***Paul's Apostolic Ministry
Romans 15:17-21
RO187-02***

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Romans 15, we are looking at Romans 15:17-21, and our subject is Pioneer Missionary - Segment Number 3. The apostle Paul has used his apostolic authority to establish churches throughout the Roman Empire. Paul's special field of missionary service was to the Gentile's of that empire. Paul found great personal satisfaction and took great pride in the work that God the Holy Spirit, had done through him in reaching the Gentiles with the gospel. Paul's ministry was characterized by the teaching of sound doctrine and by a personal life of divine good works. Paul's life coincided and backed up his preaching.

**Confirming God's Authority**

Paul's claim to apostolic authority was confirmed by the demonstrations of God's power in the form of signs and wonders. Signs, we saw, referred to miracles which identify someone as a true messenger of God. Wonders refers to the awesomeness of the miracles which God performed through Paul. These miracles were done by Paul in the power of the Holy Spirit. These demonstrations, therefore, of divine power authenticated the truth of the church doctrines which he preached. This was a great change, of course, from Judaism. It was a great change from the era in which the Jews were the dominant representatives of God upon this earth. Suddenly the Jews were out and a whole new group of people, a whole new body of saints, becomes God's official ambassadors and spokesmen, and that is the Christians made up of Jews and Gentiles.

So, Paul's message was so radically different than anything the Jews had ever heard because there was nothing about Christianity in the Old Testament. There was not the slightest whisper of the coming Church Age by the revelations of the prophets. So, God had to give a very special confirmation and say, 'Yes, these men are not making this up. Yes, I have temporarily set aside the Jewish people. They have rejected the Messiah. The final 7 years of their glorious history will not be fulfilled now, but I will begin a new work in the body of Christ, the Church.' These signs and these wonders where the miracles that confirmed that this message was indeed true and from God.

However, it is important for us to remember that miracles in the form of signs and wonders were used by God only at specific points in human history. It was only used when it was necessary to confirm the truth of God's messenger in some era of great apostasy from true doctrine. Once the work and the message of God's servants were fully authenticated, the miracles ceased. So, in the past, we have had certain periods of miracles. First of all, was in the time of Moses when he was confronting Pharaoh and trying to secure the acceptance of the Jewish slaves as God's spokesmen. Once that was done, there were no more miracles for centuries.

Then in the time of Elijah and Elisha, when they were faced by the apostasy of Ahab and Jezebel, there was another great outburst of miracles. Once the people were brought back to God and the message re-authenticated, miracles ceased. There were no more miracles from God for centuries.

Then, in the time of Jesus, when He presented Himself as the promised and the long-awaited Messiah of the Jews, He performed many miracles again to confirm Himself and His message. Then, after His ascension as the apostles established the new era of Christianity following the day of Pentecost and were preaching the new doctrines relative to the grace age of the Church, they perform a variety of miracles once more, authenticating themselves as the messengers of God and as a message which truly came from God. Once this was established and recorded in the Bible, including the record of the miracles that authenticated all this, miracles cease and God has not been performing any miracles since the apostolic era.

There is a future period in the tribulation when the servants of God will perform certain miracles again to authenticate that they are the messengers of God with a message from God. There will also, in the future, be a period of miracles, which will be false miracles, they will be pseudo miracles performed by Satan. They will be performed in a limited degree in order to deceive believers, the miracles of Satan are more like acts of magic. You know that person really isn't doing this, but it looks like they're doing something very astounding and magical.

However, we must remember that Satan as an angel, as with all angels, possesses superhuman powers. Satan does not have the omnipotence of God, but he has superhuman powers and therefore he is able to do things that in our eyes is downright miraculous. Those will be false miracles, false evidences, but they will be clearly countered by God, just as when the magicians of Pharaoh reproduced by magic the illusions of what Moses was doing for real. There came a time when at a certain point they couldn't reproduce what Moses was doing at all. So, eventually the magicians get outsmarted and outdistanced, and outshined by the real worker of miracles.

**Paul's Apostolic Ministry**

So, this morning we come to Romans 15:19, following Paul's declaration that his message was confirmed in the power of signs and wonders and the power of the Holy Spirit, he declares then the extent of his missionary outreach in which all of this was done. He says that this extended from the city of Jerusalem round about, that is throughout the vicinity, as far as Illyricum. On this map, you'll see what he is referring to. He said that his ministry came from here in Jerusalem. And if you draw a line straight up here into Macedonia, up here is Illyricum. So, this was a tremendous territory in the ancient world which was included in Paul's missionary service. Illyricum, up here, is on the eastern shore of the Adriatic Sea. Today, it is the territory of Yugoslavia and Albania. The northwest limit of his work was Illyricum. The southeast limit was Jerusalem. And in terms of the travel that was available, the means of travel, this was no small area to cover. As you can see, on some of these travels, you had to go by sea. When he went overland, it was very tedious. It was very slow. It took time and it took a great deal of effort.

