

Romans 12:9-21
August 7, '11

**ROAMING THROUGH ROMANS #6
"PAUL'S OTHER LOVE CHAPTER"**

(BEFORE BEGINNING THE SERMON, LET ME SAY SOMETHING ABOUT ONE OF THOSE FINAL VERSES THAT CAN BE RATHER CONFUSING – THE "HEAPING BURNING COALS" VERSE. THAT'S NOT A SNEAKY WAY OF SEEKING REVENGE. IT'S A QUOTE FROM THE BOOK OF PROVERBS & REFERS TO AN ANCIENT PRACTICE OF CARRYING COALS IN A BUCKET ON ONE'S HEAD AS AN ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF WRONG-DOING. SO, IN OTHER WORDS, PAUL IS ENCOURAGING HIS LISTENERS TO TREAT OTHERS IN SUCH A WAY THAT THEY WILL LOOK AT THEM & SAY, "WOW! THAT'S A MUCH BETTER WAY TO LIVE!")

ONE OF THE MAGNIFICENT & MYSTERIOUS ASPECTS OF SCRIPTURE IS THE WAY A PASSAGE CAN TAKE YOU IN SO MANY DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS.

WHEN I FIRST STARTED PREACHING, I REMEMBER HOW DISCONCERTING IT WAS TO LOOK AT SOMEONE IN THE CONGREGATION WHOSE MIND WAS OBVIOUSLY A MILLION MILES AWAY FROM WHAT I WAS SAYING.

AT SOME POINT, THOUGH, WHILE LISTENING TO A SERMON, I FOUND MYSELF DRIFTING AWAY FROM THE PREACHER'S MESSAGE & I REALIZED THAT IT WAS SOMETHING HE HAD SAID THAT TOOK ME TO ANOTHER PLACE.

I CONCLUDED, THEN & THERE, THAT I WOULD ALWAYS ASSUME THAT SOMEONE'S GLASSY-EYED STARE WHILE I WAS PREACHING WAS SIMPLY AN INDICATION THAT THE HOLY SPIRIT HAD TAKEN THEM TO A DIFFERENT PLACE WHILE LISTENING TO THE SERMON.

IN MY SANER MOMENTS, OF COURSE, I REALIZE THERE REALLY ARE THOSE WHO AREN'T LISTENING AT ALL TO WHAT I'M SAYING & IT HAS NOTHING WHATSOEVER TO DO WITH WHERE THE HOLY SPIRIT HAS TAKEN THEM IN THEIR HEARING.

THAT WON'T PREVENT ME, THOUGH, FROM BELIEVING THAT YOUR GLASSY-EYED STARE IS THE RESULT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT TAKING YOU IN A NEW DIRECTION AS A RESULT OF SOMETHING WITHIN THE SERMON.

HAVING SAID ALL THAT, I CAN TELL YOU THAT THIS PASSAGE TOOK ME IN A DIRECTION I REALLY HADN'T INTENDED TO GO.

I EVENTUALLY CAME BACK TO WHERE I HAD ANTICIPATED BEING, BUT IT WAS A CIRCUITOUS ROUTE THAT I TOOK TO ARRIVE AT THE INTENDED DESTINATION.

THAT CIRCUITOUS ROUTE SEEMED TO BE AN APPROPRIATE ONE FOR A SUMMERTIME SERMON.

AS I READ THESE WORDS OF PAUL IN THE 12TH CHAPTER OF ROMANS, I THOUGHT OF EVERYTHING THAT PRECEDED THEM IN THIS GREAT LETTER.

I WAS LEFT WITH A PROBING QUESTION – ONE THAT CAN BE TAKEN IN A VARIETY OF DIFFERENT WAYS.

THE QUESTION IS THIS: "WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF THERE WAS NOTHING YOU HAD TO DO?"

LET THAT QUESTION SINK IN FOR A FEW MOMENTS.

SAVOR THE POSSIBILITIES.

BASK IN THE WONDER OF SUCH A THING.

"WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF THERE WAS NOTHING YOU HAD TO DO?"

I HAVE A FRIEND WHO SAYS THAT HE GOT HIS FIRST LESSON ON RETIREMENT FROM HIS FATHER WHO WAS FOND OF SAYING, *“I WAKE UP EVERY MORNING WITH NOTHING TO DO & BY THE END OF THE DAY, I’M HALF FINISHED.”*

THAT’S NOT AT ALL TO SAY THAT BEING RETIRED LEAVES SOMEONE WITH NOTHING TO DO!
ON THE CONTRARY, IT SAYS THAT EVEN WITHOUT A WORK SCHEDULE, YOU STILL DON’T HAVE ENOUGH TIME TO DO EVERYTHING!

