



BETHEL
PRESBYTERIAN

MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Volume 8 Issue 42

October 25, 2009

The Servant of the Gospel, Part 3

Romans 1:8-16a, "First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers; Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you. For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established; That is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me. Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but was let hitherto,) that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles. I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek."

We have been looking at this text and learning about the different aspects of being a servant of the gospel. Thus far we have learned about the servant's service. Everything the servant of the gospel does is an act of worship for his service is the service of a priest. It is so important that you and I become mindful of this in our day-to-day living. It will transform how we conduct ourselves.

Secondly, we have learned about the servant's gratitude. For the servant of the gospel, gratitude is of utmost importance, and is to be given to our personal God on the basis of the cross of Christ for God's kingdom work in the world. Truly, the more God-centered we become in this life, the bigger that God becomes in our lives, the more grateful will be our disposition in all things!

The Servant of the Gospel's Faith

Today, we are looking at the servant of the gospel's FAITH. Now on the surface it seems as though our passage is not at all about faith, but rather prayer.

Romans 1:9b-10a, "...how unceasingly I make mention of you always in my prayers..."

And yet upon a more detailed analysis, we see that this text tells us much about Paul's Faith. Notice the phrase, "how unceasingly I make mention of you always in my prayers." The word used here for "prayer" literally means "to pray, to offer prayer, to ask." So clearly, this passage is about prayer. Yet would you notice with me that the word used, *proseuche*, is a broad word. It is the most comprehensive word for prayer in the Bible and the most frequently used word to describe prayer. In fact in Scripture, there are many words used to denote prayer.

- *Euchomai* is a prayer which expresses a wish. It comes very close to being a vow (Romans 9:3; Acts 19:18b).
- *Deesis* is a prayer of entreaty of supplication. This is used in contexts of asking or requesting (1 Peter 3:12; 1 John 5:16).
- *Enteuxis* is a prayer used when petitioning a superior (1 Timothy 4:5).
- *Proseuchomai* can refer to all of these or none of these (Colossians 1:3; 2 Thessalonians 1:11; Acts 6:4; Ephesians 6:18). Its primary reference is to devotion; it expresses a God-ward look of dependence and communion. Thus in its most essential form *proseuchomai* is devotion to God. Therefore when it is exhorted, more than anything else it is a call to a deep and abiding faith!

That's what prayer was in the life of Christ! Christ didn't pray to change the future- He is God; He ordained the future! Rather, Christ prayed because He sought communion with the Father! For Him prayer was an act of faith, dependence, reliance, and so communion.

Matthew 14:23 "And after He had sent the multitudes away, He went up to the mountain by Himself to pray..."

After a hard and long day of ministry, Christ retreated to the Father NOT to make requests for the next day BUT to fellowship and commune!

That's the idea behind prayer in the Bible. To "pray at all times" (Ephesians 6:18) is NOT to walk around as a monk with a prayer under our breath. Rather it is to cultivate a life of dependence upon and devotion to God. That is what is reflected in our passage this morning. When Paul references in this verse the fact that he had been praying for the Romans, we derive from his example teaching not only on prayer, but more importantly on the life of faith/devotion as Servants of the Gospel.

Unceasing Devotion

We are going to look at three elements to the servant of the gospels' faith. First off notice that it is unceasing.

Romans 1:9, "For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you..."

This does not mean without intermission, but again refers to a life which is characterized by prayer, reliance or dependence upon God. Paul continues:

Romans 1:9b-10a, "...as to how unceasingly I make mention of you, always in my prayers..."

This is the positive way of expressing the sentiment of verse 9, and therefore lays further stress on the fact that Paul was characterized by prayer/devotion/dependence when it came to life, much less his ministry to the Romans. From this we see that Paul's devotion to God, his faith/reliance was NOT...

- Out of convenience.
- Sporadic.
- On again/off again.
- Conditional.

Rather it was all-consuming, constant, and unceasing- a Characteristic of his life! Paul's life was not bifurcated into segments which separated kingdom service from world service. Rather, everything he did was out of devotion to God. From this we derive the first mark of the minister's faith; his service is moved out of unceasing devotion to God.

