

Jesus, Others, You

Romans 15:1-6

Introduction

Nick Vujicic- is an Australian man who was born without limbs – no arms / no legs

*** Image

Today – in spite of his tremendous handicap – he travels about the world – giving motivational talks – telling people about Jesus – telling them that God loves them no matter what their body looks like / etc.

i.e. – He is devoting his life to serving others

But – it wasn't always this way

Growing up – he struggled greatly with his disabilities

But – Nick's parents are Christians and assured him that God had a plan for his life

Nick went thru all kinds of turmoil as a young boy and teenager

'Why didn't God give me arms and legs?'

'Why didn't God make me like other people?' [who can walk and kick a soccer ball / etc.]

All he could see were limitations

He even prayed for arms and legs to appear – but nothing happened

He would have emotional crashes – at times

As Nick grew up – his trust in God deepened – and he began to see that one of the ways he could make a positive contribution to this world was thru serving others

He began giving talks to different groups – telling them about God's love and His acceptance thru Jesus

On one occasion - As he shared about his own struggles growing up – one of the teen girls began to break down sobbing. Nick wasn't sure why. [did he say something wrong?]

She then asked him if she could come forward and give him a hug.

She came up on stage and said to him

'Nobody had ever told me that I'm beautiful the way that I am. No one has ever said that they love me.' – she said – 'You've changed my life and you are a beautiful person too.'

Nick was amazed by the reaction: ‘up to this point – I was still constantly questioning my own worth. . . she gave me the first real inkling that maybe I do have something to contribute – a way to help others.’ [Life Without Limits, p. 20]

Nick had discovered the spiritual principle: the life worth living is a life which is giving

Today – Nick is married and has two children

Jesus once said – the greatest is the one who serves - - - and that the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many.

In the Bible we find a blessed pattern for Joy

We are to put Jesus first, others second, ourselves third

Why should I think of others / serve others for their benefit and blessing?

Answer: Because that is how our Savior lived – and He is our example

I. Thinking of Others - vv. 1-3

Here Paul calls us not to think of our ourselves – but to please others

Robert Haldane: 'Though no part of the truth of God is to be sacrificed to peace, yet everything consistent with truth ought to be done to avoid giving offense or stumbling weak brethren.'

We have noted – there are issues and differences that come up in the church and between believers – that are of relatively little significance

We are not to quarrel about minor issues / disagreements - - - but rather to live at peace with one another

If grandma thinks card playing is sinful – then don’t go over to grandma’s and break out the cards while you’re there – if you are out with someone who does not think alcohol is appropriate for Christian behavior – then don’t drink

To trample on the conscience of others is simply selfishness

The reaction of the flesh: ‘Why should I adjust my behavior because of them?’

Why shouldn’t I do as I please?

Paul’s response: Because Jesus didn’t just do as He pleased

Romans 15:3 - 'For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached Thee fell upon Me."

When we come to Christ – we find that He did not live a selfish life

Jesus gave Himself up as a sacrifice for our sins

In Matthew 20 - - - The mother of James and John comes to Jesus with a request – ‘give my boys the top two positions of honor in the kingdom!’ [just a small request!]

Jesus doesn't necessarily rebuke them or her for a desire to be great – but he redefines greatness

Matthew 20:20-23 - 'Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to Him with her sons, bowing down, and making a request of Him. And He said to her, "What do you wish?" She said to Him, "Command that in Your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left." But Jesus answered and said, "You do not know what you are asking for. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?" They said to Him, "We are able." He said to them, "My cup you shall drink; but to sit on My right and on My left, this is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by My Father."

Matthew 20:24-28 - 'And hearing *this*, the ten became indignant with the two brothers. But Jesus called them to Himself, and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and *their* great men exercise authority over them. "It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Jesus does something here with a common human instinct – some would call this ‘the mattering instinct’ – we want to matter in this world - or to be significant or great in some way

Rebecca Newberger Goldstein; 'Ultimately, we want to know what matters because we desperately want our own lives to be driven by what matters. We want to know who matters because we desperately want to be numbered among the ones who matter.'

Jesus does not rebuke the desire to matter - - - but He changes our definition of greatness – realigns it with kingdom values

If we want to be great in the kingdom of heaven – be a servant here

What is greatness to you and I?

- Having a boat load of money?
- Winning the Super Bowl
- Being a famous rock star / Hollywood actor
- Having political power – being President
- Buying the big house?