So, Paul says that he covered this territory; and in this territory and the environs surrounding it, he was able to say that he had fully preached the gospel. The word "fully preached" is actually the Greek word "pleroo," p l e r o o, and "pleroo," means "to fulfill." He says what he fulfilled here was "the gospel of Christ," meaning that he had fully preached it in this territory. That means that Paul proclaimed in this vast Gentile area on the Jerusalem/Illyricum axis, the gospel of Jesus Christ. He did this in the past by journeys and now this coverage stood at this point in time. The Greek word here is in the infinitive mood, which indicates that this was the purpose of the apostle Paul in his life. His intention was to cover this vast territory.

His preaching ministry, as you know, consisted of several missionary journeys that began following his conversion. After he spent 3 years out in the Arabian Desert learning Church Age doctrine, he finally came back to Jerusalem. They were all suspicious of him because this has been the man that with a vengeance, had been searching out Christians, putting them in prison, having them executed, and now suddenly comes back and says, 'I'm one of you. I've been born again. I'm trusting in Jesus Christ.' Their first reaction was, he's a spy and we shouldn't trust him. Eventually, he was accepted and he did a little preaching around Jerusalem. Then he moved up here to Antioch in Syria, which was the base from which the Christians were operating. As a matter of fact, that was the city in which believers in Jesus Christ were first given the name Christians.

His first missionary journey then began here at Syrian Antioch, and it came across here by sea to Cyprus. Then he went up here to these cities in Galatia that we're acquainted with, Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, Pisidia, and Antioch. Then he backtracked through the cities back home to Syria and Antioch. You find this in Acts 13:1 through Acts 14:26. The second missionary journey began again in Antioch of Syria, went back up here into Galatia, then extended way up here on the Aegean Sea to Troas, then across into the province of Macedonia, down to Athens and to Corinth and then across to Ephesus and then home to Caesarea and perhaps visiting Jerusalem back up to Syrian Antioch.

The third missionary journey began again in Antioch of Syria and went back again to Galatia, then across to Ephesus and then to Troas, then across to Philippi, coming down through Macedonia to Corinth once more, then retracing his steps back up to Troas, and then to Ephesus, then to the seaport, Miletus, down to Tyre on the Mediterranean coast, to Caesarea, and then to Jerusalem. So, in this circle of extensive travels, the apostle Paul hit the major cities and then he left convert's behind who branched out and covered the surrounding territories.

What Paul is saying here, then when he says, "I have preached fully the gospel of Christ, he is saying that on the Jerusalem/Illyricum axis, he now believes that he has fully evangelized the territories of this part of the ancient world, which was indeed a very major and important part of that world. Paul's missionary method was really very simple. He'd go to a town, usually hit the synagogue first because anybody could walk in and stand up and speak. He would preach the gospel, win converts, bring them into an organizational structure as a local church. He would appoint a pastor-teacher to take charge and then he himself would move on to the next place, leaving the work in their hands, an indigenous missionary operation.

In 1 Corinthians 3 we have his method somewhat reflected when Paul says, (In 1 Corinthians 3:7) "So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth." Paul recognized that he was a planter of seeds. Then in 1 Corinthians 3:10, he says, "According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building upon it. But let each man be careful how he builds upon it." So, Paul said he went into an area, he preached the gospel, won some Jewish and mostly Gentile converts, organized them into a church, and then he would move on and leave the work in other hands to be carried on. Paul now feels he is free finally to do what he would like to have done for a long time: to go to minister to the Christians who are in Rome, a place where Christianity has already been established, probably by some of Paul's converts from other places.

**Paul's Desire To Go To Rome**

In Romans 15:20-21, Paul expresses a personal ambition. In Romans 15:20, he declares himself a pioneer missionary type and thus referring back to the territory he has covered, "I aspire to" do something. The word "aspire" looks like this in the Greek Bible, it's a long word, "philotimeomai," p h i l o t i m e o m a i. This word literally means "to love or seek after honor." You see this "phileo," which is the Greek word for love and "timeo," from "time," which is "honor." So, the word literally means "someone who loves to seek after honor." So, the word came to connote the idea of being ambitious in some way. A person was ambitious in some way. This is what Paul said he was.

He constantly had this personal kind of ambition and the ambition was to "preach the gospel." The word is "euaggelizo," and "euaggelizo" connotes evangelizing someone with some good news. That's where we get the word "to evangelize." It is delivering the message of the grace salvation by faith in Christ. This was present tense. Paul says, 'It was my constant ambition.'