And this raises the question: Is your service in God's kingdom marked by...

- Unceasing Dependence upon God?
- Uninterrupted devotion to the Lord?
- Faith?

This is such an important question. The age in which we live is an age of self-dependence, independence, and autonomy. To be in need of something or someone is a sign of weakness! Thus, the counsel heard today is one of Self-confidence, Self-dependence, SELF! And I fear that many in the church have adopted this doctrine as a guideline for living. The following are the symptoms that arise when the Christian does not trust God...

- When approaching others- Plastic smiles are a testimony of this doctrine. To be genuine and real with another is the very opposite of self-dependence.
- When approaching God- Legalism is a testimony of this doctrine. To be genuine and real with God is the opposite of self-dependence.
- When approaching the past- Grumbling and complaining during difficulty and trial is a testimony of this doctrine. To be well-content with weakness, insult, distresses, persecution, and difficulties (2 Corinthians 12:10), is the opposite of self-dependence.
- When approaching the future- Worry is a testimony of this doctrine. Worry is an attempt to maintain control over something we can't control. To give to God full control of that which is out

of our control is the opposite of self-dependence.

- When approaching personal piety- All the questions and struggles the church has with Prayer is a testimony of this doctrine. If a life of prayer flows from a heart wholly devoted to God, to struggle with prayer really is to struggle with devotion. Prayer and self-dependence contradict one another! You will note that the persecuted church never struggled with prayer.

And that raises a very important observation; if it is God's will for His servants to be men and women of Unceasing Faith, then where do you suppose God in His providence is going to lead you in life?

- Easy pastures?
- Carefree living?
- All sun and no clouds?

Indeed! God's will for ALL Servants of the Gospel is the life of faith (Hebrews 10:38a); a life secured in the furnace of affliction.

- Where did Christ lead Peter when it came to the life of faith? To walk on a storm-tossed sea, only to sink and so cry out, "Lord, save me!" (Matthew 14:30).
- What was Peter's message to a persecuted church filled with concern over the future? "Therefore, let those also who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right" (1 Peter 4:19).
- Where did Christ lead David as King of Israel? Listen to David's own words, "It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Thy statutes" (Psalm 119:71).
- And what therefore became the longing of Paul for his disciples?

1 Corinthians 7:35, "And this I say for your own benefit; not to put a restraint upon you, but to promote what is seemly, and to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord."

Henry Lyte put it this way:

When God wants to drill a man, and thrill a man, and skill a man,
When God wants to mold a man, to play the noblest part;
When He yearns with all His heart to create so great and bold a man,
That all the world shall be amazed, watch His methods; watch His ways.

How He ruthlessly perfects whom He royally elects!
How He hammers him and hurts him and with mighty blows converts him
Into trial shapes of clay which only God understands;
While his tortured heart is crying, and He lifts beseeching hands!

How He bends but never breaks when His good He undertakes.
How He uses whom He chooses, and with every purpose fuses him;
By every act induces him to try His splendor out,
God knows what He's about!

Submissive Faith

Such is the will and working of God in the lives of all His Servants. Such was the place God had led Paul as he contemplated ministering to the Romans. And yet, it is NOT ONLY an unceasing faith that God is after. It ALSO is a submissive faith.

Romans 1:10, "making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you."

From this little phrase I want you to notice two things when it came to Paul's faith. First, Paul was indeed eager to get to Rome. Three times he references this fact in Romans.

Romans 1:10, "...now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you."

Romans 1:13, "...often I have planned to come to you..."

Romans 15:22, he talks about being "...hindered from coming to you..."

And yet in spite of his eagerness we read a very important qualification in "if perhaps now at last by the will of God" (Romans 1:10). Paul's eagerness to serve God was subject to and so directed by the will of God. In fact this little phrase, "by the will of God," is in the emphatic position which speaks of Paul's commitment to doing the will of the Lord before anything. Truly Paul wanted to come to Rome, but only in the way and at the time God would choose.

