



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Romans: 16:1-16

Romans

“The Honor Roll”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Our text this morning is chapter 16 of the book of Romans, and we're going to look at verses 1 through 16 where Paul sends his greetings to the Romans; and it's a chapter with a lot of names as you'll see. But you're going to hear the correct pronunciation of every one of them.

"I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea; that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of; for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well.

Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who for my life risked their own necks, to whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles; 5 also greet the church that is in their house. Greet Epänetus, my beloved, who is the first convert to Christ from Asia. Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you. Greet Andronicus and Junias –" Junias is masculine, but commentators are divided over that. It may be Junia, which is feminine. Mention that again, but it could be Junias or Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners, who are outstanding among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me. Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord. Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and Stachys my beloved. Greet Apelles, the approved in Christ. Greet those who are of the household of Aristobulus. Greet Herodion, my kinsman. Greet those of the household of Narcissus, who are in the Lord. Greet Tryphaena and Tryphosa, workers in the Lord. Greet

Persis the beloved, who has worked hard in the Lord. Greet Rufus, a choice man in the Lord, also his mother and mine. Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the brethren with them. Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you."

May the Lord bless this reading of his Word. Let's bow in a word of prayer:

[Prayer] We thank you, Father, for this day, the Lord's day. When we, as your people, believers in Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior can gather together and read a text of Scripture like this, text that's full of names of people we are unfamiliar with but who we become somewhat familiar with and learn something very significant about the church as we do so. Bless us as we study this text, guide us in our thinking, open it up to us, and make the proper applications to our lives that we would go out and be servants of yours. You've called us to service, every one of us. You've equipped us to serve.

So often, Father, we get distracted by the details of life and the schedules that we have; distracted by many things that are good and proper, and that need attention; but in so doing, we neglect matters that are even more important: attention to your Word and to your service. And so we pray, Father, that you'd correct us where we need correction, and give us motivation where we need that, the incentive to serve and be faithful, and to live for what is eternal, what really lasts with the time that you've given us to do so. So bless us spiritually, build us up in the faith this morning as we study, and bless us physically.

We have material needs as well; bless our labors. As we seek to provide our daily bread, we recognize that ultimately that is your work; you do that. You give us work, you bless us in it, and we pray for a blessing there. Bless our health; that's a gift from you.

And we know that as we consider the prayer requests that have been given and consider the health that's been lost or is in jeopardy, we recognize that it's a tenuous

thing, that so many of the givens of life really aren't given at all. They are tenuous and they can slip from us; but never in a way that's outside your plan. Everything is planned by you, everything works for the good of your children, you promise us that; and so we thank you, Father, that whatever touches our lives it's for our good. We have that assurance. But for those who are lacking health, we pray that you bless them and give them encouragement in that affliction. Bless those who are facing surgery or recovering from it. We pray that you'd restore their health. Certainly give them encouragement in the midst of affliction whatever that affliction may be. Give us hearts that are grateful for what we have because we have much, and what we have is a gift from you.

We thank you for the ministries that we have, we're reminded of that this morning; and we thank you for the ministry that's been given in this church, particularly this past week in the Vacation Bible School. We thank you for all of the ladies who devoted time and effort to it. We pray for the ministry that was given. For the seeds that were sown in those young hearts, we pray that it will bear fruit; and we know that it will. We know that your Word never goes forward and comes back void, that it always has its intended effect, and so we thank you for that, and pray that that will happen this morning. May your Word be blessed as we study together. So we look to you to do that, to prosper us in that way. Bless us now as we sing our final hymn. Prepare our hearts for study together. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

[Message] We are in a portion of the book of Romans that is easy to pass over lightly. Paul is concluding his letter as he often did with greetings to friends in the church. In 16 verses, he mentions people, most of whom we know nothing apart from their names being listed here; but treating these verses and Paul's comments as unimportant is a mistake. They tell us a lot about Paul, they teach us about personal relationships of love, and they inform us about life in the early church.

As I was reading through the list of names in Paul's comments to his friends earlier this week, I thought of other lists in the Bible like the one in 2 Samuel 23, a list of David's mighty men; and there too, we read of men of whom we know little or

nothing other than their names and some brief comments that are made about them. Men like Josheb-Basshebeth who was chief of the captains, the greatest of David's mighty men. You've probably never heard of him. He's a man who killed 800 at one time. Or Eleazar who fought the Philistines with David and struck them until his hand was weary and clung to the sword. Benaiah who went down and killed a lion in the middle of a pit on a snowy day; and many others: Shammah and Helez and Zalmon; names that mean little to us, but meant much in Israel. They were heroes; they were mighty men. And for their courage and service, their names were recorded in the Bible and have been remembered over the long centuries of history. Christians and Jews alike have read those names and thought about those men.

