

Yahweh's Apostle

Romans 15:14-21

Introduction

We recently remembered the 25th anniversary of the 9/11 terror attacks on NYC and Washington D.C.

One woman who was on flight 93 – and was an airline stewardess that day – was Sandy Bradshaw – a 38-year-old native of North Carolina - - - who after 11 years working as an airline stewardess – was only flying on two flights / month for United airlines

Flight 93 – being the last of the hi-jacked planes still in the air - - - passengers were able to receive news from their phone conversations of what the hijackers were doing with these planes

When faced with the situation, Bradshaw called United Airlines to report the emergency and describe the terrorists. Then she called her husband in their North Carolina home. He recalls Sandy saying that she and others on the plane were boiling water to throw on the hijackers. As the call ended, she reported that everyone was running up to first class.

This plane also had Todd Beamer and Mark Bingham on board – we can only guess that Sandy got to use her pot of boiling water. Of course – flight 93 crashed in a field in Pennsylvania – taking no other lives than those on the plane

Al Braca, was a 54-year-old corporate bond broker and vice president at Cantor Fitzgerald. On September 11, 2001, Braca was working on the 104th floor of the North Tower when the first plane struck his building between floors 93 and 99 - - - creating a death trap for all on the floors above. In fact – no one survived above floor 92 that day – many perishing when the tower collapsed.

Braca, a devout Christian who was sometimes jokingly nicknamed "Rev." by his colleagues, chose to spend his final moments ministering to those around him. According to phone calls and messages that victims managed to send to their families before the tower collapsed, Braca gathered approximately 50 of his co-workers in a circle and led them in prayer, helping comfort them in their final moments – and telling them how to trust in Jesus Christ

What should one do when faced with their own mortality?

One of the great lessons that comes thru stories like these – is the ordinariness of the day in which someone gets up and goes to work / gets on a plane – only to find out that their lives are pretty much over in this world

It is for this reason – that the gospel of Jesus Christ comes to us with urgency

We don't know how much time we have in this world

We are just vapors that appear for a little while and then are gone

Dinesh D'Souza: 'Is death the end, or is there something more? This is the ultimate question. It has been the defining issue for entire cultures from the ancient Egyptians to the present. And in truth, there is no more important question that any of us will face. It is the issue that makes every other issue trivial.'

'If you have doubts about its significance, go to a hospital or funeral or talk to a parent who has recently lost a child. You will discover very quickly that the apparent normalcy of everyday life is a sham. Death is the great wrecking ball that destroys everything. Everything that we have done, everything we are doing now, and all our plans for the future are completely and irrevocably destroyed when we die.'

There is only one question that matters when we die:

Do we know Christ as Savior and Lord?

The book of Romans was written to tell us how we can know Christ as our Savior

Romans 1:16 - 'For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.'

I. Goodness and Knowledge - vv. 14-15

We are now coming to what is the closing section of this tremendous letter that has had a huge impact upon Western Civilization and the globe

God - from the beginning of history – has always had His spokesman / His prophets - - - someone to bring the Word of God unto others

We might think of Noah or Moses – all the many prophets Samuel / Isaiah / Daniel

Then – in the church age – we have the disciples: Peter / James and John

Then we come to the last of the apostles – Paul – who was converted on the Damascus road - - - went from being a Jewish Pharisee who persecuted the church - - - to becoming the church's greatest missionary and church planter in history - - - as well as prolific author – having written more letters – that made their way into the NT canon – than any of the other apostles

Antony Flew – formerly an atheist philosopher - - - was drawn to theism [belief in God] – when he considered the remarkable complexity of life – and the requirement of an intelligent Designer – as observed in DNA

He says he has met with the Anglican Bishop – N.T. Wright to discuss the claims of the Christian faith

Antony Flew: 'No other religion enjoys anything like the combination of a charismatic figure like Jesus and a first-class intellectual like St. Paul. If you're wanting omnipotence to set up a religion, it seems to me that this is the one to beat! [There is a God, p. 157]

John Piper once applied C.S. Lewis' famous trilemma argument onto the Apostle Paul

He says there are essentially three possibilities of what to do with the Apostle Paul:

- 1) Paul was a fraud / someone who knew his message was not true but used religion for some ulterior reason [a liar]

What did Paul get for all his labor? [he was beheaded by Nero / before that – He was stoned and left for dead / 5 times – 39 lashes / beaten w/ rods / etc.]

He suffered greatly for the faith – there was no earthly reward for promoting the Christian faith - - - so the incentive to be a fraud is not real compelling!

- 2) He was deceived / perhaps even crazy – telling people about Jesus who he says rose from the dead

Was Paul a crazy person?

