

Romans 1:8-15
July 3, '11

ROAMING THROUGH ROMANS
“GIVING & RECEIVING”

(Before scripture)

IF YOU PLAN ON FOLLOWING OUR SCRIPTURE READING THIS MORNING, I SUGGEST YOU PUT YOUR BIBLE ASIDE FOR A FEW MINUTES BECAUSE AN INTRODUCTION IS WARRANTED.

FOR SEVERAL WEEKS, I HAD BEEN TRYING TO COME UP WITH A SERMON SERIES THAT WOULD BE APPROPRIATE FOR THE SUMMER.

I WENT THROUGH SEVERAL POSSIBILITIES & THEN FINALLY WAS PRETTY WELL SETTLED ON A SERIES THAT WOULD FOCUS ON BOOKS.

IT SEEMS AS THOUGH SUMMER IS A GOOD TIME FOR READING – READING WHILE ON VACATION AT THE BEACH OR IN THE MOUNTAINS OR JUST READING ON A WARM SUMMER NIGHT.

THE BOOKS I CONSIDERED USING WEREN'T BOOKS OF THE BIBLE OR EVEN NECESSARILY BOOKS THAT WOULD BE CLASSIFIED AS RELIGIOUS.

THEY WERE SIMPLY BOOKS THAT CARRY SOME ELEMENT OF A SPIRITUAL THEME WITHIN THEM.

I HAD MADE A FINAL DETERMINATION OF MOST OF THE BOOKS TO BE INCLUDED IN AN 8-10 WEEK SERIES.

BUT THEN I DECIDED AGAINST IT – PRIMARILY BECAUSE THERE WAS ANOTHER BOOK THAT CAME TO MIND THAT SEEMED AS THOUGH IT WOULD BE A PERFECT FIT FOR SUCH A SERIES.

I REALIZED, THOUGH, THAT IT WASN'T ENOUGH TO HAVE IT SIMPLY FIT INTO THE SERIES.

IT WAS A SERIES IN ITSELF.

PAUL'S LETTER TO THE ROMANS IS THAT BOOK.

IT ALSO SEEMED AS THOUGH IT WOULD BE APPROPRIATE TO BEGIN THE STUDY ON THIS PARTICULAR SUNDAY BECAUSE IT FITS PERFECTLY.

IN THE SUMMER OF 1776, THE SECOND CONTINENTAL CONGRESS WAS MEETING IN PHILADELPHIA AT THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE HOUSE – LATER CALLED INDEPENDENCE HALL.

ON JUNE 7, RICHARD HENRY LEE OF VIRGINIA STOOD & READ A RESOLUTION – “*RESOLVED THAT THESE UNITED COLONIES ARE, AND OF RIGHT OUGHT TO BE, FREE & INDEPENDENT STATES, THAT THEY ARE ABSOLVED FROM ALL ALLEGIANCE TO THE BRITISH CROWN, AND THAT ALL POLITICAL CONNECTION BETWEEN THEM & THE STATE OF GREAT BRITAIN IS, AND OUGHT TO BE, TOTALLY DISSOLVED.*”

THE DIE WAS CAST & ON JUNE 11, 1776, A COMMITTEE WAS FORMED WITH THE EXPRESS PURPOSE OF DRAFTING A DOCUMENT THAT WOULD FORMALLY SEVER THE TIES OF THE COLONIES WITH GREAT BRITAIN.

THE COMMITTEE INCLUDED THOMAS JEFFERSON OF VIRGINIA, BENJAMIN FRANKLIN OF PENNSYLVANIA, JOHN ADAMS OF MASSACHUSETTS, ROGER SHERMAN OF CONNECTICUT & ROBERT R. LIVINGSTON OF NEW YORK.

ON JULY 1, CONGRESS RECONVENED & THE FOLLOWING DAY, THE LEE RESOLUTION FOR INDEPENDENCE WAS ADOPTED BY 12 OF THE 13 COLONIES.

IMMEDIATELY, CONGRESS BEGAN TO CONSIDER THE DECLARATION DRAWN UP BY THE COMMITTEE.