Second Samuel 23 is an honor roll, and Romans 16 is like that. Paul simply greets his friends. He engages in a common courtesy. But in doing that, in greeting them, he immortalized them, or memorialized these individuals; real people who were faithful to God and loved by the apostle.

There are great honors that people can have in this world, but I can't think of a greater honor than going down in history as a companion of the apostle Paul, of a person whom Paul called "beloved," a person Paul counted as his friend, as his fellow worker, as his fellow prisoner as these people were. But the greetings that Paul gives say as much about him as they do about the people he greeted. They show that he was a man who had strong personal ties. He was not some secluded scholar, but a man who was involved with people and very interested in them, very concerned about them.

Leon Morris noted how significant that is as he writes this letter which has given us so much solid doctrinal teaching should end with this emphasis on persons, on love, and on a reminder that humble servants of God perform all sorts of active ministry. That, I think, that last point is particularly significant and to be noted, and will be noted in this lesson, that humble servants of God perform all sorts of active ministry; they do. And it is important ministry which is necessary for the church to function effectively.

Paul appreciated his friends. He wasn't casual about relationships. He didn't enter into a relationship and then neglect that individual. He was a man who appreciated his friends, his many friends. Paul was a man with many friends. He'd never been to Rome. He'd never met the people in that church; and yet we look at this list and we know he knows a lot of people there. He knew people everywhere. He was that kind of man, a personable kind of person; and he appreciated those who were his friends, and he appreciated their service, and he expressed his affection and his concern for them here in this final chapter of the book.

The first to be mentioned is Phoebe. Paul calls her "our sister." She was from Cenchrea, which was the port of Corinth just north of the city, and Paul commends her to the Romans. In the early church, Christians carried letters of recommendation or accommodation when they would travel from one place to. They may travel to a city they had never been to, a city in which they did not know people, and so they would take a letter from their church that would verify that they were genuine believers; and that they were to be received into Christian fellowship and given Christian hospitality, and kindness, and food, and lodging; this kind of thing.

The commendation of Phoebe at the end of the letter indicates that she was probably the person that carried the letter. She is the one who brought this Epistle to Rome, which I suspect is a story in itself, a story of providence. The original copy of the book of Romans, the greatest letter ever written, the only copy of it, was entrusted to a woman to face all of the dangers and the hazards of travel, and deliver that letter safely to Rome. I can just imagine Paul handing Phoebe his precious scroll, which she then stuck in her purse and sailed off to Rome. It seems very risky. And if her purse was anything like my wife's, it's a miracle that the book of Romans wasn't lost in it.

Donald Grey Barnhouse gives us a sense of the risk and the responsibility she took on. He wrote, "Never was there a greater burden carried by such tender hands." The theological history of the church through the centuries was in the manuscript which she brought with her, the reformation in that baggage; the blessing of multitudes in our day was carried in those parchments. It was a great responsibility

that was given to her. Paul entrusted all of that to Phoebe, but he knew what he was doing. Phoebe was a very reliable person who had proven that she was faithful. Paul commends her to the Romans as a servant of the church which is in Cenchrea.

Now there is some question about what Paul meant in identifying Phoebe as a servant because the word "servant" is the same Greek word that's used for "deacon." The Revised Standard Version, for example, translates it, "Phoebe, a deaconess of the church at Cenchrea." That is a possible translation, a possible interpretation of the word, but it's not at all necessary.

In verse 2, Paul states that Phoebe ministered to the saints. He calls her a "helper of many," which seems sufficient to define Paul's meaning in verse 1. So Phoebe was a deacon in a general, if not an official sense. Certainly, she was a deacon in a general sense. She was a servant of the church, she was a helper of many. Even if she was not a person who held an official position, still, she was a very important person.