I USED TO HAVE A POSTER IN MY OFFICE WHEN I FIRST SERVED AS A CHURCH YOUTH DIRECTOR. IT WAS A DRAWING OF A WOODEN STOOL ON A YELLOW BACKGROUND WITH THE WORDS, *“SOMETIMES I SITS & THINKS – AND SOMETIMES I JUST SITS.”*

THOSE WORDS ARE OFTEN ATTRIBUTED TO SACHEL PAIGE, THE GREAT, AGELESS BASEBALL PLAYER. I HAVE ALWAYS APPRECIATED THE MESSAGE OF THOSE WORDS BECAUSE THEY CAN SERVE AS A REMINDER OF OUR NEED TO SLOW DOWN ON OCCASION & DO NOTHING – NOTHING AT ALL – NOT EVEN THINK.

OUR TENDENCY IS TO FEEL AS IF WE HAVE TO BE DOING SOMETHING TO BE PRODUCTIVE.

EVEN IF WE’RE JUST SITTING, WE EASE OUR CONSCIENCE BY AT LEAST *THINKING*.

IT’S GOOD TO DO THAT OCCASIONALLY – SIT & THINK.

BUT IT’S ALSO GOOD TO ALLOW OURSELVES PERMISSION TO REFRAIN EVEN FROM THINKING!

THAT’S WHY I SUGGESTED THAT THE UNEXPECTED PLACE THIS PASSAGE TOOK ME AS I CONSIDERED EVERYTHING THAT PRECEDES IT WAS A PLACE THAT’S APPROPRIATE FOR SUMMERTIME.

IT’S APPROPRIATE FOR TIMES OF VACATION – TIMES OF REST, RELAXATION & REJUVENATION.

OKAY - YOU CAN STAY THERE IF YOU LIKE FOR THE REMAINDER OF THE SERMON OR YOU CAN ALLOW THE SPIRIT TO TAKE YOU SOMEWHERE ELSE – OR YOU CAN HEAR HOW THAT CIRCUITOUS ROUTE BROUGHT ME BACK TO WHERE I HAD ANTICIPATED THIS PASSAGE TAKING ME.

CONSIDER THAT QUESTION AGAIN – THE ONE THAT TOOK ME ON THAT DETOUR.

“WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF THERE WAS NOTHING YOU HAD TO DO?”

I THINK IT’S A QUESTION THAT’S VERY APPROPRIATE FOR THESE PARTICULAR WORDS OF PAUL, SITUATED AS THEY ARE IN THIS LETTER.

MOST OF YOU ARE PROBABLY FAMILIAR WITH I CORINTHIANS 13 – THE PASSAGE THAT BEGINS *“LOVE IS PATIENT & KIND, IT IS NOT JEALOUS OR BOASTFUL”* & ENDS WITH *“SO FAITH, HOPE, LOVE ABIDE, THESE THREE, BUT THE GREATEST OF THESE IS LOVE.”*

IT’S PART OF OUR CHILDREN’S MEMORY WORK.

IT’S BEEN WRITTEN AS A SONG, IT’S SEEN ON GREETING CARDS, AND – AS VINCE VAUGHN & OWEN WILSON REMIND US IN *“THE WEDDING CRASHERS”* – IT’S PROBABLY THE MOST FREQUENTLY-USED PASSAGE AT WEDDINGS.

WE KNOW IT AS *PAUL’S LOVE CHAPTER*.

I THINK THIS PASSAGE IN ROMANS, THOUGH, CAN LEGITIMATELY LAY CLAIM TO BEING *“PAUL’S OTHER LOVE CHAPTER.”*

THE ORIGINAL GREEK WORDING FOCUSES FAR MORE ON LOVE THAN ANY OF OUR ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS.

I THINK IT'S INTERESTING THAT THE VERSES WHICH IMMEDIATELY PRECEDE THE LOVE CHAPTER IN I CORINTHIANS, CENTER ON THE THEME OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS AND THE IMPORTANCE OF EACH MEMBER OF THE BODY OF CHRIST.

PAUL FOCUSES ON EXACTLY THE SAME THING IN THE WORDS WHICH PRECEDE *THIS* LOVE CHAPTER. IN STUDYING THIS PASSAGE, IT WOULD SEEM LOGICAL TO LOOK AT THE INSTRUCTIONS IT OFFERS. BUT IF WE DID THAT, IT WOULD TAKE A WHILE & BY THE TIME WE FINISHED, THOSE GLASSY-EYED STARES I MENTIONED EARLIER WOULD BE EVIDENT ALL THROUGH THE SANCTUARY.

THERE ARE NO FEWER THAN 28 SPECIFIC DIRECTIVES OFFERED BY PAUL IN THESE 13 VERSES.

28 TIMES, HE TELLS US SOMETHING WE SHOULD DO AS FOLLOWERS OF JESUS CHRIST.

SO LET'S NOT LOOK AT EVERY ONE OF THESE 28 DIRECTIVES.

LET'S INSTEAD GO BACK TO THE QUESTION WE ASKED EARLIER & CONSIDER ITS CONNECTION TO THIS PASSAGE.

"WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF THERE WAS NOTHING YOU HAD TO DO?"

