

Romans 8:22-27
September 6, '09

UNBINDING YOUR HEART
"THE SECRET POWER"

SOME OF YOU MAY REMEMBER TOM DEMPSEY.

THOUGH IT'S NOT THE REASON YOU'D REMEMBER HIM, TOM WAS BORN WITHOUT TOES ON HIS RIGHT FOOT & WITHOUT A RIGHT HAND.

THAT DIDN'T STOP HIM, THOUGH, FROM COMPETING IN SPORTS.

HE COMPETED IN WRESTLING AND TRACK & FIELD IN HIGH SCHOOL.

HE EVEN PLAYED FOOTBALL.

BUT IF YOU REMEMBER HIM, IT'S BECAUSE 39 YEARS AGO, TOM DEMPSEY SET A RECORD THAT STILL STANDS IN THE NATIONAL FOOTBALL LEAGUE.

HE KICKED THE LONGEST FIELD GOAL EVER – 63 YARDS, BEATING THE OLD RECORD BY 6 YARDS.

HE DID IT KICKING RIGHT-FOOTED – THE FOOT WITH NO TOES – VIRTUALLY HALF A FOOT!

WHO WAS IT, I WONDER, WHO FIRST HAD THE AUDACITY TO TELL TOM DEMPSEY HE COULD BE A KICKER!?

WAS IT A WISE GUY FELLOW STUDENT WHO PASSED HIM IN THE HALL ONE DAY & SAID, "HEY, TOM, FOOTBALL TRYOUTS ARE NEXT WEEK. WHY DON'T YOU TRY OUT - FOR KICKER!"

SPEAKING OF THAT SORT OF THING, WHO WAS IT WHO FIRST TOLD ROD STEWART HE COULD SING!?

DON'T GET ME WRONG.

I LIKE ROD STEWART.

I HAVE MORE THAN A DOZEN ROD STEWART SONGS ON MY IPOD.

BUT, LET'S FACE IT, THE GUY CAN'T SING!

PEOPLE TRYING TO DO THINGS THAT DON'T FIT WITH WHO THEY ARE.

WE'RE IN THE SECOND WEEK OF THE UNBINDING YOUR HEART PROGRAM HERE AT EASTMINSTER.

THERE ARE TWO MAIN COMPONENTS OF THIS EXPERIENCE.

ONE IS EVANGELISM & THE OTHER IS PRAYER.

HERE ARE TWO THINGS THAT, AS PRESBYTERIANS, DON'T SEEM TO FIT WITH WHO WE ARE.

THEY ARE BOTH AREAS OF NOTORIOUS WEAKNESS FOR US.

HISTORICALLY, WE DON'T SEEM TO DO EITHER ONE VERY WELL.

I HAVE TO QUALIFY THAT STATEMENT, THOUGH.

IN *RECENT* HISTORY, WE HAVEN'T DONE THOSE THINGS VERY WELL.

IN THE PAST, THOUGH, WE WERE GIANTS IN BOTH.

EVERY GREAT MOVEMENT OF EVANGELISM IN THIS COUNTRY UNTIL THE MIDDLE OF THE 20TH CENTURY HAD PRESBYTERIANS AT THE FOREFRONT.

JOHN CALVIN, THE MOST FAMOUS PRESBYTERIAN OF ALL, PLACED TREMENDOUS EMPHASIS ON PRAYER & GEORGE BUTTRICK – PERHAPS THE GREATEST PRESBYTERIAN PREACHER OF THE 20TH CENTURY – WROTE A BOOK ON PRAYER THAT IS CONSIDERED A CLASSIC.

SO IT IS REALLY OUR RECENT HISTORY – AS IN THE PAST HALF CENTURY – THAT HAS SEEN A DECLINE IN THE AREAS OF EVANGELISM & PRAYER FOR PRESBYTERIANS.

IT SURELY ISN'T MERELY COINCIDENCE THAT A CORRESPONDING MEMBERSHIP DECLINE HAS BEEN SEEN OVER THAT SAME 50 YEAR PERIOD.

AS PRESBYTERIANS, WE DO A LOT OF STUFF VERY WELL – AS WELL AS ANYONE.

WE'RE GREAT IN MUSIC, IN EDUCATION, IN MISSIONS, IN ECUMENICAL RELATIONS.