That is perhaps why when Paul did finally arrive in Rome NOT as the bold and mighty Apostle to the Gentiles BUT as a shameful prisoner he did not repine or bemoan the bitter providence that had befallen him. Rather, he made the most of his situation such that his witness for Christ went to places he never dreamt possible as a free man.

Philippians 1:12-14: "Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, so that my imprisonment in *the cause of Christ* has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear."

From this I hope you see that Paul's reliance upon God with regard to the Kingdom of God was NOT secondary to his own plans. Paul didn't make his own plans and ask God to bless them RATHER, it was in complete submission to God's plans for his life.

In essence Paul said, "Lord, this is the desire of my heart. Nevertheless, grant me the desires of Your heart!" And if that meant trials and tribulation, difficulties or heart-ache, Paul was well-content (2 Corinthians 12:8-10)! From this we see a second characteristic of the FAITH of the Servant of the Gospel: SUBMISSION!

That brings us once again to the question, "Do you and I have a submissive faith?" And again what an important question today! With the "have it your way" generation of which we all are apart, submission has become an evil word.

- Wives submit to your Husbands?
- Workers submit to your Boss?
- Children submit to your Parents?

Our culture says, “We shouldn’t submit to one another. Submission is degrading and is the opposite of self-reliance.” And it is in this atmosphere that the question arises, “Christian, submit to God?” In fact, I wonder how many of us could honestly pray that portion of the Lord’s prayer which says, “...Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” (Matthew 6:10) and not gripe or complain when God answers that prayer in a way that contradicts our will?

Family of God, let us see that to fail to submit to God truly is to fail as Servants of the Gospel.

- It was when SAUL placed his wants and desires before God’s that he was rejected as king (1 Samuel 12, 15).
- It was when JUDAS placed his wants and desires for the deliverance of Israel above God’s that he betrayed Christ (Matthew 26).
- It was when DEMAS placed his wants and desires before God’s that he fell away from the faith (2 Timothy 4:12).

And insofar as WE place our wants and desires above God’s we will prove ourselves Unfaithful servants of the gospel. But, as you and I submit ourselves, our desires and our lives to God, and pursue His desires and will, we will learn what true Joy and Peace are all about! To the Submissive Faith, there is no such thing as...

- Interruptions.
- Bad Experiences.
- Poor timing in our lives.
- Inconveniences.

Rather, everything is met with joyful and peaceful trust!

Philippians 4:6-7, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

You know the poem I just read by Henry Lyte? This is how it ends:

Go then, earthly fame and treasure! Come disaster, scorn, and pain!
 In Thy service, pain is pleasure; with Thy favor, loss is gain.
 I have called Thee, Abba, Father; I have stayed my heart on Thee.
 Storms may howl, and clouds may gather; all must work for good to me.

A Ready Faith

The faith of the servant of God is unceasing and submissive. Notice the final characteristic that it is a ready faith.

Romans 1:10, “always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you.”

Would you notice that Paul not only was deeply concerned for the kingdom of God in Rome, but he was willing to be used by God as an instrument to address this concern. Notice Romans 1:11 and the part Paul was willing to play in God’s work among the Romans.

Romans 1:11, “For I long to see you in order that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established.”

See, Paul’s reliance upon God with regard to His kingdom was NOT a lot of hot air- merely good intentions! RATHER, it was sincere *and ready!* When Paul prayed for the well-being of the Romans, he prayed with a willingness to be the answer to His prayer. As such, whatever it took for God’s will to be accomplished, Paul was ready and willing to be used as the instrument. And that’s the heart of a servant of the gospel. *Lord! Thy Kingdom Come! Now Use Me That It Might Be Done!* Notice the incredible statements found in Philippians.

Philippians 2:17, “But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all.”

2 Timothy 4:6, “For I am already being poured out as a drink offering...”

Paul considered his life to be a “drink offering”- a sacrifice to be wholly consumed by God, unto God, for God, at His bidding!

- What a picture for us as we consider our service in the Kingdom of God.
- God’s will for us is that we too have a Ready Faith- a faith willing to be used by God in the accomplishment of His will.

Now, whether you realize it or not, this is a rare commodity today for many Christians!