Or – is it making a positive contribution to others in Jesus' Name?

We can all do that

We just have to lay our lives before the Lord and say, 'Here I am Lord – use me in the service of others'

We are talking about the principle of humble servanthood

Jesus served you and I by going to the cross – He calls us to lay our lives out in service as well

In C.S. Lewis' Chronicles of Narnia – Aslan famously dies in Edmund's place on the stone table so that the wicked witch would release him. Shades of 'substitutionary atonement' are embroidered into the narrative

When talking about the actual cross – the redemptive work of Christ

The book of Hebrews reminds us that Jesus went to the cross despising the shame

Hebrews 12:1-2 - '... Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.'

The cross was something He endured – despising the shame - - -

Why did He do it?

He looked forward to the joy of bringing about our salvation

In the Narnian tale – Aslan was shamed and degraded by the witch who had his lion's mane shaved from off his head

Christ faced the verbal and physical beatings from the soldiers before the cross

It was not a pleasant work to go to the cross – His flesh despised the shame

This struck Corrie Ten Boom one day – while in the concentration camp – and the prisoners were made to stand naked during a regular Friday roll call at Ravensbruck

Suddenly, the thought struck her that Jesus, too, was stripped of His garments and hung completely naked

Corrie Ten Boom: 'I had read a thousand times the story of Jesus' arrest – how soldiers had slapped Him, laughed at Him, flogged Him. Now such happenings had faces and voices . . . He hung naked on the cross . . . The paintings, the carved crucifixes showed at the least a scrap of cloth. But this, I suddenly knew, was the respect and reverence of the artist.'

Corrie Ten Boom: 'But oh – at the time itself, on that other Friday morning – there had been no reverence. No more than I saw in the faces around us now. I leaned toward Betsie, ahead of me in line . . . "Betsie, they took His clothes too." Ahead of me I heard a little gasp. "Oh, Corrie. And I never thanked Him."

That thought caused her to see her own sufferings as but a fraction of what Christ endured

Jesus did not please Himself / He endured the cross – despising the shame

Corrie Ten Boom - - - As she became aware of the potential cost of helping her Jewish neighbors, some of whom were followers of Christ, came to the point where she prayed:

Corrie Ten Boom: "Lord Jesus, I offer myself for your people."

Jesus: 'Father . . . not my will but Thine be done.' [Matt. 26:39]

In humble servanthood – we lay aside our own interests that we might be able to adopt heaven's value system – in the service of others - - [whether it's teaching kids / supporting a missionary / giving to Samaritan's Purse / St. Jude's / praying for others / encourage someone who needs encouragement / inviting a church member over for a meal /etc.]

II. The Encouragement of Scripture - v. 4

Here we are reminded of one of the great purposes of Scripture for the believer

As we read of the lives of men and women of faith – and the trials they encountered in this life / in this world - - - and we see their perseverance – we are encouraged

Patience and endurance are fruits that come thru reading the Bible

James 5:10, 11 - 'As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold we count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful.'

James assumes we know the story of Job – and how Satan brought devastation into his life - - - trying to get Job to curse God - - - and Job did not

We can't be encouraged by Job's story if we don't know Job's story!

We need hope and encouragement in this life

Life can come at us fast and furious with its discouraging events / trials

When we read about others who have faced similar or far greater trials - - - and persevered in their faith - - - it encourages us to do the same

Corrie Ten Boom describes a time when she was feeling depressed

The family had been arrested – her father had already died but she didn't know it. She and her sister had been separated at the first prison camp – Scheveningen

She had not been outside for nine weeks - - and was finally allowed to take a walk outside her cell on the prison yard

Corrie Ten Boom: 'Tremendous emotion came upon me, and then an unspeakable melancholy descended within. In me and around me was more loneliness than in the cell - - - all around me was the atmosphere of death . . . Scheveningen already had three crematoria. Behind the south wall, the rattle of a machine gun broke the silence . . . I walked on and an uncontrollable homesickness surged up in my heart.'

She was arrested in a righteous cause – providing shelter to Jews - - - now in prison for doing what they believed God wanted them to do – she's depressed

What can you do when you are depressed?

You can read the Psalms

The psalms cover the spectrum of human emotions from anger to fear to anxiety / depression / guilt / remorse

Pastor Charles Allen shares an interesting session he had with a man in his church.