BUT IT SEEMS AS THOUGH WE'VE PUSHED THOSE TWO THINGS – EVANGELISM & PRAYER - ASIDE IN OUR EMPHASIS ON OTHER MATTERS.

IT HAS BEEN TO OUR GREAT DETRIMENT.

THE 8TH CHAPTER OF ROMANS IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT PASSAGES IN THE ENTIRE BIBLE.

IT'S A CHAPTER THAT'S FAMILIAR TO MOST OF YOU – WHETHER YOU KNOW IT OR NOT.

IT BEGINS WITH THESE WORDS – *“THERE IS THEREFORE NOW NO CONDEMNATION FOR THOSE WHO ARE IN CHRIST JESUS. FOR THE LAW OF THE SPIRIT OF LIFE IN CHRIST JESUS HAS SET ME FREE FROM THE LAW OF SIN & DEATH.”*

IN THE MIDDLE OF THE CHAPTER, WE READ THESE WORDS – *“I CONSIDER THAT THE SUFFERINGS OF THIS PRESENT TIME ARE NOT WORTH COMPARING WITH THE GLORY THAT IS TO BE REVEALED TO US.”*

AND THEN THERE ARE THOSE SOARING & POWERFUL WORDS WITH WHICH PAUL CLOSES THE CHAPTER – *“THERE IS NOTHING IN ALL CREATION THAT WILL BE ABLE SEPARATE US FROM THE LOVE OF GOD IN CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD.”*

YES, WE KNOW THESE WORDS.

BUT THE WORDS OF OUR SCRIPTURE FOR THIS MORNING – PARTICULARLY VERSE 26 – AREN'T WORDS THAT JUST ROLL OFF OUR TONGUES.

“LIKEWISE THE SPIRIT HELPS US IN OUR WEAKNESS; FOR WE DO NOT KNOW HOW TO PRAY AS WE OUGHT, BUT THE SPIRIT INTERCEDES FOR US WITH SIGHS TOO DEEP FOR WORDS.”

WHEN IT COMES TO PRAYER, THESE WORDS EXCEED ALL THE OTHER WORDS IN THIS CHAPTER & THEY ARE AMONG THE MOST PROFOUND WORDS IN THE ENTIRE BIBLE REGARDING PRAYER.

PRAYER IS A SECRET POWER THAT GOD HAS GIVEN US – A POWER THAT WAS NEVER INTENDED TO BE KEPT A SECRET!

THERE ARE LITERALLY HUNDREDS OF LESSONS THAT CAN BE OFFERED REGARDING PRAYER BUT I THINK PAUL HAS OFFERED TWO IN THIS VERSE THAT ARE ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL – AND PERHAPS MORE ESSENTIAL FOR US AS PRESBYTERIANS.

THE FIRST THING HE SAYS IS – “...*THE SPIRIT HELPS US IN OUR WEAKNESS; FOR WE DO NOT KNOW HOW TO PRAY AS WE OUGHT...*”

AS PRESBYTERIANS, WE LIKE TO BE THE BEST AT WHAT WE DO.

I MENTIONED THOSE THINGS AT WHICH WE TRADITIONALLY EXCEL – MUSIC, EDUCATION, MISSIONS & ECUMENICAL RELATIONS (RELATIONS WITH OTHER DENOMINATIONS & OTHER FAITHS).

WE WANT TO BE THE VERY BEST WE CAN BE WHEN IT COMES TO THOSE THINGS.

BUT WITH EVANGELISM & PRAYER, WE THINK OTHERS DO THOSE THINGS BETTER THAN WE DO, SO WE STEP ASIDE & SAY, “*THAT’S NOT OUR THING. THAT’S WHAT OTHER CHRISTIANS DO WELL SO WE’LL LEAVE THOSE THINGS TO THEM.*”

WITH EVANGELISM, I’M AFRAID IT’S A CLASSIC CASE OF “THROWING THE BABY OUT WITH THE BATHWATER.”

WE DON’T LIKE SOME OF THE APPROACHES TO EVANGELISM, SO WE IGNORE IT COMPLETELY.

JUST BECAUSE THERE ARE EVANGELISTIC METHODS THAT DON’T HAPPEN TO *SUIT* US, DOESN’T MEAN THERE AREN’T OTHER APPROACHES THAT *DO*.