Christians don't have to hold an office in the church. They don't have to be a deacon or an elder in order to be of service to the saints, to the people of God. Phoebe served in a very significant way. Now Paul doesn't tell us how she did that, though there are various ways in which she could have ministered. There were many needs in the church that would have been more appropriately met by female ministry rather than male ministry, as in assisting women with baptism or visiting women in their homes. Sometimes that's more appropriate for a woman to do. And, of course, in that situation, a woman is to give encouragement, a woman is to give wisdom, instruction.

In 1 Timothy 2:12, Paul puts two limitations on the role of women in the church. They are not to teach men; they are not to exercise authority over them. But there are many opportunities for women to teach women, to teach children in Sunday School. In fact, women are often the best teachers in those areas. There are opportunities of ministry in terms of mercy and in terms of hospitality. And, again, women are often more effective in those areas as well.

There was a group of women, for example, that followed our Lord and the disciples and ministered to them. Luke writes of this in chapter 8 of his gospel. He mentioned Mary Magdalene and others who did this performed a great serviced for our Lord and the disciples. When Paul was in Philippi, Lydia opened her home to him and to his friends, and showed them hospitality and ministered to them in that way.

Phoebe could have ministered in a number of ways. In fact, some feel that she may have ministered in much the same way that Lydia did. Lydia was a wealthy businesswoman, and the description of Phoebe in verse 2 as a helper may suggest that she was as well, because that word "helper" means, or can mean, "patroness, benefactress, or protectress," which suggests that she was a woman of means and used her wealth in the service of the church and in Paul's service as well. Whatever she did, Phoebe took many opportunities to serve the saints. She served the apostle and the church throughout the ages by safely delivering Paul's letter to the church at Rome; and so he asks the church to help her with any needs that she might have to give her a worthy welcome, one that is fitting of Christian kindness and hospitality, just the kind of kindness that she had shown to others.

Well, having commended Phoebe to the church, he then greets the church, and the remaining verses, verses 3-16, Paul gives his greetings to his friends at Rome. He greets 26 individuals: 24 he names and 2 he doesn't. Apart from Pricilla and Aquila, we know nothing about any of them, but all of them are significant. Leon Morris called this passage, "A happy hunting ground for many scholars."

For one reason, it gives us a glimpse into the nature and the make-up of the early church, and what we see from the reading of these names is the early church was diverse. It was diverse in race, in gender, and in class. Paul called some of them his "kinsmen," which means his fellow Jews; and a few of the names that are mentioned here are Jewish names like Herodion in verse 11. Other names are Latin, but most of them are Greek. And what we see from all of this is that they represent the make-up of the church which was made up of different nations, different ethnic groups. There

were all kinds of people in the church at Rome, and they were of different social status.

John Stott writes that inscriptions indicate that Ampliatus, Urbanus, Hermes, Philologus, and Julia were common names for slaves. So they were slaves in the church, but many of these were freed people, and some of them had links to people of distinction in the city. Aristobulus, for example, was mentioned in verse 10, was the name of the grandson of Herod the Great who lived in Roman and was a close friend of the emperor Claudius; and some commentators, one in particular, Bishop Lightfoot, a 19th century Anglican and commentator made quite a bit of that and believes that this Aristobulus is the same as Herod's grandson. Also the name Narcissus mentioned in verse 11 was a well-known freed man who was rich and powerful, and was also an influential friend of the emperor.

Now Paul mentions these two men, but he's not suggesting by that that these two men became Christians. In fact, most likely they had died before Paul even wrote the letter. But there were Christians in their households; family members, perhaps, or slaves; but members of the church in these very distinguished, very important households in Rome. And so there were people who were from the upper-class as well as slaves. In fact, we know from the book of Philippians that the Gospel penetrated Caesar's household. That's the make-up of the church in Rome: slaves, patricians, bond, free; all kinds of people.

We see that in another way as well. I think it's very significant that of the 26 people mentioned, 9 are woman; 10 if we count Phoebe. That is an impressive number when you consider that they lived in a male-dominated society, and what that shows is the elevated status women had in the church, as well as Paul's attitude toward them. Paul was not some male chauvinist as he is sometimes portrayed as being. Paul honored women, the Gospel elevated women; and we see that in Paul, we see that in his writings. He understood that women have a different role in the church from men, but he taught that they were equal in person to men, and equal before God, and equally valuable in ministry. He calls Pricilla a "fellow worker" in verse 3. He

calls Junias a "fellow prisoner." He thought so highly of Phoebe that he entrusted this book to her to carry to Rome.

