we do not have Paul original letter to the Romans. We do not have the copy that Tertius actually wrote on. We do not have any original copies of any of the New or Old Testament. What we have are manuscripts. We have handwritten copies of copies. As you would assume, preservation was much harder in ancient times. So, as these letters were used and read and started to break down, they were copied onto fresh paper so they could continue to circulate. Not only that, but copies were made so that multiple churches could have access to the same letters and books.

So, these books and letters were copied in their original Greek over and over again. And what we have today are the copies, the manuscripts. So, the big question for us is, how can we know that the copies that we have are genuine and true to what was original said in these letters and books?

I'm certain that many of you have dealt with objectors in your life. People who say that the Bible cannot be trusted. People who say that it is full of errors. People who say it isn't what was originally written down.<sup>7</sup>

This branch of scholarship is called textual criticism, or in more layman words, the study of how we can know if a written book is true to the original. To do this, you need to look at all of the

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<sup>5</sup> And if anyone could, it probably would be Paul. He's well trained in the Scriptures. He has seen the risen Christ in the flesh. He knows how to read and write. He is eloquent with his words. He has the skills of tent making to earn money to be able to go on these journeys. But he fully understands that God has intended to reach the world through the use of his church not just individual people.

<sup>6</sup> We are quickly approaching 100 years of being a church here. And last I checked, the most tenured members we have had only been here for 50 years. Which means that it hasn't been one person for 100 years. It has been people who have taught others and trained others and have passed on what they have learned to others. And my hope is that in 100 years when Jerry is gone and Eric is gone and I am gone and everyone in this room is gone, the church will continue to thrive because it is not based on the ministry of one person but the whole church being co-workers together.

<sup>7</sup> Every Easter, atheist Bart Ehrman's work resurfaces as he attacks the Bible's credibility. (Just as a side note, what Ehrman argues for is incorrect.)

manuscripts, noting when they were written and see how accurate they are. This is called the bibliographic test.

The bibliographic test examines the transmission of the text of the Old and New Testaments from the original autographs to the present day. The three aspects of this test are the quantity, quality, and time span of the manuscripts.<sup>8</sup>

I won't be able to cover all that I want to with Textual Criticism. If you want to know more, this summer we are going to do just that. We are going to look at How We Got the Bible during six different weeks this summer. The schedule is in an insert in your bulletin, but we have a DVD series by Dr. Timothy Paul Jones where we will take a deeper dive into how we got our Scriptures for those who are interested in learning more about this textual criticism.

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Now, the quantity of New Testament manuscripts is unparalleled in ancient literature. There are over 5,000 Greek manuscripts, about 8,000 Latin manuscripts, and another 1,000 manuscripts in other languages (Syriac, Coptic, etc.). In addition to this extraordinary number, there are tens of thousands of citations of New Testament passages by the early church fathers. In contrast, the typical number of existing manuscript copies for any of the works of the Greek and Latin authors, such as Plato, Aristotle, Caesar, or Tacitus, ranges from one to 20.

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The time span of the New Testament manuscripts is exceptional. The manuscripts written on papyrus came from the second and third centuries A.D. The John Rylands Fragment (P52) of the Gospel of John is dated at A.D. 117-38, only a few decades after the Gospel was written. The Bodmer Papyri are dated from A.D. 175- 225, and the Chester Beatty Papyri date from about A.D. 250. The time span for most of the New Testament is less than 200 years (and some books are within 100 years) from the date of authorship to the date of our earliest manuscripts. This can be sharply contrasted with the average gap of over 1,000 years between the composition and the earliest copy of the writings of other ancient authors.

The quality of the New Testament is very good--considerably better than the manuscript quality of other ancient documents. But the issue is that there are some variations in these manuscripts. As we look at our text for today, the earlier manuscripts do not have verse 24 while some of the later ones do. This is why it is included in the King James Version because they used a later manuscript when they translated the Greek to English. But the variations are there.

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<sup>8</sup> I will only say this of the Old Testament and not that there is a small number of Hebrew manuscripts, because the Jewish scribes ceremonially buried imperfect and worn manuscripts. They treated it much like the military treats old, worn flags with honour and reverence. Many ancient manuscripts were also lost or destroyed during Israel's turbulent history.

But we do have the Masoretic Text from the sixth century A.D., the Dead Sea Scrolls from the third century B.C. to the second century A.D., the Septuagint which is a Greek translation from the third century B.C. and other documents that show us that what we have today is what Jesus would have had in his day. If Jesus trusted these, then I believe that we can safely trust them as well.

Because of the thousands of New Testament manuscripts, there are many variant readings, but these variants are actually used by scholars to reconstruct the original readings by determining which variant best explains the others in any given passage.

Here's the way F.F. Bruce, an English Biblical scholar from a generation ago, put it. He wrote this in 1943, "If the great number of manuscripts increases the number of scribal errors, it increases proportionately the means of correcting such errors, so that the margin of doubt left in the process of recovering the exact original wording is . . . in truth remarkably small."

The more copies that we have means that there will be more errors that we find, but it also means that we have a plethora of copies to piece together and find where their errors occurred. It is like a giant game of telephone where you whisper a sentence into someone's ear and they pass it along and so forth. We can ask each person what they heard and said and find where the issues are.

So, what are these variations? Some of these variant readings crept into the manuscripts because of visual errors in copying or because of auditory errors when a group of scribes copied manuscripts that were read aloud. Other errors resulted from faulty writing, memory, and judgment, and still others from well-meaning scribes who thought they were correcting the text.

Let's take verse 24 as our example. It is missing from the earliest manuscripts. But what we can see is that it is almost word for word for the second part of verse 20. So, this could simply be accounted for by a copier accidentally rewriting verse 20 after verse 23.

But ask yourself, whether this verse is or is not included, does this change any of the meaning of this passage? Does it change any of the meaning of the book of Romans? The New Testament? The Bible? No, it doesn't.

Nevertheless, only a small number of these differences affect the sense of the passages, and only a fraction of these has any real consequences. Furthermore, no variant readings are significant enough to call into question any of the doctrines of the New Testament.

The New Testament can be regarded as 99.5 percent pure, and the correct readings for the remaining 0.5 percent can often be ascertained with a fair degree of probability by the practice of textual criticism.

Absolutely nothing that we find in any of these variations make us believe anything different about our faith. So, that is what I want to highlight here. If you talk with someone who says they can't believe the Bible because they don't think it is accurate or you hear someone saying you shouldn't believe the Bible because of these errors, you can know that none of them make any changes to what Christians believe.

The gospel message that the Bible teaches us remains to be true. There is nothing that makes us doubt anything about who Jesus was and what he has done. That the God of the universe came down to earth and lived as one of us. That Jesus, the God man, lived a perfect life and died on the

cross for our sins and that we are forgiven and saved by faith alone in what he has done. That hasn't changed one bit between these manuscripts. So, the challenge I want to leave us with is this, do we believe what the Bible says or not? Because we cannot hide behind the excuse that we cannot trust it. We have every certainty that what Paul wrote, what the Biblical authors wrote is what we have today.

Let's pray.

### **Benediction**

Despite the objections you may hear, the Bible remains to be true. Its message has been unchanged for thousands of years. Will you believe its message? And if you believe it, will you partner with Christ and his church to be co-workers in the gospel? Happy Mother's Day. God bless.