Greeting the Saints

Romans 16:1-16

Introduction

Alasdair Paine: 'On the first day of a church course introducing the Christan faith, we ask everyone to write down the one question they would ask God if they could. One person wrote this question to God: 'I appreciate how intricate and amazing our world is and I believe in you, but I cannot understand my purpose in your grand scheme of things. I feel insignificant in life and the world.'

At the close of Romans – in Paul's greetings - - - we see something of how God wants us to fit in to His world – thru the church

In the grand narrative of Scripture – we find Creation / Fall / Redemption / Renewal

Rankin Wilbourne: The Bible tells the epic tale of God's ongoing quest to ransom His creation.'

Here – at the end of Romans - - - We read of at least 25 saints in this section – who were at the church in Rome – serving in some capacity for the cause of Christ

- This person is a helper of others
- This one is approved of God
- This one risked his life for Paul
- This one held church in their home
- This one is a hard worker in Christ Jesus

The very fact that these people have been immortalized in the Word of God – for us to read about today – reminds us of the very fact that there is a God who sees the kind of life we are living – and how faithful we are to His calling upon our lives

As we approach this chapter – we might want to ask, 'What could be said about me?'

Proverbs 15:3 – 'The eyes of the Lord are in every place, watching the evil and the good.'

R.C. Sproul says the Christian is one who reminds himself that he lives every day Coram Deo - - - or before the face of God

This section of the letter gives us a small window into the early church – and of the relationship the Apostle Paul had with some in the early church

The church in Rome was likely a collection of house churches – there were no church buildings as we think of them today

This portion of the letter reminds us that Paul was not writing to scholars but everyday Christians

People who believed in Christ Jesus as Lord - - - and who sought to serve Him in whatever way they could – and who found purpose and meaning in doing so

I. Phoebe – vv. 1, 2

The first individual we come to is Phoebe

Paul singles her out – to be received by the church at Rome

Phoebe was likely the one who carried this letter from Paul to the Romans

Paul would not ask just anyone – she must have been well known to have been faithful for such a task

When one thinks of the enormous role that the book of Romans has played in church history and the Reformation – the understanding of the gospel for Martin Luther

Every time you and I are blessed by the book of Romans – we might think of the service of Phoebe

We can be grateful for her small role

What if Phoebe dropped the letter into a mud puddle? - - - - or forgot it somewhere - - - no letter to the Romans!

Oops!

What if she decided to stop at the hot springs in Pompeii – while on her way there?

Oops – I think I just got Paul's letter wet – oh well – he can write another!

I'm sure that Phoebe had some idea that this was an important letter – but it seems unlikely that she would have grasped the full extent

God made her a blessing to others – to us – by her being faithful with the task given her

Luke 16:10 - 'He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much.'

*** The reality: we don't always know the significance of what we are doing – while we are doing it – in obeying Jesus – that's why the Christian life is a life of faith

Kevin DeYoung: 'Holiness is the sum of a million little things – the avoidance of little evils and little foibles, the setting aside of little bits of worldliness and little acts of compromise, the putting to death of little inconsistencies and little indiscretions, the attention to little duties and little dealings, the hard work of little self-denials and little self-restraints.'

We trust God that it does matter

In the classic movie – 'It's a Wonderful Life' – the main character George Bailey and his family own a small savings and loan in their town – they don't operate by cutthroat business practices like the main bank's owner

They care about people – and make loans a big bank would never do – and show grace in ways a big bank would not

At one point – their practices seem to get them into trouble financially – perhaps to ruin them. George despairs and wishes that he had never been born. An angel shows up and takes George on a little tour – showing him what life would be like in their town if he had never been born

George sees a town of coldness / and harshness – everything is much worse

Relatives don't live up to half their potential / his wife is living a pathetic life

In the end – the whole point was – 'George – you have done the right thing – just look at the difference you have made'

C.S. Lewis: 'Every time you make a choice you are turning the central part of you, the part of you that chooses, into something a little different from what it was before.' [p. 92]

Now bring this down to yourself:

Does it matter if you are faithful to God / to your family / to your church?

Does it matter if you pray for your family / your neighbor / your co-worker?
Does it matter if you read the Bible?

Does it matter if you live with integrity / honesty / keeping your word?

Do we need an angel to take us around and show us what a difference these things make?