The man was the company President of corporation - - - and enjoyed all the perks of the position - - - a 6-figure salary / big home / lavish vacations / etc.

Charles Allen: 'Yet, along the way, he left something out, and one of the things he did not achieve was happiness. He was a nervous, tense, worried, and sick man. Finally, one of his physicians suggested he talk with a minister.'

'We talked of how his doctors had given him prescriptions and he had taken them. Then I took a sheet of paper and wrote out my prescription for him. I prescribed the twenty-third Psalm, five times a day for seven days.'

'I insisted that he take it just as I prescribed. He was to read it the first thing when he woke up in the morning. Read it carefully, meditatively, and prayerfully. Immediately after breakfast, he was to do exactly the same thing. Also, immediately after lunch, again after dinner, and finally, the last thing before he went to bed.'

'It was not to be a quick, hurried reading. He was to think about each phrase, giving his mind time to soak up as much of the meaning as possible. At the end of just one week, I promised, things would be different for him.'

Charles Allen: 'That prescription sounds simple, but really it isn't. The Twenty-third Psalm is one of the most powerful pieces of writing in existence . . . I have suggested this to many people and in every instance which I know of it being tried it has produced results. It can change your life in seven days.'

Read the Psalms

Also – reflect upon the characters of the Bible

Corrie Ten Boom was depressed – what did she do?

Corrie Ten Boom: 'Then suddenly I remembered Enoch. He was not filled with homesickness when he walked with God, and so I was no longer alone either. God was with me. Hand in hand we walked on and saw the blue sky and the flowers and the flowering shrubs, and I could see the yard as part of a beautiful free world where I would be allowed to walk once again.'

The memory of Enoch – who walked with God - - - was enough to lift up her faith in that moment

Do you need encouragement? / do you need guidance / wisdom

We have a treasure chest of hope and encouragement any time we need – found in God's Word – including the OT

We should know the stories of Gideon and David / of Daniel and the lion's den / Shadrach / Meshach and Abednego

Remember the cross of Calvary - - - and the empty tomb

When it comes to the Bible – it's all good – read it – study it – learn it – grow in your knowledge of it

John Calvin: 'it would be an insult to the Holy Spirit to imagine that he had taught us anything which it is of no advantage to know.'

II Timothy 3:16, 17 - 'All Scripture is inspired of God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.'

III. A Prayer for Unity - vv. 5-6

We are to pursue peace with one another

Spiritual unity and cooperation in the church brings glory to God

Psalms 133:1 - 'Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!'

Relationships can become difficult in this world – in which all are afflicted with the disease of sin

Paul wrote to the Philippians – and singled out two ladies – to cool their feud!

Philippians 4:2, 3 - 'I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord. Indeed, true comrade, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel . . .'

Paul says, 'ladies – you are Christians – knock it off!'

A contentious / divisive spirit that is always at odds with others – is not a Christian spirit

It's not always easy to get along with others in this fallen world

Paul looks to God to bless them – and keep them – so that with one voice they will glorify their Father

He prays to God for their spiritual unity

John 17 – we find Jesus' High Priestly prayer for the disciples and us by extension

He prays that the Father would keep them from the evil one

John 17:15 - 'I do not ask Thee to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one.'

It is important that we be kept

Martyn Lloyd Jones: 'Oh it is a wonderfully consoling and comforting thought, to know that God the Father is looking upon us and caring for us, and keeping us at this present time.'

We need the Father's keeping – His watchful care

We need the Father to rebuke us if we are quarreling and being divisive with one another

Conclusion

Jesus prayed as well that we be gathered unto Him

John 17:24 - 'Father, I desire that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am, in order that they may behold My glory; which Thou hast given Me; for Thou didst love Me before the foundation of the world.'

When I was a kid – I had a friend named Ron – his parents – were big Nebraska fans – would go to some of the away games in their RV – Winnebago

One year – Ron was allowed to invite one friend to go with him to the NE / IA state game in Ames

He invited me to go along

They paid for my ticket / my hot dog! / my coke! – all I did was show up and go along for the ride

Why was I there?

Because the son wanted me there

Jesus wants us in heaven

Our job is to respond in faith – that's our calling

Thomas Brooks: 'You shall not see my face except you bring your brother Benjamin with you, said Joseph to his brethren. So says God to sinners, you shall not see My face except you bring Jesus with you.'