THEN LATE IN THE AFTERNOON OF JULY 4, 1776, THE DOCUMENT KNOWN AS THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE WAS OFFICIALLY ADOPTED.

THAT DOCUMENT HAS BECOME OUR NATION'S MOST CHERISHED SYMBOL OF LIBERTY.

I SAID THIS IS AN APPROPRIATE DAY TO BEGIN A STUDY OF PAUL'S LETTER TO THE ROMANS BECAUSE IT'S PLACE WITHIN CHRISTIANITY IS SIMILAR TO THE PLACE THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE HAS FOR US AS AMERICANS.

THERE IS NO DOCUMENT THAT STATES MORE CLEARLY WHO WE ARE AS AMERICANS.

BY THE SAME TOKEN, THERE IS PERHAPS NO DOCUMENT THAT STATES WHO WE ARE AS CHRISTIANS MORE CLEARLY THAN ROMANS.

YOU HAVE HEARD ME REFER TO IT MOST OFTEN AS PAUL'S THEOLOGICAL MASTERPIECE.

ONE COMMENTATOR OPENS HIS STUDY OF IT BY SAYING, "...IT IS UNQUESTIONABLY THE MOST IMPORTANT THEOLOGICAL BOOK EVER WRITTEN."

WHAT IS IT ABOUT ROMANS THAT MAKES IT SO SPECIAL?

WHY IS IT DIFFERENT FROM ALL THE OTHER LETTERS PAUL WROTE?

WELL, FOR ONE THING, ROMANS WASN'T WRITTEN TO A CHURCH PAUL HAD ESTABLISHED.

IN FACT, PAUL HAD NEVER VISITED THE CHURCH IN ROME.

THAT MEANS THAT WHAT HE WRITES TO THEM ISN'T GOING TO INCLUDE SPECIFICS.

THERE'S NO ISSUE TO ADDRESS – NO QUARRELING TO TRY TO SQUELCH.

THERE ARE NO CONFLICTS TO RESOLVE & NO MISUNDERSTANDINGS TO SETTLE.

SOMETHING ELSE THAT MAKES THIS LETTER DIFFERENT IS THAT PAUL SEEMINGLY HAD TIME ON HIS HANDS.

HE WAS MOST LIKELY IN CORINTH, AWAITING A RESPONSE FROM VARIOUS CHURCHES WHO WERE GOING TO PARTICIPATE IN A CONTRIBUTION TO THE CHURCH IN JERUSALEM.

PAUL WASN'T ENGAGED IN TRAVELING OR INTENSE EVANGELISTIC EFFORTS & HE HAD TIME TO LEISURELY WRITE – AND TIME TO THINK THROUGH THE CORE OF HIS FAITH.

THAT'S WHAT WE GET IN ROMANS – THE HEART OF PAUL'S FAITH.

PAUL HAD NEVER VISITED ROME BUT – AS WE'LL HEAR HIM SAY IN OUR PASSAGE FOR TODAY – HE HAS LONGED TO GO THERE.

HE HAS HAD A BURNING DESIRE TO VISIT THE CHURCH IN ROME AND ONE OF THE REASONS FOR THAT DESIRE IS SOMETHING HE DOESN'T REVEAL UNTIL MUCH LATER IN THE LETTER.

HE ALSO HAS A DESIRE TO GO TO SPAIN & ROME WOULD BE A "STOPPING OFF" PLACE ON THAT JOURNEY.

SO, AS WE BEGIN A SUMMER OF "ROAMING THROUGH ROMANS," LET'S LOOK AT PAUL'S FIRST CHAPTER IN THIS MONUMENTALLY-IMPORTANT LETTER.

ROMANS 1:8-15.

(After scripture)

PAUL'S THEOLOGICAL MASTERPIECE.

THE MOST IMPORTANT THEOLOGICAL BOOK EVER WRITTEN.

YES, ROMANS IS FILLED WITH THEOLOGY – BUT IT IS ALSO FILLED WITH PRACTICALITY.

