

Romans 8:12-25
July 17, '11

**ROAMING THROUGH ROMANS #3
"THE REAL DEBT CHALLENGE"**

(Before Scripture)

OUR SCRIPTURE READING THIS MORNING IS FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT, BUT IT HAS DEEP ROOTS IN THE OLD.

REMEMBER THE STORY OF THE EXODUS – THE SINGLE-MOST SIGNIFICANT EVENT OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.

THE JEWS HAD BEEN HELD IN SLAVERY & CAPTIVITY IN THE LAND OF EGYPT.

UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF MOSES, THEY SOUGHT & ULTIMATELY WERE GIVEN THEIR FREEDOM FOLLOWING THE 10 PLAGUES THAT WREKED HAVOC ON THE EGYPTIANS.

AS THEY TRAVELLED IN THE WILDERNESS, THEY WERE LED BY GOD WHO WENT BEFORE THEM AS A PILLAR OF CLOUD BY DAY & A PILLAR OF FIRE BY NIGHT.

THERE WERE TIMES, ALONG THE WAY, WHEN THE ISRAELITES WERE TEMPTED TO GIVE UP, TURN AROUND & HEAD BACK TO EGYPT BECAUSE THE WAY SEEMED TOO DIFFICULT TO ENDURE.

SOMEHOW, THOUGH, THEY PERSEVERED & EVENTUALLY MADE THEIR WAY TO THE PROMISED LAND.

WITH THAT AS BACKGROUND, LISTEN TO THESE WORDS FROM THE APOSTLE PAUL IN ROMANS 8:12-25.

(After Scripture)

WE'RE "ROAMING THROUGH ROMANS" THIS SUMMER – TAKING A TRIP THROUGH THIS MAGNIFICENT LETTER OF PAUL – A LETTER HE WROTE TO A CHURCH HE HAD YET TO VISIT, BUT HAD GREAT HOPES OF DOING SO.

LAST WEEK, PAUL LEFT US WITH WHAT WE LABELLED "THE ULTIMATE ACCESS CODE" - THE WAY TO ABUNDANT & ETERNAL LIFE – THE KEY TO SALVATION – THE PASSWORD TO GOD'S KINGDOM.

THAT ACCESS CODE IS JESUS CHRIST & OUR JUSTIFICATION BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH.

AS WE CONSIDERED WHAT PAUL HAD TO SAY ABOUT THAT, IT SEEMED TO LEAVE US WITH A FREE RIDE.

AND YET, THE GREAT APOSTLE OPENS *THIS* PASSAGE BY TALKING ABOUT "DEBT."

LAST WEEK WE TALKED ABOUT THE USE OF THE WORD "ACCESS" BEING MORE PROMINENT TODAY THAN IT WAS IN PAUL'S TIME.

THAT'S PROBABLY TRUE TO AN EVEN GREATER EXTENT *THIS* WEEK AS LOOK AT THE WORD "DEBT."

I'M SURE WE'VE ALL HAD OUR FILL OF DISCUSSION ABOUT "DEBT" RECENTLY.

YOU CAN'T TURN ON THE NEWS WITHOUT HEARING ABOUT IT.

EVERYONE SEEMS TO HAVE THE ANSWER TO THE CHALLENGE BUT, UNFORTUNATELY, THOSE ANSWERS AREN'T THE SAME & ARE, IN MANY CASES, DIAMETRICALLY OPPOSED TO ONE ANOTHER.

EVEN WITHIN PARTIES, THE DEMOCRATS AREN'T IN AGREEMENT WITH ONE ANOTHER, NOR ARE THE REPUBLICANS.

QUITE OFTEN, WHEN WE SEE SUCH DISSENTING VIEWS ABOUT SOMETHING, I'M REMINDED OF THE STATEMENT, OFTEN ATTRIBUTED TO EDMUND BURKE – *“THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A POLITICIAN & A STATESMAN IS THAT A POLITICIAN LOOKS TO THE NEXT ELECTION, WHILE A STATESMAN LOOKS TO THE NEXT GENERATION.”*

THE DEBT CHALLENGE IN WASHINGTON RIGHT NOW WOULD SUGGEST THAT WE HAVE AN AWFUL LOT OF POLITICIANS & FAR TOO FEW STATESMAN!

IT IS A CHALLENGE, THOUGH, ISN'T IT?

IT'S A CHALLENGE THAT WON'T BE EASILY MET.

I WOULD SUGGEST TO YOU THIS MORNING, THOUGH, THAT THE CHALLENGE PAUL PUTS BEFORE US IN THESE WORDS WE'VE JUST READ, IS A FAR MORE IMPORTANT ONE.

IT'S THE REAL DEBT CHALLENGE THAT ALL OF US FACE.

PAUL WAS A FAITHFUL JEW & AS SUCH, HE WAS A STUDENT OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.

HE KNEW THE STORY OF THE EXODUS WELL.

AND HE ALSO KNEW HOW CLOSELY CONNECTED IT WAS TO THE SITUATION THAT IS FACED BY ALL FOLLOWERS OF JESUS.