Well – he planted churches across the Roman world

He pointed to evidence for the resurrection – even arguing to the Corinthians – that Jesus appeared to more than 500 on one occasion – some of whom were still around [go talk to them!]

Paul worked actual miracles – signs of a true apostle were performed among them

He taught the highest form of ethics known to man – the Christian faith

That does not sound like the deeds of a crazy person

- 3) Paul was an authorized and truthful spokesman chosen by the Lord Jesus Christ to be an Apostle

Those are your options: fraud / lunatic / truthful spokesman

John Piper: 'I cannot with any sincerity consider Paul a liar or a lunatic. I cannot see him as a deceiver or deceived. He has won my trust.'

Paul was a genuine apostle – he brings that out in this closing section

Paul has basically finished the doctrinal portion of his letter - as well as the practical application

One thing we note in this closing section is Paul's tone – he seems to soften his tone / shares personal plans / sends personal greetings [Ch. 16]

Some think that Paul may be trying to disarm or put at ease any resistance his letter may find there at the church

At the time of writing this - - Many of the believers there would not know Paul personally

The Romans could have been offended – ‘Why is the apostle Paul writing a 16 chapter dissertation to teach us?’

He doesn't want them to think he views them as novices or immature in the faith

History will bear out the wisdom of Paul in writing this letter

Such figures as Augustine / Martin Luther / John Wesley – all were converted to the faith in connection to this letter

It was God's intention that this letter to the Romans be part of our Bibles

God's Word is always an instrument of change and growth

Isaiah 55:10, 11 - 'For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there without watering the earth, and making it bear and sprout, and furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so shall My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.'

God has used and continues to use the book of Romans to convert sinners

Paul sees the Romans as being filled with goodness and knowledge – two important traits for the Christian

Goodness = high moral character – to love God and hate sin
Faithfulness to God's truth

To be willing to serve others / serve God

Pat Williams shares an interesting story on Coach John Wooden's life

Coach Wooden – when he was just starting out in coaching at Indiana State – had a player who had broken his nose a few times while playing basketball. Because of this he was developing chronic breathing problems. The coach sent a doctor to visit the player and he recommended surgery. The player said there was no way he could afford surgery. The doctor said – it's already been taken care of.

It turned out the coach had arranged to pay for the surgery out of his own pocket
The coach was certainly not well paid in those days – but that reflected his life philosophy

That's goodness

John Bunyan: 'You have not lived today until you have done something for someone who can never repay you.'

Christians should be characterized by goodness

In Acts 9 – we read of Tabitha – a disciple who was abounding with deeds of kindness and charity [Acts 9:36]

Paul also commends the Romans in their knowledge - - - He has written to them in this manner – because they have a strong knowledge of the truth

Paul writes to remind them of certain truths [v. 15]

I know when I am preaching – for many of you – I am saying something you already know / but which you appreciate hearing again

We do need reminders of truth

Why is that?

We are leaky vessels and we need our cup re-filled

We need daily reminders of various spiritual principles;

- That God is still on the throne / sovereign over His creation / causing all to work together for good for His people
- We are to forgive those who sin against us
- That sin never delivers on its promises – that God's way is better
- We need to be reminded to rejoice and be thankful [smile!] – don't be a porcupine
- We are helping others to heaven or hell by our actions / words – our faithful example / or hypocrisy / do we show love? / pettiness? / grace or lack of grace?

We need reminders – to set our minds on things above

To meditate on what is pure and holy / of good repute

II. The Grace Given to Paul - vv. 15-18

When you think of the twelve disciples

Paul was the odd man out – called and chosen by the Lord – but **after** the resurrection

Paul – in his calling was told that he would be an apostle to the Gentiles

Remember the Damascus Road experience

Acts 9:15 - 'Go for he is a chosen instrument of mine to bear My Name before the Gentiles.'

Paul was chosen for this task of taking the gospel to the Gentiles

He sees this calling as an expression of *grace*

Paul was not originally following Jesus – he was a Pharisee / persecuting the church / stood by at the stoning of Stephen – but God called him thru grace

Ephesians 3:8 - 'To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ.'

Paul did not appoint himself to be an apostle

Paul did not come up with the gospel / his message – it was given to him

Paul sees himself as an *instrument in the hands of the Redeemer* – for the conversion of Gentiles unto Christ / building up of the church

All Christians are instruments in the hands of the Redeemer

You / Me - - - all of us who have been called and redeemed

Romans 12:6-8 - 'And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, *let each exercise them accordingly*: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.'

Paul David Tripp: 'When God calls you to Himself, He also calls you to be a servant, an instrument in His redeeming hands.'