IN THESE WORDS NEAR THE OPENING OF THE LETTER, WE HAVE 3 WONDERFUL EXAMPLES OF THAT PRACTICALITY – THREE THINGS PAUL TEACHES THAT CAN BE APPLIED TO ANY SITUATION AND ANY TIME OF LIFE.

FIRST OF ALL, NOTICE HIS WORDS OF AFFIRMATION – HIS EXPRESSIONS OF PRAISE.

PAUL WAS ALWAYS QUICK WITH A COMPLIMENT – ALWAYS EAGER TO FIND SOMETHING POSITIVE TO SAY ABOUT SOMEONE ELSE.

WILLIAM BARCLAY, IN COMMENTING ON THIS PASSAGE, SAYS, *“THERE ARE SOME PEOPLE WHOSE EYES ARE FOCUSED TO FIND FAULTS, AND OTHERS WHOSE EYES ARE FOCUSED TO DISCOVER VIRTUES.”*

IT WAS SAID OF THOMAS HARDY, THE BRITISH WRITER, THAT IF HE WENT INTO A COUNTRY FIELD, HE WOULD ALWAYS SEE, NOT THE WILDFLOWERS, BUT THE DUNG HEAP IN THE CORNER OF IT.

WE ALL KNOW PEOPLE LIKE THAT, DON'T WE – THOSE WHO ARE VERY ADEPT AT FINDING FAULT WITH ANYONE.

RUMOR HAS IT THERE WAS A GUY AT THE FEEDING OF THE 5,000 WHO COMPLAINED THAT JESUS HADN'T INCLUDED A SOFT DRINK WITH THE LOAVES & FISHES THE DISCIPLES PASSED AROUND.

PAUL KNEW THE IMPORTANCE OF OFFERING PRAISE INSTEAD OF PASSING JUDGMENT, COMPLIMENTING RATHER THAN CRITICIZING.

IT'S A LESSON MANY OF US WOULD BENEFIT FROM LEARNING.

ANOTHER PRACTICAL LESSON PAUL TEACHES IN THIS PASSAGE IS THAT OF MUTUALITY IN GIVING & RECEIVING.

HE SAYS, *“FOR I AM LONGING TO SEE YOU SO THAT I MAY SHARE WITH YOU SOME SPIRITUAL GIFT TO STRENGTHEN YOU...”*

BUT THEN HE QUICKLY FOLLOWS THAT UP BY SAYING *“...OR RATHER SO THAT WE MAY BE MUTUALLY ENCOURAGED BY EACH OTHER'S FAITH, BOTH YOURS & MINE.”*

THIS MUTUALITY IN FAITH IS SOMETHING THAT IS SO VITAL AND, UNFORTUNATELY, SO RARE.

IN FACT, I WOULD SUGGEST THAT IT IS ONE OF THE MOST SERIOUS PROBLEMS WE FACE IN OUR DAY & AGE – NOT ONLY IN FAITH, BUT IN POLITICS, AND SOCIETY IN GENERAL.

IT IS AN UNWILLINGNESS TO LISTEN TO ONE ANOTHER – AN UNWILLINGNESS TO LEARN FROM SOMEONE ELSE BECAUSE WE'RE SURE WE'VE GOT ALL THE ANSWERS!

THE GREAT THEOLOGIAN PAUL TILlich SAID, *“THE FIRST DUTY OF LOVE IS TO LISTEN.”*

THE NOVELIST ERNEST HEMINGWAY ACKNOWLEDGED THE IMPORTANCE OF LISTENING WHEN HE SAID, *“I LIKE TO LISTEN. I HAVE LEARNED A GREAT DEAL FROM LISTENING. MOST PEOPLE NEVER LISTEN.”*

UNFORTUNATELY, HEMINGWAY IS RIGHT IN HIS ASSESSMENT, ISN'T HE?

MORE OFTEN THAN NOT, WE AREN'T WILLING TO LISTEN TO SOMEONE'S VIEWS THAT ARE DIFFERENT FROM OUR OWN.

BUT LOOK AT PAUL.