One could – but then we wouldn't need much faith to live out the Christian life

Paul provides a kind of recommendation for her with the Romans - - - take care of her - - - she is a faithful servant

Cenchrea was about 6 mi. east of the city of Corinth

Take care of Phoebe - - - She deserves help since she has helped many herself

II. Aquila and Priscilla – The Dynamic Due – vv. 3-5

This husband and wife team held a church in their home

I Corinthians 16:19 – 'Aquila and Prisca greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.'

In the 1st century – there were no official church buildings

Paul refers to this pair in II Tim. 4:19

II Timothy 4:19 – 'Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus.'

What were some of the special traits about Aquila and Priscilla?

They were sound in doctrine

Acts 18:24-26 - Now a certain Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus; and he was mighty in the Scriptures. This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus, being acquainted only with the baptism of John; and he began to speak out boldly in the synagogue. But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.'

Are we capable of explaining the way of God more accurately?

They instructed Apollos – so that he understood the gospel better

They helped train a preacher!

Maybe you've been impacted by a Priscilla or an Aquila

I remember as a young believer – sitting in the University of Nebraska student union – as a 20 year old college freshman - - - discussing I Corinthians 3 with a fellow believer – we talked late into the night – I probed him for answers to questions I had about the gospel

He gave me a John MacArthur book after that [the Gospel According to Jesus] – He went on to be a pastor – in S. Africa

*** Going deep into the Scriptures guards us / protects us and the church from many forms of deception and error

I Timothy 4:16 - 'Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things; for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.'

II Timothy 2:15 - 'Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.' [kjv]

Satan deceives us when we don't have a firm grasp on truth

We see this couple again in the book of Acts

Acts 18:1-3 – 'After these things he left Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. He came to them, and because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and they were working; for by trade they were tent-makers.'

Acts 18:18-21 – 'And Paul, having remained many days longer, took leave of the brethren and put out to sea for Syria, and with him were Priscilla and Aquila. In Cenchrea he had his hair cut, for he was keeping a vow. And they came to Ephesus, and he left them there. Now he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. And when they asked him to stay for a longer time, he did not consent, but taking leave of them and saying, "I will return to you again if God wills," he set sail from Ephesus.'

After the edict of Emperor Claudius was given to expel Jews from Rome in 49 AD - - - they went to Corinth [Acts 18:2] – and later to Ephesus – [Acts 18:19] – then when Claudius rescinded his edict in 54 AD – they returned to Rome

When did they risk their life for Paul? [we don't know – but may have been associated with the riot in Ephesus]

Acts 19 = Demetrius a silversmith – who made idols stirred up a riot – and two of Paul's companions were seized – Gaius and Aristarchus – but Paul avoided arrest – perhaps Aquila and Priscilla helped Paul at this time

Finally – we read that there was a church that met in their home – v. 5

III. Servants of the Lord – vv. 5-16

Epaenetus – [v. 5] an early disciple

He became a Christian when it wasn't fashionable to be a Christian
He was not a herd follower – but followed the truth he was led to

He said: 'I have decided to follow Jesus – no turning back!'

Anon. 'When the whole world is running towards a cliff; he who is running in the opposite direction appears to have lost his mind.'

Andronicus and Junia – v. 7

They were apparently Christians before Paul

And were imprisoned with Paul during one of his imprisonments

Paul indicated that some imprisonments may have taken place – we don't know about – because they were not recorded in the book of Acts

II Corinthians 11:23 – 'In far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death.'

The life of Paul faced many hazards

He had companions to help carry the cross

Apelles – v. 10

Paul refers to him as 'approved' in Christ – a term referring to that which is genuine

II Tim. 2:15 – 'Be diligent to present yourself approved unto God a workman who need not be ashamed – handling accurately the Word of truth.'

We are to do certain things to be approved unto God

Faithful / integrity

Approved [dokimos] has the idea of testing – and coming forth as true and genuine

You and I are tested in our faithfulness to Christ every day

Will you give in to sins of anger / lust / doubt / jealousy / envy / greed / pride

Will you become a lover of self / lover of money - - - or will your values reflect the gospel?

Are there areas of your life that prove / demonstrate your faith?