Like Christ, Paul elevated women; and this list of names is evidence of that. So it's significant from that standpoint. But what is especially significant about this list of names is the emphasis that it puts on the universality of the church. God's love is for the world, meaning He loves all kinds of people. Christ did not save one group; He does not love one nation more than another. God set his eternal love on all kinds of people: Jew and Gentile, male and female, slave and free; that's the world. The heavenly choir sings praise to Christ for that very reason. "He purchased for God with his blood," they sang in Revelation 5:9, "men from," or more literally, "some out of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation." A church of Jesus Christ is a diverse group of people, but they are also a united people.

Paul lays great stress on that in this passage. Four times he refers to his friends as being "in Christ." Five times he refers to them as being "in the Lord." There are all kinds of people in the world; all kinds of ethnic groups, tongues, tribes – all kinds of people. But all who are saved are saved in one way, and in the same way, and that is through Christ. He is the only Savior. And having been saved by him, we are all joined to him equally, and united together in him with a unity that transcends all of the differences that we have. God has designed the church to be made up of all kinds of people. Heaven is made up of all kinds of people.

In Rev 7:9, John has a vision of heaven and he describes it in that verse as being, "A great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes, and people, and tongues; and they are all dressed in white and they are standing before the throne of God, and they are praising God and the Lamb for their salvation." All kinds of people, different kinds of people, saved in the same way, through the same person. Whether a Jew or a Gentile, there's only one way of salvation and that's through Jesus Christ. And yet you see, in all of that, all of that diversity, all of those different kinds of people, unity in heaven; and that unity should be seen on earth.

The acceptance that God has for each person in Christ, from various backgrounds, diverse backgrounds. But his acceptance of us should be reflected in our acceptance of one another in spite of all the differences. That should be the case because that's the spiritual reality. God has accepted; we should accept one another. But that is also a great witness to the world because it shows a genuine unity that the world can never achieve. The world tries.

The 20th century witnessed valiant efforts by the world with the League of Nations, it fell apart, and then the United Nations, which only proves that you cannot unite the world. The world cannot bring itself together. It never has been able to; it never will be able to. It can never achieve that, but what a witness it is to look at the church and see this great diversity of nations, and tribes, and tongues, coming together united.

That's a witness to the world and it's a witness that displays the supernatural work of God's transforming grace. It's the only way to account for it, the grace of God. And all through this chapter, Paul reminds believers of their unity in the Lord and his, Paul's, unity with them; he rejoiced in it. He called Jews and Gentiles alike friends and beloved.

That's the nature of Paul's relationships with individuals. The differences didn't get in the way. He was a true friend, he was a loyal friend, he remembered people over the years, he never forgot them, he remembered what they did, expressed his appreciation, and he joined himself willingly, this Hebrew of the Hebrews, with Gentiles. His greetings to them reveal a lot about Paul, a lot about his person, his genuine interest in people. But they also give us some understanding of life in the early church.

Some of the names are of particular interest. We can't go through all of them, but some of them we'll highlight. The first people he greets are Prisca and Aquila. We're more familiar with them perhaps as Pricilla and Aquila, that's the way Luke refers to them. They were husband and wife. Aquila was a tentmaker from Pontus, which was on the northern coast of Asia Minor, or modern-day Turkey.

He'd settled in Rome. When there, he married Pricilla, but they were forced to leave the capital when the emperor Claudius expelled the Jews. They traveled to Corinth where Paul met them having just arrived from Athens. Paul, as you know, was also a tentmaker, and so their common trade providentially brought them together; and having come together, they became fast friends, they worked together, they ministered together. Paul calls them his "fellow workers."

When Paul left Corinth and traveled on to Ephesus, they went with him. They remained there in Ephesus after Paul moved on, and they were able to have a very significant ministry. There in Ephesus, they met Apollos, and they were able to instruct him, which says a lot about this couple. Apollos was a Jew from Alexandria. He was a brilliant man. He is described as being eloquent and mighty in the Scriptures. He preached boldly in the synagogue, but his understanding of Christ was somewhat defective. He did not have a full understanding of him. He knew the baptism of John, but he had not progressed beyond that. And recognizing his inadequacy, recognizing the truth that he had but that it was not yet fully developed, Luke tells us in Acts 18:26 that Pricilla and Aquila took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.