HOW, YOU MIGHT ASK, DOES SUCH A QUESTION CONNECT TO THIS PASSAGE – THIS SERIES OF 28 VERY SPECIFIC DIRECTIVES TO THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY ABOUT LOVE?

REMEMBER THE THEME – THE BIG THEME – THE VITAL THEME THAT OCCUPIES SO MUCH OF THE FIRST HALF OF ROMANS – THAT OF JUSTIFICATION BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH.

PAUL MAKES IT CLEAR THAT WE ARE SAVED PURELY BY GRACE.

WE DON'T WIN GOD'S FAVOR THROUGH OUR ACTIONS.

WE DON'T EARN GOD'S ACCEPTANCE BY OUR DEEDS.

GOD'S LOVE IS FREE – TO ALL WHO WANT IT.

SO LET ME ASK THE QUESTION AGAIN & SEE IF YOU CATCH THE CONNECTION.

"WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF THERE WAS NOTHING YOU HAD TO DO?"

THIS, I BELIEVE, IS A QUESTION PAUL IS ADDRESSING IN THESE WORDS WE'VE READ THIS MORNING.

AFTER SPENDING AS MUCH TIME AS HE HAS IN MAKING IT CLEAR THAT SALVATION IS NOT THROUGH WORKS, HE NOW SETS FORTH A 28-PART CHALLENGE TO ANYONE WHO WOULD CHOOSE TO ACCEPT THIS FREELY-GIVEN GRACE OF GOD.

THERE'S A WONDERFUL PARADOX HERE.

YOU DON'T DO THESE THINGS BECAUSE YOU *HAVE* TO IN ORDER TO WIN GOD'S FAVOR.

ON THE CONTRARY, YOU DO THEM PRECISELY BECAUSE YOU *DON'T* HAVE TO.

YOU DO THEM BECAUSE YOU *WANT* TO AS A RESPONSE TO THE INCREDIBLY GRACIOUS LOVE THAT GOD HAS EXTENDED TO YOU.

THE WONDERFUL THING ABOUT ANY ONE OF THESE DIRECTIVES IS THAT THEY AREN'T BURDENS, BUT BLESSINGS.

THEY DON'T WEIGH YOU DOWN – THEY LIFT YOU UP.

THEY DON'T MAKE LIFE MORE DIFFICULT – THEY MAKE IT MORE MEANINGFUL.

A FEW WEEKS AGO, EMMA SUE & I HAD THE PLEASURE OF WATCHING OUR GRANDSON, DYLAN, WHILE DEREK & ERIN WERE LEADING A PROGRAM AT THE SEMINARY.

ONE OF THE THINGS WE DID WITH DYLAN WAS TAKE A TRIP TO KENNYWOOD PARK – ONE OF THE OLDEST AMUSEMENT PARKS IN THE COUNTRY.

THEY HAVE ONE OF THE OLDEST *CAROUSELS* IN THE COUNTRY AT KENNYWOOD & WE WERE HOPING DYLAN WOULD ENJOY RIDING IT.

WELL, AT 22 MONTHS OLD, HE INITIALLY BALKED FIERCELY AT THE IDEA, EVEN THOUGH THERE WERE SOME WONDERFUL ANIMALS FOR HIM TO RIDE – HORSES & TIGERS & LIONS & ZEBRAS.

WE WERE FINALLY ABLE TO COAX HIM TO RIDE ONE WITH EMMA SUE.

AS THE MUSIC BEGAN & THE CAROUSEL STARTED MOVING, YOU COULD SEE THE LOOK OF PANIC IN DYLAN'S EYES.

AFTER THE FIRST TIME AROUND, THOUGH, THE LOOK OF PANIC WAS TRANSFORMED INTO PURE JOY & STAYED THERE FOR 9 MORE RIDES ON THE CAROUSEL – ANIMALS OF EVERY VARIETY BEING RIDDEN MULTIPLE TIMES.

AT ANY AGE, THERE ARE THINGS WE ARE ENCOURAGED TO DO THAT INITIALLY MAY SEEM TO BE TOO INTIMIDATING OR TOO CHALLENGING OR TOO DIFFICULT.

UPON DOING THEM, THOUGH, WE FIND THAT MANY OF THOSE THINGS PROVIDE US WITH A JOY & FULFILLMENT WE WOULD OTHERWISE NEVER EXPERIENCE.

SO IT IS WITH THESE 28 DIRECTIVES PAUL OFFERS IN THIS PASSAGE.

THEY PROVIDE US WITH AN INTENSE JOY & PROFOUND FULFILLMENT THAT NO OTHER WAY OF LIFE CAN OFFER.

THEY ARE, IN FACT, THE ONLY WAY TO RESPOND TO THE UNQUALIFIED, UNEARNED, UNEXPECTED GRACE & LOVE OF GOD.

“WHAT DO YOU DO IF THERE IS NOTHING YOU HAVE TO DO?”

YOU LOVE AS YOU HAVE BEEN LOVED. AMEN.

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