THERE IS THE MATTER OF BEING IN BONDAGE TO SIN & THE POSSIBILITY OF FREEDOM.

THERE IS THE LEADING OF GOD AS BELIEVERS WANDER IN THE WILDERNESS OF THE WORLD.

THERE IS THE TEMPTATION TO TURN BACK TO OLD HABITS – TO SETTLE BACK INTO THE WAY THINGS USED TO BE.

THERE ARE TIMES WHEN IT WOULD SEEM SO MUCH EASIER TO BE ENSLAVED TO SIN AGAIN – NO MORE BATTLES, NO MORE SENSE OF AN UPHILL STRUGGLE.

ISN'T THAT PRECISELY WHAT THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL FACED IN THE WILDERNESS?

THEY WERE TEMPTED TO GIVE IT ALL UP BECAUSE IT WOULD HAVE BEEN SO MUCH EASIER TO TURN BACK.

NO MATTER HOW DIFFICULT THEIR SLAVERY HAD BEEN, AT TIMES IT SEEMED AS THOUGH THE STRUGGLES THEY FACED IN THE WILDERNESS WERE TEN TIMES WORSE!

BUT IN THE END, THERE WAS SOMETHING AWAITING THEM.

IF THEY PERSEVERED & IF THEY KEPT THEIR EYES CENTERED ON THE ROAD BEFORE THEM & IF THEY FOLLOWED THE PILLAR OF CLOUD BY DAY AND THE FIRE BY NIGHT, THE PROMISED LAND WAS THEIRS TO INHERIT.

DO YOU SEE THE CLEAR CONNECTION PAUL IS MAKING HERE BETWEEN THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL AND THE FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST?

WE, TOO, HAVE AN INHERITANCE AWAITING US.

HE SAYS IT VERY CLEARLY – *“WE ARE CHILDREN OF GOD & IF CHILDREN, THEN HEIRS, HEIRS OF GOD & JOINT HEIRS WITH CHRIST...”*

BUT THERE'S MORE – BECAUSE JUST PRIOR TO THIS, HE SAYS, “*FOR ALL WHO ARE LED BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD ARE CHILDREN OF GOD.*”

HERE'S WHERE THE DEBT CHALLENGE ENTERS THE PICTURE.

HOW CAN WE TALK ABOUT GRACE BEING FREE AS WE DID LAST WEEK & YET THIS WEEK TALK ABOUT OWING A “DEBT” TO GOD?

WHAT SEEMS CONTRADICTORY REALLY ISN'T BECAUSE IT'S SIMPLY A MATTER OF OUR WILLINGNESS TO BE “*LED BY THE SPIRIT*” AS PAUL SAYS.

THE LEADING OF THE SPIRIT IN THIS CONTEXT CORRESPONDS TO THE LEADING OF THE PILLARS OF CLOUD & FIRE IN THE WILDERNESS.

WOULDN'T IT BE WONDERFUL IF *WE* WERE AS MUCH IN AWE OF THE FACT OF THE SPIRIT'S DWELLING *IN* & *WITH* US AS THE ISRAELITES LEARNED TO BE WITH THE PRESENCE OF GOD IN THE CLOUD & THE FIRE?

SOME ARE INCLINED TO BELIEVE & LIVE AS IF EVERYTHING IS SIMPLY HANDED TO US BY GOD WHILE WE SIT BACK CASUALLY & RECEIVE IT.

BUT GOD'S GIFT TO US & GOD'S CALL TO US ARE NOT FOR US ALONE, BUT FOR THE PURPOSE OF WORKING *THROUGH* US TO BRING ABOUT THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE WORLD.

I KNOW IT CAUSES SOME PEOPLE TO BE ANXIOUS WHEN WE TALK ABOUT GRACE BEING FREE BUT THERE ARE OTHERS WHO GET *JUST* AS ANXIOUS WHEN WE TALK ABOUT IT COSTING US SOMETHING.

BUT PAUL SAYS VERY CLEARLY HERE THAT WE ARE “DEBTORS.”

THE WAY WE MEET “THE REAL DEBT CHALLENGE” THAT FACES US IS SIMPLY DOING WHAT THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL DID IN THE WILDERNESS – WE FOLLOW WHERE GOD LEADS US.

FOR THEM THAT LEADING WAS MANIFESTED IN A CLOUD & IN FIRE.

FOR US, PAUL SAYS, IT IS FOUND IN THE HOLY SPIRIT.

WHERE IS THE SPIRIT LEADING YOU?

DISCOVERING THAT & ACTING ON IT IS THE ONLY WAY TO PAY THE DEBT YOU OWE.

BUT HERE'S THE THING – PAYING THAT DEBT IS PERHAPS THE MOST EXCITING ASPECT OF BEING A CHRISTIAN!

THAT'S WHY WE CALL IT “GOOD NEWS!”