Now they were obviously unusual people who had a firm grasp on the truth, who had a deep knowledge of theology. They understood the great doctrines of the faith. Theology in our time has fallen on bad days. It's disparaged; it's considered unimportant; it's considered subservient to relationships; it's not spoken well of. But these people obviously had a grasp of theology.

They understood Christology, the person of Christ. They understood soteriology, the work of Christ. They understood the doctrines of the faith because they were able to take this man aside, Apollos, who was a knowledgeable man, mighty in the Scriptures. A man of great intelligence, certainly more intelligent than either one of them; but they were able to instruct him, and they could do that because they knew the Word of God. They had a firm grasp on the truth; they knew the whole counsel of God, so they were able to instruct Apollos.

By the time Paul had returned to Corinth on his third missionary journey, they had resettled in Rome and had a church meeting in their house according to verse 5. They also had a church meeting in their house when they were in Ephesus. That's what Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 16. So wherever they went, they had a meeting in their home. Wherever they went, they spread the Gospel. They used their time and their possession's in Christ's service. For them, life was not about accumulating things, it was about Christ; and they were ready to lay down their lives for him and for the saints.

Paul refers to an incident when they almost did that for him, "Who for my life risk their own necks," which literally mean something like put their necks under the axe, the executioner's blade for him. And it means, obviously, that they risked their lives in order to save his life. Paul doesn't reveal the incident, but there were many times when he was in great danger in Corinth and in Ephesus, and somehow in some place, they intervened in his life to save it. They were a remarkable couple that lived for Christ and lived to serve his people. They supported themselves with a trade, but their real work was the ministry, and they traveled widely doing it. That's how the Gospel spread in the first century.

We think often of the Gospel spreading through great sermons like the one Peter preached on the day of Pentecost; and that, of course, was what began the church. And many of those people who were there on that day went back to Rome and established the church. So that was through the ministry of an apostle, and we think of Philip going up to Samaria and preaching, and the great revival that occurred there. And Paul going throughout the Roman Empire and preaching in synagogues and in marketplaces, and people being brought to faith through his ministry.

Now that's not the only way the Gospel spread. In fact, after Paul would leave a city, then the Christians in that city would go out and spread the Gospel throughout the region; and very often the way the Gospel spread was simply by Christians telling other people about the forgiveness in Jesus Christ, and the salvation that is in him. That's how the church of Antioch was established.

The Church of Antioch was the most significant church in the ancient world. The first centuries of the church, it was the main church. It soon eclipsed the church in Jerusalem as the central, most active church in the ancient world. And it was established, not by an apostle, but by unnamed men who went from Cyprus and Cyrene to that city, perhaps on business, we don't know, but they came to that city. And Luke says that they began speaking to the Greeks. These Jewish people began to speak to Gentiles and preach the Lord Jesus to them.

Now that is an interesting passage to me because it's one that you can almost read over without even thinking about it in Acts 11:20, and yet it's so significant, because what it shows is it doesn't take a major organization and a huge budget to do the work of ministry. It doesn't take a seminary education, as good and as important as that is. And men who teach the Word of God full time should be well-trained in the Word of God, but it doesn't take that to do good ministry. It doesn't take ordination to be an effective minister of the Word. These weren't clergymen, these weren't professional ministers who went to Antioch. They were ordinary people being witnesses wherever they went; willing to make sacrifices; willing to suffer.

Paul acknowledges that about some of those he greets here. In verse 6, he greets Mary, "Who has worked hard for you." In verse 12, he greets Tryphaena and Tryphosa, who may have been twin sisters. Some speculate on that because the names sound so similar, and they mean delicate and dainty. And you might think Paul was amused by that because their names were in contrast to their lives. He calls them "workers." So these delicate and dainty hands had lots of calluses on them; they were hard workers.

In the same verse, he greets another woman, Persis, "Who has worked hard in the Lord." Obviously, women made a large contribution to the early church and the success of its ministry. These people sacrificed much; and just like Paul, they suffered much.

In verse 7, he greets two more, Andronicus and Junias; or that can be taken as feminine, Junia, as many commentators believe, which means that they may also have been a married couple. But Paul describes them as his kinsmen, meaning that they were a Jewish couple who he says, "Were in Christ before me." They were Christians longer than Paul had been a Christian, which may mean that they originally were associated with the church in Jerusalem in its earliest days. He also calls them fellow prisoners, and he says that they were outstanding among the apostles.