It's a mark of God's children – they want to serve in some way / contribute in some way to the overall ministry of the church

When we use our gifts / seek to serve one another in the name of Jesus / backed by prayer and humility - - - God brings forth His fruit of salvation / sanctification / spiritual growth

That is God's program – God's people serving one another

We think of all the 'one another' verses

- Love one another
- Serve one another
- Encourage one another
- Pray for one another
- Don't forsake the assembly of one another before the Lord
- Teach one another
- Admonish one another

That is God's program

We are [in a sense] dependent upon the faithful service of others in our lives - - - who play an important role in our sanctification – as they exercise the grace given to themselves

The church is inter-connected

Paul David Tripp: 'If you followed the Lord for a thousand years, you would still need the ministry of the body of Christ as much as you did the day you first believed. This need will remain until our sanctification is complete in glory.'

Our job is to use our gifts – consider the parable

Matthew 25:14-30

Matthew 25:14-19 - "For *it is* just like a man *about* to go on a journey, who called his own slaves, and entrusted his possessions to them. "And to one he gave five talents, to another, two, and to another, one, each according to his own ability; and he went on his journey. "Immediately the one who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and gained five more talents. "In the same manner the one who *had received* the two *talents* gained two more. "But he who received the one *talent* went away and dug in the ground, and hid his master's money. "Now after a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them."

Matthew 25:20-23 - "And the one who had received the five talents came up and brought five more talents, saying, 'Master, you entrusted five talents to

me; see, I have gained five more talents.' "His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave; you were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things, enter into the joy of your master.' "The one also who *had received* the two talents came up and said, 'Master, you entrusted to me two talents; see, I have gained two more talents.' "His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave; you were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.'

Matthew 25:24-27 - "And the one also who had received the one talent came up and said, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no *seed*.' And I was afraid, and went away and hid your talent in the ground; see, you have what is yours.' "But his master answered and said to him, 'You wicked, lazy slave, you knew that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I scattered no *seed*.' Then you ought to have put my money in the bank, and on my arrival I would have received my *money* back with interest.'

Matthew 25:28-30 - 'Therefore take away the talent from him, and give it to the one who has the ten talents.' "For to everyone who has shall *more* be given, and he shall have an abundance; but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away. "And cast out the worthless slave into the outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

The point of the parable is to use one's gifts given to them by God - - don't be the guy who buries it in the ground

It's only the wicked / the unbeliever who squanders his life selfishly – foolishly

III. Signs and Wonders - vv. 19-21

Part of the purpose of signs and wonders was to authenticate and prove that one was a genuine apostle – [give evidence – this guy is not a liar or a lunatic or a religious huckster]

II Corinthians 12:12 - 'The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles.'

Peter and John healed a lame man outside the temple

Peter raised Tabitha from the dead

Paul raised up Eutychus – who had fallen from the church rafters

Paul was left for dead after a stoning – got up and walked on as though nothing had happened – didn't even ask for aspirin

He healed a lame man – Acts 14

These functioned as signs that these men were chosen apostles [evidence]

R.C. Sproul: 'Signs and wonders' was a phrase rooted in the authentication of Moses' ministry at the time of the Exodus. God periodically gave such miracles at critical junctures of redemptive history, such as the Exodus, the prophetic ministries of Elijah and Elisha, the preserving of His people in the time of Daniel, and the ministry of Christ and the Apostles.'

These miracles often accompanied the giving of new revelation from God

God was breaking into earthly history – raising up His church upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets – Christ Jesus being the cornerstone

Hebrews 2:3, 4 - 'How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also bearing witness with them both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.'

The Tribulation will be another time of signs and wonders / along with new revelation – for a very short period

With the two prophets – Revelation 11

Revelation 11:3-6 - 'And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth . . . and if anyone desires to harm them, fire proceeds out of their mouth and devours their enemies; and if anyone would desire to harm them, in this manner he must be killed. These have the power to shut up the sky, in order that rain may not fall during the days of their prophesying . . . and to smite the earth with every plague, as often as they desire.'

Paul was what we might today call a pioneer missionary – taking the gospel to lands that had not heard of Jesus

He planted churches and appointed pastors and elders to carry on after Him – fellows such as Titus and Timothy / Apollos

Why did Paul do what he did?

Conclusion

II Timothy 2:8-10 - 'Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descendant of David, according to my gospel, for which I suffer hardship even to imprisonment as a criminal; but the Word of God is not imprisoned. For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus and with it eternal glory.'

Why did Paul do what he did?

So that we could obtain salvation

Peter tells us to be diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you – live out our faith