NATIONALLY-KNOWN SPEAKER & WRITER TONY CAMPOLO TELLS A STORY OF AN EXPERIENCE HE HAD MORE THAN 30 YEARS AGO WHEN A FRIEND CALLED HIM WITH A REQUEST.

IN TONY'S WORDS, HERE'S HOW THAT PHONE CALL WENT:

“MY FRIEND SAID, ‘I WANT YOU TO BE ON A BOARD.’

I ASKED, ‘FOR WHAT?’

HE SAID, ‘WE'RE GOING TO BUILD HOUSES FOR POOR PEOPLE.’

I SAID, ‘THAT'S GOOD.’

HE SAID, 'NOT ONLY ARE WE GOING TO BUILD HOUSES FOR POOR PEOPLE, BUT THEY'RE GOING TO BE ABLE TO BUY THESE HOUSES WITH NO DOWN PAYMENT.'

I SAID, 'THAT'S TERRIFIC! THAT'S WHAT USUALLY KEEPS POOR PEOPLE FROM BUYING HOUSES.'

HE SAID, 'BEYOND THAT, THEY'RE GOING TO HAVE LONG TERM MORTGAGES AND NO INTEREST ON THE MORTGAGES.'

I SAID, 'THAT'S WILD! I'M BUYING A HOUSE & MOST OF WHAT I PAY IN ANY GIVEN PAYMENT IS FOR INTEREST.'

AND HE SAID, 'THAT'S RIGHT BUT THE BIBLE SAYS THAT YOU SHOULD NEVER CHARGE INTEREST TO POOR PEOPLE SO WE'RE NOT GOING TO DO THAT. ONE THING MORE – WHEN THESE PEOPLE BUY THESE HOUSE THEY'RE ONLY GOING TO HAVE TO PAY FOR THE COST OF BUILDING MATERIALS.'

I SAID, 'FRIEND, THAT'S WONDERFUL – EXCEPT FOR ONE THING. WHO'S GOING TO PAY FOR THE LABOR? WHO'S GOING TO PAY FOR THE WORKERS?'

HE SAID, 'NO PROBLEM! I'M GOING TO GET CHURCH PEOPLE TO VOLUNTEER.'

I SAID, 'RIGHT.'

YOU MAY RECOGNIZE THAT IDEA AS “HABITAT FOR HUMANITY” & THAT FRIEND OF TONY CAMPOLO AS MILLARD FULLER, ITS FOUNDER.

MORE THAN 35 YEARS AFTER THAT PHONE CALL, HABITAT HAS BUILT MORE THAN 400,000 HOMES, SHELTERING MORE THAN 2 MILLION PEOPLE ON 5 CONTINENTS & IN 3,000 COMMUNITIES.

AS CRAZY AS IT SOUNDED, MILLARD FULLER WAS RIGHT & THOUSANDS UPON THOUSANDS OF CHURCH PEOPLE – PEOPLE LED BY THE SPIRIT – HAVE HELPED OTHERS MAKE THE DREAM OF OWNING THEIR OWN HOME A REALITY .

A LITTLE SIDE NOTE HERE – DO YOU REALIZE THAT OUR OWN LOCAL HABITAT CHAPTER IS ONE OF THE STRONGEST CHAPTERS IN THE COUNTRY?

AND DID YOU KNOW THAT, OVER THE YEARS, THERE ARE ONLY 2 CHURCHES IN THE ENTIRE EVANSVILLE AREA WHO HAVE CONTRIBUTED MORE MONEY TO HABITAT THAN WE HAVE – NEARLY \$110,000!

THE STORY OF HABITAT IS AN INCREDIBLE STORY OF A MAN WHO HAD A VISION – A MAN WHO ALLOWED HIMSELF TO BE LED BY THE SPIRIT.

AT A PARTICULAR POINT IN HIS LIFE, HE OPENED HIMSELF UP & ASKED THE HOLY SPIRIT TO INVADE HIM – TO POSSESS HIM & TO LEAD HIM.

AND THAT MAN BELIEVED THAT OTHERS WOULD BE LED BY THE SPIRIT AS WELL IN THIS VENTURE.

PAUL SAYS HERE IN THIS PASSAGE IN ROMANS – “FOR ALL WHO ARE LED BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD ARE THE CHILDREN OF GOD.”

SO THESE TWO GREAT CONCEPTS PAUL HAS PRESENTED TO US – “THE ULTIMATE ACCESS CODE” - FREE GRACE & “THE REAL DEBT CHALLENGE” – WHAT WE OWE IN RETURN FOR THAT GRACE – ARE NOT AT ALL CONTRADICTORY.

THEY GO HAND IN HAND.

WHERE IS THE SPIRIT LEADING YOU?

WHAT IS YOUR RESPONSE TO THE FREE GRACE YOU'VE BEEN GIVEN IN JESUS CHRIST?

THE REAL DEBT CHALLENGE OF OUR LIVES CAN TAKE US TO THE MOST EXCITING PLACES IMAGINABLE.

AND, YES, THAT'S GOOD NEWS – THE BEST NEWS EVER. AMEN.

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