- The church has always been full of people who are quick to criticize, but quite empty of those who are willing to be used by God to solve the problems they are concerned about.
- Many Christians are willing to give money to an outreach, but so few are willing to go and serve the Lord in His Kingdom.
- It is much more attractive to pray for others to be used by the Lord than to pray that He use us.

And yet as faithful servants of the gospel, when we see a spiritual need or hear the Lord’s call for service, we must say with Isaiah, “Here am I. Send me” (Isaiah 6:8). What this means practically is...

- If you are burdened with a ministry in the kingdom, a READY faith will require you to be willing to pursue its completion.
- If you are concerned for the dying souls around you, a READY faith will require you to be willing to engage the culture in which we live!
- If you are bothered by something you see in the body, a READY faith will require you to be willing to get involved. It is wholly unacceptable in the Kingdom of God to see a need and then criticize

others for not fulfilling the need.

What was Christ response to Peter when he said,

John 21:22, "Lord, what about John?" The Lord answered and said, "If I want him to remain until I come, what *is that* to you? You follow Me!"

To pray for "God to send out workers into His harvest" (Matthew 9:36-38) is to pray with a willingness to be the ANSWER to our prayer. That is what a ready faith is all about. And yet as we talk about the servant of the gospel's faith, I am reminded of the man who approached Christ because his son was filled with an evil spirit. During his discussion with Christ, he said this:

Mark 9:22, "But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us."

Christ responded by saying this:

Mark 9:23: "*If you can?*...Everything is possible for him who believes."

To which the man then replied this way:

Mark 9:24, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." (KJV)

I wonder, how many here this day can identify with this man? We read of the faith of the servant of the gospel and we are filled with two emotions...

- Excitement- because this is exactly what our hearts truly long for- to be...
 - Unwavering.
 - Submissive.
 - Willing and ready to be a part of the answer to our prayer.
- Sadness- because we know in our own strength we could never will ourselves to be a Faithful Servant of the Gospel- either in our constancy, devotion/dependence, or readiness.

And so we hear a passage like this and we walk away grieved- maybe even burdened. Listen family of God One of the most amazing things about Christianity is that it isn't...

- The AMOUNT of faith that saves us.
- The CONSISTENCY of faith that saves us.
- Even the QUALITY of faith that saves us.

Rather, it is the OBJECT of our faith.

- Is your trust in Jesus Christ?
- Though you fail so often in being...
 - Unceasing.
 - Submissive.
 - Ready.

Nevertheless do you trust in the Savior? If that is so, then do not hear condemnation but hear only that which God intends us to be by grace. Turn with me John 6.

John 6:66-67, "As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew, and were not walking with Him anymore. Jesus said therefore to the twelve, 'You do not want to go away also, do you?'"

This passage occurred when Christ experienced a mass defection on account of His teaching. This we sadly confess is a reality in the Kingdom of God people whom we love and with whom we have served renounce their faith. In the words of John:

1 John 2:19, "...they went out from us, in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us."

Yet in response to the mass defection which will be a part of the Kingdom of God, Christ turns to us this day and asks, "Will you also go away?" Christian, let me ask you...

- Has Christ's yoke been too hard and His burden too heavy?
- Is He not good enough?
- Has He not loved us with an everlasting love?
- What has God done that you will turn from Him?

You say, "It is not that Christ is not good. It is that I am so evil" ...

- I am not a faithful servant of God.
- I have failed Him too greatly.

My faith is NOT...

- Unceasing.
- Submissive.
- Ready.

I'm tired of playing the game! Christian! *Will you turn away because YOU have failed Him?* Listen to the assumption that permeates this entire epistle...

Romans 1:7, "To all who are beloved of God in Rome, called *as* saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

All that we have seen is true of the servant of God and will be true of you NOT because you work and labor to make it so BUT because Christ has loved you and so is working in and through you to make you a vessel of honor for His glory. Accordingly, don't allow this passage to drive you in fear to a corner. Rather, allow it to...

- Kindle afresh the faith you already have in Christ.
- Move you to greater service out of love for your Savior.
- Lead you to a greater devotion to the Lord!

Such is the blessed calling resting on our lives today!

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Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10th Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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About the Preacher

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