

THE THREE I AM'S OF THE APOSTLE PAUL

Romans 1:8-17

Intro: I have heard more than one Christian say that the most profitable reading they have done has been that of Christian biographies. It is always good to learn how the Lord has taught others in their walk with the Lord. I am always on the lookout for information from others that will help me in my fellowship with the Lord. The Bible is probably the greatest help of all in learning the ways of the Lord because much of the Bible is biographical. And we often find some of the most valuable help in parts of the Bible where we might least expect to find it.

The passage that I have chosen to speak on tonight is a good example of this. I am taking my text tonight from Paul's introduction to his letter to the church at Rome. We don't know how that church got started. Paul had never been to Rome. He had planned many times to go there but the pressure of his work and the need in other places had kept him from going. Even as he wrote he had no idea as to how he was going to get there. I am sure that most of you have read this epistle often enough that you are familiar with what he had to say. We have here one of the longest, if not the longest, of his introductions. And it is not a part of the epistle that we must hurry over to get to what his message was because in this introduction we have a glimpse into the heart of Paul which is very important for us to read over and over again. You can see in the first 17 verses of chapter 1 what the Lord had done in his heart to make the Gospel the very heart of his life and message.

Nothing could be more significant for any of us than that we should begin this new year of 2012, remembering the Lord Jesus Christ in His death. It is obvious that we would not be here tonight if the Lord Jesus had not died for us that we might be forgiven of our sins and made new creatures in Christ. And that message is very, very important to all of us. And we never tire of hearing it, do we? We love to hear it again and again, and I want to point out tonight from the apostle Paul's letter to the church at Rome that we all should love to tell it as much as we love to hear it.

Several hymns have been written about telling the story of Jesus and His love. The last verse of one of those hymns gives us these words:

I love to tell the story; for those who know it best
Seem hungering and thirsting to hear it like the rest,

And when in scenes of glory, I sing the new, new song,
'Twill be the old, old story that I have loved so long.

Years ago when we were making our first trip by plane to visit Lucille's folks in Arkansas, as the plane was taking off many of you will remember how you were pushed back in your seat. It was quite an experience if you had never flown before. Our Carolyn was a preschooler, and she was very frightened. She was sitting with her mother, and Lucille heard her say, "Sing to me! Sing to me!" When Lucille asked her, "What shall I sing?" Carolyn responded with, "the Old Rugged Cross."

All through eternity we are going to be praising God for the Gospel. And it will mean even more to us then than it does now because our knowledge of it will be perfect then.

We learn about the Gospel from every book in the Bible – OT and NT. But the one book of the Bible, that is devoted to the most thorough exposition of the Gospel is Paul's letter to the church at Rome. It shows us our need to be saved. It shows us that salvation originated with God. It shows us that our salvation was secured by the substitutionary death of the Lord Jesus Christ. And that from the beginning of time to the end of time those people are being saved who were chosen for salvation by trusting in Christ. And in Romans we learn that the object of salvation is not just the forgiveness of our sins, and the hope of heaven, but our transformation into the very likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul makes it clear in Romans that there is only one salvation and that it is for Jews and Gentiles alike. Especially in the latter part of this epistle he makes it clear that who is truly saved is going to give evidence of his or her salvation by a changed life. We are no longer to live like the people of the world live, but to live to please God. And the book of Romans gives us a good start in explaining to us what this means.

Tonight as we come to the Lord's Table, I want to direct your attention to Paul's introduction to this priceless treasure that the Lord gave to him to give, not only to the church at Rome, but also to us and to all who would trust in Christ afterwards.

Now I want to read the first seventeen verses of Romans 1, and then focus our attention on three points that the Apostle Paul made about himself in the hope that we would make the application to ourselves that he made to himself. The three statements are in;reading that Paul's emphasis all

through these verses is on *the Gospel!*

(Read Romans 11-17 with comments.)

The common definition among the Greeks was that everyone who was not a Greek was a barbarian. See Paul's statement in 2 Cor. 14:11:

Therefore if I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him a barbarian, and he that speaketh shall be a barbarian unto me.

I. "I am debtor" (Rom. 1:14).

Paul was given a special commission as an apostle. But there is the feeling in the heart of every true child of God after he is saved, that he is responsible to make sure that others hear the Gospel.

Notice that Paul call himself a debtor "to the Greeks and to the barbarians," but this obligation has been placed upon us by God. It is not a debt that we owe for our salvation, but a solemn debt of love before God and before the world to make Christ known.

II. "I am ready . . . (Rom. 1:15).

One grammarian speaks of this as readiness of mind. There is much more to preparing for ministry than to have prepared notes. The servant of the Lord above all, needs a prepared heart. This is the readiness that Paul was talking about. Blessings may come *through* us, and we hope that they will, but they must originate with God – all three Persons of the Godhead.

How did he prepare? See verses 9-12. Notice how Paul had prayed for them in verse 9. How he had prayed for himself (v. 10). His twofold objective in vv. 11 and 12. Probably one of the greatest reasons for the blessing that Paul experienced in his ministry was that he went to receive from the Lord for himself, as well as to be a blessing to the people.

III. "I am not ashamed . . . (Rom. 1:16).

From Haldane:

His declaration implies that, while in reality there is no just cause to be ashamed of the Gospel, there is in it something which is not acceptable, and that it is generally hated and despised among men. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him . . ." (2 Cor. 2:14). They run contrary to his most fondly-cherished notions of independence; they abase in the dust all the pride of his self-reliance, and, stripping him of every ground of boasting, and demanding implicit submission, they awaken all the enmity of the carnal mind. Even they who have tasted of the grace of God, are liable to experience, and often to yield to, the deeply-rooted and sinful feeling of being ashamed of the things of God. So prevalent is this even among Christians (who are) the most advanced, that Paul deemed it necessary to warn Timothy respecting it, whose faithfulness he so highly celebrates (pp.45-46).

See Paul's exhortation to Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:8-13, 16.

But if we turn away from the Gospel, what other hope is there? Absolutely none! This is the reason that it is important for us to be "ready to preach the Gospel" with our dependence upon the Spirit of God.

Concl: Notice from these words of Paul, and relate it to what we are doing tonight, that the church needs the Gospel. And that is what the Apostle Paul did in this epistle. As often as we eat this bread, and drink this cup, we are *showing* the Lord's death until He comes.