IN THE MATTER OF PRAYER, I THINK FAR TOO MANY OF US THINK WE’RE NOT GOOD AT IT & IF WE CAN’T BE GOOD AT IT – IF WE CAN’T BE THE BEST – WE’LL GIVE UP ON IT ALTOGETHER.

HERE’S WHERE PAUL’S WORDS CAN BE EXTREMELY HELPFUL.

NOTICE THAT HE USES THE FIRST PERSON PLURAL HERE.

HE SAYS “...OUR WEAKNESS.

AND HE SAYS, “...WE DON’T KNOW HOW TO PRAY AS WE OUGHT.”

THE GREAT APOSTLE INCLUDES HIMSELF IN THAT INDICTMENT.

HE SAYS, “*NONE OF US REALLY KNOWS HOW TO PRAY.*”

I HOPE THAT OFFERS SOME COMFORT IF YOU FEEL INADEQUATE IN YOUR PRAYERS – IF YOUR PRAYER LIFE ISN’T ALL THAT YOU WISH IT WERE.

I’LL BE THE FIRST TO TELL YOU THAT MINE ISN’T.

LIKE PAUL, IT’S A WEAKNESS IN MY LIFE.

LIKE PAUL, I DON’T KNOW HOW TO PRAY AS I OUGHT.

IF YOU FEEL THAT YOUR PRAYER LIFE ISN’T WHAT YOU WISH IT WERE, YOU ARE IN SELECT COMPANY – PAUL’S WASN’T EITHER.

REMEMBER WHAT THE DISCIPLES ASKED JESUS – “*MASTER, TEACH US TO PRAY.*”

THE DISCIPLES THEMSELVES WERE WEAK IN THEIR PRAYER LIFE.

THE CLOSEST FOLLOWERS OF JESUS *DIDN’T KNOW HOW TO PRAY AS THEY OUGHT.*

SO DON’T LET YOUR INADEQUACY KEEP YOU FROM PRAYING.

IT’S A WEAKNESS THAT ALL OF US SHARE.

THE SECOND IMPORTANT MESSAGE OF PAUL IN THIS VERSE IS THAT WE'RE NOT ALONE WHEN WE PRAY.

WE DON'T HAVE TO FIGURE IT OUT FOR OURSELVES.

LISTEN TO THE SECOND HALF OF THAT VERSE AGAIN

"THE SPIRIT INTERCEDES FOR US WITH SIGHS TOO DEEP FOR WORDS."

YOU DON'T HAVE TO DO IT ALONE – BECAUSE YOU'RE *NOT* ALONE WHEN YOU PRAY.

THE HOLY SPIRIT IS RIGHT ALONGSIDE YOU.

THE HOLY SPIRIT "HELPS" US IN OUR WEAKNESS.

IT'S INTERESTING THAT THE ONLY OTHER TIME THIS PARTICULAR WORD THAT IS TRANSLATED AS "HELPS" IS USED IS WHEN MARTHA COMPLAINED TO JESUS THAT HER SISTER MARY HAD LEFT HER TO DO ALL THE PREPARATIONS & COOKING & SERVING.

"TELL HER TO HELP ME," SAID MARTHA.

"TELL HER TO COME ALONGSIDE ME & GIVE ME AID. TELL HER TO ASSIST ME IN PREPARING & SERVING."

DO YOU SEE THE MEANING HERE?

IT'S NOT A WORD THAT CALLS FOR SOMEONE TO TAKE OUR PLACE.

IT'S NOT A WORD THAT ASKS FOR US TO STEP ASIDE & DO NOTHING.

IT'S NOT A "LET GO & LET GOD" ATTITUDE.

IT'S A JOINING FORCES – IT'S STRUGGLING, WRESTLING, SEEKING, WORKING, TRYING – BUT NOT DOING IT ALONE.

THE HOLY SPIRIT IS RIGHT BESIDE YOU IN YOUR PRAYERS.

YOU CAN'T – AND DON'T HAVE TO – GO IT ALONE.

TOM DEMPSEY, THE KICKER WHO SET THAT RECORD WITH A 63-YARD FIELD GOAL, WAS DESCRIBING THE MOMENT IT HAPPENED.