Spurgeon: 'You must be tested. God does not give faith, or love, or hope, or any grace without meaning to prove it. If a man builds a railway bridge, it is that engines may go over it, that so its carrying power may be proved . . . so when God made you my brother to be strong in the Lord He meant to try every ounce of your strength; for that which God makes has a purpose, and He will prove it to see that it is equal to its design.'

You and I are tested - - - every day

Are we being faithful to our Savior?

When we look at the number of spiritual leaders who compromise / disqualify themselves from ministry - - - I think it makes us have greater appreciation that the Apostle Paul could say towards the end of his life

II Timothy 4:7, 8 - 'I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.'

Household of Narcissus – v. 11

There was a Narcissus who was executed by Nero's mother – shortly after he took the throne

Tryphaena / Tryphosa – v. 12
Likely sisters - - - and who served the Lord faithfully

A lot of Greek names in this list

Rufus - v. 13

Mark 15:21 – Mark identifies Simon of Cyrene [who carried Jesus' cross] as being the Father of Alexander and Rufus

Mark was writing his gospel for a Gentile audience – the Roman church consisted of many Gentiles

If a Father is identified by his sons in Scripture – that usually indicates the sons were known to the people intended to receive the writing

That causes many to believe that perhaps this Rufus was the son of Simon of Cyrene who carried Jesus' cross

Mark 15:21 – 'And they pressed into service a passer-by coming from the country, Simon of Cyrene (the father of Alexander and Rufus), to bear His cross.'

Apparently Rufus' mother ministered to Paul significantly - - - perhaps nursing him back to health after a beating / etc.

v. 16 – the kiss on the cheek is still a custom in the middle east

Judas greeted Jesus with a kiss – when they came to arrest Him

We might prefer the fist bump! / or the hug / handshake!

Conclusion

Simon of Cyrene and his two sons became the inspiration behind a song called, 'Watch the Lamb' - - the story tells of a father travelling with his two sons to Passover – bringing a lamb for the sacrifice

Watch The Lamb

Walking on the road to Jerusalem,
The time had come to sacrifice again,
My two small sons,
They walked beside me on the road,
The reason that they came was to watch the lamb.

"Daddy, daddy, What will see there,
There's so much that we don't understand",
So I told them of Moses and Father Abraham,
Then I said "dear children watch the lamb".

"There will be so many in Jerusalem today,
We must be sure the lamb doesn't run away",
And I told them of Moses and Father Abraham,
Then I said "dear children watch the lamb".

When we reached the city,
I knew something must be wrong,
There were no joyful worshipers,
No joyful worship songs,
I stood there with my children
in the midst of angry men,

Then I heard the crowd cry out
"Crucify Him".

We tried to leave the city but
we could not get away,
Forced to play in this drama
a part I did not wish to play,

"Why upon this day were men condemned to die?,
Why were we standing here, Where soon they would pass by?".
. . .
Then someone said "there's Jesus",
I could scarce believe my eyes,
A man so badly beaten,
He barely looked alive,
Blood poured from His body,
From the thorns upon His brow,
Running down the cross, Falling to the ground.

I watched Him as He struggled,
I watched Him as He fell,
The cross came down upon His back,
The crowd began to yell,

In that moment I felt such agony,
In that moment I felt such loss,
Till a Roman soldier grabbed my arm
and screamed, "you, carry His cross".

At first I tried to resist him,
Then his hand reached for his sword,
So I knelt and took the cross from the Lord,
I placed it on my shoulder,
And started down the street,
The blood that he'd been shedding
was running down my cheek.

They led us to Golgotha,
They drove nails deep in His feet and hands,
Yet upon the cross I heard Him pray
"Father, forgive them".
Oh, never have I seen such love in any other eyes,
"Into thy hands I commit my spirit"
He prayed and then He died,

I stood for what seemed like years,
I'd lost all sense of time until
I felt two tiny hands holding tight to mine,
My children stood there weeping,
I heard the oldest say,
"Father please forgive us, the lamb ran away".

"Daddy, daddy, What have we seen here?,
There's so much that we don't understand",
So I took them in my arms,
And we turned and faced the cross,
Then I said "dear children watch the Lamb'

***If we want to be faithful – 'Watch the Lamb'

If we want to grow in Christ-likeness – watch the lamb

John 1:29 - 'The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, "Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.' [kjv]

Hebrews 12:2 – 'and 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.'