Now outstanding among the apostles doesn't mean that they themselves were apostles. It can mean that because Paul does use the word "apostles" in a more general sense. Barnabas was called an apostle, an apostle in a non-technical sense. Not one of the 12, but one who was sent out, or went out with the Gospel. So it's possible that they were outstanding among those like Barnabas who was sent out. But probably this means they were highly regarded among the apostles, among the 12, because the definite article is used with the apostles, and that always refers to the 12.

Well they were regarded highly by them; and in part, at least, because they had suffered for Christ. They were fellow prisoners with Paul, meaning they either shared a prison with him or they shared the experience of being imprisoned for their service to the Lord. But since Paul suffered numerous imprisonments, some of which aren't mentioned in the New Testament, or at least aren't given to us in detail, it's not unlikely that they shared a cell with him, and in that situation became close friends. They ministered together; they suffered together. Either way, they did suffer in the faith.

And it's interesting, Paul calls them outstanding among the apostles, and yet, we don't know anything about them other than what is written here. And what that suggests, at least to me, is that there may have been many other such outstanding Christians in the early church of whom we know nothing; men and women who bravely stood for Christ when it was dangerous to do so.

Others are mentioned of whom we know nothing: Urbanus, Strachys, Apelles, and Herodion. They're called "beloved," they're called "approved," which means

tested. Men who have been tested. Apelles was tested and approved, went through difficulties, persevered in his faith, and was approved as a result; and fellow worker. Those are great testimonies to Christian lives.

Maybe the most intriguing name on the list is the one in verse 13, Rufus. It means, "red." And we find it also in the Gospel of Mark. Mark records it when Christ stumbled under the weight of the cross, Simon of Cyrene was pressed into service and made to carry the cross the rest of the way to Calvary. Mark states in a parenthetical way that he was the father of Alexander and Rufus. That's significant because it's generally agreed that the Gospel of Mark was written to the Romans. Evidentially, the point of mentioning Simon's two sons is that they were well-known in the church at Rome; and here Paul names one of them, he names Rufus, and describes him as, "A choice man in the Lord."

Literally, those words mean, "The elect in the Lord; the chosen in the Lord." But since all Christians are elect of God, all who are believers have been chosen before the foundation of the world to faith and to salvation; and so it probably doesn't mean that here, and the reason is because that wouldn't distinguish Rufus from any other Christian, and it seems that Paul is singling him out for special commendation. So the idea is probably a choice or exceptional believer. He done some great service for the Lord; and so had his mother because Paul also greets her. She, on some occasion, had provided Paul with hospitality and care.

So this was a believing family, it was a family not only in the church, but one that was very active in ministry in the church, which if it is, the family of Simon must have an interesting story behind it; one of God's providence and grace. Simon had come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, when unexpectedly, he was chosen at random from the crowd to carry Christ's cross. Randomly in terms of that Roman guard, or soldier who picked him out of the crowd; but it was all in the providence of God, because the result of that was his life forever changed. As he witnessed the crucifixion and listened to the Lord's words, as he heard the testimony of the thief on the cross and the Centurion at the foot of the cross, he was brought to faith in Christ as the Son of God.

After the Passover, he returned to Cyrene in Northern Africa. He told his family about Christ; they believed through his testimony. It's not hard to imagine any of that. In fact, it's not hard to imagine that he or his sons were among those from Cyprus and Cyrene who evangelized Antioch and established the church there. God's grace works like that. It visits us unexpectedly. Simon went to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, and there unexpectedly he met our Passover the Lord Jesus.

God always takes the initiative. He seeks those who are not seeking him. He snatches us like brands from the fire. Rufus, Simon's son maybe, was certainly God's elect, chosen from all eternity, and drawn irresistibly to the Savior with God-given faith. That's the grace of God. It's the grace that each one of you as believers in Jesus Christ have received. Every one of us are a product of sovereign grace. The knowledge of that inspired and motivated these people to be servants of the Lord, to sacrifice for him.

There are interesting stories behind each name that's listed here. Someday, we will hear them and many others. We'll sit down with David's mighty men and we'll listen to their stories, and we'll hear all of the stories of saints whose names we don't even know.

Paul ends the passage with instruction to greet one another with a holy kiss. The idea is that a verbal greeting should be confirmed with a visible gesture, assuming that gesture will be determined according to culture. J. B. Phillips paraphrases this verse: "Give one another a hearty handshake all round for my sake." I don't know that that's the best understanding of that verse, but I think that it is true that a verbal greeting is to be expressed or confirmed with a visible gesture, one of genuine love and concern for God's people.