HE SAID, "EVERYTHING WAS PERFECT FOR ME THAT DAY: I GOT A PERFECT SNAP, I GOT A PERFECT HOLD, AND I GOT A LOT OF PROTECTION...SO EVERYTHING WENT WELL, AND EVERYONE DID THEIR JOB. THE LAST THING WAS FOR ME TO TRY TO DO MINE."

THAT'S WHAT IT IS FOR US IN PRAYER.

THIS SECRET POWER IS AVAILABLE TO US & WE DON'T HAVE TO DO IT ALONE.

NO MATTER HOW INADEQUATE YOU MAY FEEL IN YOUR PRAYERS, YOU'VE GOT HELP.

THE HOLY SPIRIT IS RIGHT ALONGSIDE YOU – HELPING YOU EVERY STEP OF THE WAY TO TAP INTO THIS SECRET POWER.

IT STILL ISN'T EASY, THOUGH, IS IT?

FOR MANY OF YOU, FINDING A TIME TO PRAY & KNOWING HOW TO DO IT IS DIFFICULT.

REMEMBER THE WORDS OF MARTIN LUTHER, WHO SAID, *"I'M TOO BUSY NOT TO PRAY."*

AMID ALL THE STRESS & CHAOS & TURMOIL OF DAILY LIVING - THE BUSIER YOU ARE - THE MORE ESSENTIAL IT IS TO SCHEDULE TIME FOR PRAYER.

BUT STARTING A REGULAR PRACTICE OF PRAYER MAY NOT BE EASY FOR YOU.

YOU MAY FIND THAT AS YOU MAKE A COMMITMENT TO DO SO THAT IT'S HARD TO FEEL A CONNECTION – THAT IT'S DIFFICULT TO COMMUNICATE WHAT YOU'RE THINKING & FEELING & EQUALLY DIFFICULT TO LISTEN TO WHAT GOD IS SAYING TO YOU.

SEVERAL YEARS AGO, I HAD A FRIEND WITH WHOM I ENJOYED TALKING.

OUR CONVERSATIONS, THOUGH, WERE USUALLY FAIRLY BRIEF & THE TIME WE SPENT TOGETHER WAS USUALLY FOR A SPECIFIC PURPOSE.

WE ENJOYED OUR CONVERSATIONS, THOUGH, AND FINALLY DETERMINED THAT WE WOULD MEET REGULARLY – ONCE A WEEK AT THE SAME TIME – AND SPEND AN HOUR TOGETHER.

NO LONGER WERE OUR CONVERSATIONS BRIEF & NO LONGER WAS THERE A SPECIFIC PURPOSE.

IT WAS SIMPLY SHARING LIFE TOGETHER & GETTING TO KNOW ONE ANOTHER BETTER.

OVER TIME, I HAVE FOUND THAT I LOOK FORWARD TO THAT TIME MORE & MORE & THE HOUR SEEMS TO FLY BY AS IF IT'S JUST MINUTES.

ON THE OCCASIONS WHEN SOMETHING PREVENTS US FROM MEETING, I FIND THAT I'VE MISSED OUT ON SOMETHING ESSENTIAL IN MY LIFE.

THAT'S THE WAY IT IS WITH PRAYER.

WHEN OUR CONVERSATIONS WITH GOD ARE ALL-TO-BRIEF AND CONFINED TO A SPECIFIC PURPOSE, IT'S TIME TO INTENTIONALLY SET ASIDE A SPECIFIC PERIOD TO MEET WITH HIM.

YOU'LL FIND THAT YOU GET TO KNOW GOD BETTER THAN YOU'VE KNOWN HIM BEFORE.

YOU'LL FIND THE TIME PASSING MUCH TOO QUICKLY.

YOU'LL FIND THAT WHEN YOU'RE PREVENTED FROM SHARING THAT TIME, YOU FEEL AS THOUGH YOU'RE MISSING OUT ON SOMETHING ESSENTIAL IN YOUR LIFE.

PRAYER IS A SECRET POWER – A POWER THAT EVERY ONE OF US IS CAPABLE OF EXPERIENCING.

DON'T LET ANOTHER DAY GO BY WITHOUT EXPERIENCING THAT POWER. AMEN.

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