HERE HE IS – IN A DOCUMENT THAT IS UNIVERSALLY CONSIDERED THE GREATEST THEOLOGICAL TREATISE EVER WRITTEN – AND HE WANTS TO BE ABLE TO LEARN ABOUT MATTERS OF FAITH FROM SOMEONE ELSE.

IF PAUL FEELS HE HAS SOMETHING TO LEARN ABOUT SPIRITUAL MATTERS FROM SOMEONE ELSE, SHOULDN'T YOU BE WILLING TO DO THE SAME?

FINALLY, IN ADDITION TO PAUL'S WORDS OF PRAISE FOR OTHERS & HIS INTEREST IN GIVING & RECEIVING WHEN IT COMES TO DISCUSSING MATTERS OF FAITH, THE GREAT APOSTLE HAS A VISION FOR A NEW CALL IN HIS LIFE.

HERE HE IS, A MAN WHO HAS ALREADY – THROUGH HIS MISSIONARY JOURNEYS – ACCOMPLISHED MORE THAN VIRTUALLY ANY OTHER PERSON ON THE PLANET & WHAT'S ON HIS MIND?

GOING FURTHER – DOING SOMETHING MORE – STARTING A NEW VENTURE – LOOKING FOR ANOTHER CHALLENGE!

PAUL WANTS TO VISIT ROME & THEN HE WANTS TO GO TO SPAIN!

WHAT A TREMENDOUS EXAMPLE HE IS OF SOMEONE WHO'S NOT CONTENT TO REST ON PAST ACCOMPLISHMENTS – SOMEONE WHO BELIEVES GOD HAS SOMETHING ELSE IN STORE FOR HIM.

IRONICALLY, IT WAS PAUL WHO SAID IN ANOTHER LETTER THAT HE HAD LEARNED TO BE CONTENT IN WHATEVER STATE HE FOUND HIMSELF.

THOSE TWO THINGS AREN'T CONTRADICTIONARY.

RATHER, THEY ARE COMPLIMENTARY.

PAUL HAD LEARNED TO PUT HIS COMPLETE TRUST IN GOD.

HE HAD LEARNED THAT WHATEVER HE WAS DOING, GOD WOULD BE THERE – GUIDING & PROTECTING HIM.

THAT'S WHY HE COULD LOOK TO THE FUTURE WITH ENTHUSIASM.

THAT'S WHY HE COULD DREAM OF A NEW CALL – A NEW TASK – A NEW DIRECTION IN HIS LIFE.

WHAT A WONDERFUL LESSON FOR ALL OF US.

PAUL IS TELLING US THAT GOD ALWAYS HAS SOMETHING MORE IN STORE FOR US.

THERE'S ALWAYS A NEW TASK, A NEW VISION, A NEW OPPORTUNITY, A NEW CHALLENGE.

IT'S EASY TO SIT BACK & RELAX AND CONCLUDE YOU'RE ALREADY DOING EVERYTHING YOU'RE CAPABLE OF DOING & EVERYTHING GOD HAS CALLED YOU TO DO.

BUT COULDN'T PAUL HAVE DONE THE SAME THING – AND WITH MUCH GREATER VALIDITY?

BE ASSURED THAT GOD HAS SOMETHING MORE IN STORE FOR YOUR LIFE – SOME NEW CHALLENGE THAT'S JUST WAITING FOR YOU TO ACCEPT.

YES, PAUL WAS THE GREATEST THEOLOGIAN THE WORLD HAS EVER KNOWN.

AND YET HE WAS ALSO A MAN WHO DEALT IN PRACTICALITY.

BEFORE HE ENTERS THE REALM OF THEOLOGY IN THIS VITALLY-IMPORTANT LETTER, HE TEACHES US THE IMPORTANCE OF PRAISE, HE EMBODIES THE ESSENTIAL NATURE OF MUTUALITY & LISTENING TO THE IDEAS OF OTHERS & HE DARES US TO OPEN OUR HEARTS & MINDS TO THE NEW CHALLENGES GOD SETS BEFORE US.

AMEN.

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