Well, then Paul sends greetings from all of the churches, probably referring to the greetings that those men with him from the churches of Macedonia, and Greece, and Asia, who were about to go with him up to Jerusalem to visit the poor saints there. Those people with Paul gave their greetings to the church in Rome. It's an interesting

passage and it gives good information about the early church, about its situation, about its composition, make-up of that church, and its activity. We get inside into Paul's personality, the kind of man that he was. He was a man of great loyalty, of strong friendships. But we're also reminded of what is really important about what Paul thought was important, and that was spiritual labors and accomplishment.

So often, we strive and struggle for material security, and that has its place. We need to work hard, and we need to save, and we need to be concerned about the future. That's proper; that's right. But sometimes we're more concerned about physical comfort than spiritual gain. These early Christians were single-minded in their devotion to Christ. It was their life. We see that very clearly in Pricilla and Aquila. They worked hard and they used what they had for the service; that's why they were tentmakers, able to support themselves in doing the Lord's work.

So they remind us of these things. These names and these comments that Paul makes: a helper of many, fellow workers in Christ, risk their own necks, fellow prisoners, worked hard in the Lord, and so on. That reminds us what the Christian is to be doing. These people served with Paul, they did God's work, and they had been remembered for it.

In Shakespeare's play *Henry V*, the king rallies his troops with a stirring speech before the Battle of Agincourt. He tells them of the honor they will have for having fought with him. In the years to come he says their names will become household words in England, and men will think themselves accursed for not having been there and fought with them. "To the end of the world," he says, "we shall be remembered. We few; we happy few; we band of brothers."

Well that's what we are, a band of brothers. We're all fellow soldiers of the King of kings, and we're fighting for the greatest cause on earth, the greatest cause of all history, the cause of the Gospel. Saving souls and glorifying God. We are privileged to be a part of it. We should be happy because of it. We should be devoted to it and not waste our time on trivialities, but serve Christ earnestly.

What we do will be remembered, if not by men – and certainly not by men. Memories of us and our deeds, if they're remembered at all, will fade quickly from men's minds, but not from God's. What is done for Him is never forgotten. And the day will come when He will open the books where our names and deeds are written, and review them, and reward us. That is something worth living for; worth working hard in his service for; worth risking our necks for.

But the greatest blessing of it all, the greatest reward, is to have been a part of it, to have been chosen by him to serve Christ; and, yes, serve with Christ, because there's not place we go that Christ is not with us. He goes before us. He's the Captain of our salvation, He's the King of kings, and we have the privilege of serving Him. There's no greater honor than that; no greater honor than the one that's been given to you as a believer in Jesus Christ to be a fellow soldier of the Lord Jesus Christ. So serve Him with joy, with diligence, with energy in whatever task He's given you.

Are you a Sunday School teacher? That is a great task; that's a task He's given you. Do you work in the nursery? That's not a minor task, that's the task that He has given you. Serve Him faithfully and well.

You go to work; that's not secular employment, that's your ministry. If you're a pharmacist, if you're a bricklayer, if you're a lawyer; whatever your business, whatever your employment; that's where you meet people, and you're to be a minister to the Lord Jesus Christ. Be a witness wherever you are, at home or at work. That's what God has called you to do. As we see from this list, ordinary people who are really extraordinary people because they serve the Lord faithfully. May God help you to do that.

But, of course, if you've not trusted in Him, if you have not believed in Jesus Christ, you cannot serve Him. If you are not with Him, you're in fact against Him; and the reality is you're under the wrath of God at this very moment. But there's a way of escape and there's a way to life, and that is faith in Him; faith in God's eternal Son who became a genuine man and a perfect man, and died in our place so that every

sinner who trusts in Him will have forgiveness and eternal life. May God help you to look to Him, to believe in Him, and help all of us to serve Him. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we thank you for this list of names that we might be tempted to pass over lightly. We thank you for the lessons that are given to us here. We pray that we will learn those lessons and pray that they might be applied to our lives. And we're to do that, and yet we can't do anything apart from the grace that is given to us through the Holy Spirit. We pray that He would apply these things, and move us, and motivate us, to become active Christians, faithful servants of you in all that we do. We pray these things in Christ's name, amen.