Interestingly enough, he uses the middle voice, which in the Greek indicates he is the personal beneficiary. How could Paul be a personal beneficiary because he gets other people to understand the gospel and brings them in to salvation? Well, he's the beneficiary because God rewards him in eternity for that kind of fruit bearing. Therefore, he is very exact saying that he is preaching the gospel that is bearing fruit and he himself is going to benefit by eternal rewards. And again, it's in the infinitive mood which indicates that this is his purpose, this is his intention in life. 'I want to proclaim the gospel of the grace of God, but in a specific place, not where Christ was already known.' He said, 'I want to name Jesus Christ, that is, I want to make Him known, but I don't want to make Him known at some point where someone else has already brought the gospel. What Paul is saying is that he had a very personal, deep conviction that he was to be a pioneer missionary. He was not to be an itinerant revivalist who went from church to church to jack people up spiritually and then go on to the next place to jack people up spiritually. He was walking into a place where no one had ever gone before. He walked where no man had gone before, and he walked into territory that had never heard the gospel, and he walked into a place where people live, and to a city. He had to look around and make his decision on how he was going to make inroads with the gospel. He indeed preached in un-evangelist fields, and he did it, as you see, to the outer limits of the Roman Empire. Sometimes, of course, Paul's plans for ministry were redirected by the Holy Spirit, but nevertheless, it was his constant ambition to reach out for new fields and to preach where no man had gone before with the gospel.

What he intended to do there was to build on the foundation that he himself laid. So, he said, I did this because I do not want to build on another man's foundation. The word "build" is the word "oikodomeo" in the Greek, o i k o d o m e o. And "oikodomeo" is the word for building a structure. What Paul is referring to specifically here is that he's building church congregations. And this was an action he said that he never wanted to build upon another man's foundation. Paul did not want to build God's work on the foundation of believers which had been laid down by another missionary. Paul preferred instead to bypass that place and to go on to someplace that had never been touched with the gospel. When he finished in a place, he let others build upon that foundation. So, Paul established and nurtured his own local congregations all over the Roman Empire.

This, of course, was the purpose of the spiritual gift of an apostle. Remember that an apostle, in terms of spiritual authority over people, is distinctively different from that which a pastor-teacher has. An apostle had near dictatorial power. When an apostle established a congregation, he was in charge of that congregation from then on. He appointed the pastor-teacher. He laid out the structure. He laid out the organization, and he set the work on its feet, and then handed it over. And then when anything went awry, he'd come back and he'd jerk some heads and toss some people around and straighten out the work. He had the divine power to do exactly that. Being an apostle was an impressive position to have.

The apostle Paul had complete authority over the churches that he had brought into being. And the early church rapidly expanded on the work done by the apostles. Paul himself, of course, had very good reason to say that he's taken a great deal of pride and satisfaction in the work that God had done through him because he had, in fact, turned the Roman world upside down by his own ministry. The Book of Acts records for us many triumphs that the apostle Paul was referring to when he talks about the satisfaction that he takes and what God has been doing through him. Here's just a few of them.

One of them he records for us in Acts 13. Acts 13:42-44, "And as Paul and Barnabas were going out, the people kept begging that these things might be spoken to them the next Sabbath. [43] "Now when the meeting of the synagogue had broken up, many of the Jews and of the God-fearing proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, were urging them to continue in the grace of God. [44] "And the next Sabbath nearly the whole city assembled to hear the Word of the God." Paul preaching to a group of believers just turned the city upside down. People the next week could not wait to crowd into the assembly area to hear more about what this man had to say about the Messiah Jesus. Acts 13:48-49, "And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. [49] "And the word of the Lord was being spread through the whole region." This is just one example of the kinds of things that constantly took place in the work of Paul: coming into a city and God the Holy Spirit, making an impact with the word so that droves of people just crowded in to hear and were converted. This is why Paul says, "I'm so pleased with what God has done with my efforts.

On your own, you might like to read Acts 16:5, Acts 16:14-15, Acts 16:32-34, Acts 17:4, Acts 17:11-12, Acts 18:4, Acts 18:8, all in the book of Acts, tremendous conquest victories by the apostle Paul.

**Paul's Desire to Minister to Gentiles**

'Now,' Paul says, 'He's ready to go on to Rome.' He has bypassed it up to now because he felt he had to be out in places that needed him more urgently. He justifies this plan on his part by a quotation from Isaiah. In Romans 15:21 he says, "but as it is written," and he's referring back to what he has done as a pioneer missionary in new places. He goes to Isaiah and he says, 'What I am doing is based upon what Isaiah himself predicted would be done for the Gentiles. What he is quoting from is Isaiah 52:15. We'll just go ahead and read it. Isaiah 52:15, he quotes part of this verse. The verse says "Thus he will sprinkle many nations, Kings will shut their mouths on account of Him; For what had not been told them they will see, And what they have not heard they will understand." So, Paul, quoting that verse in Romans 15:21 says, "THEY WHO HAD NO NEWS OF HIM." That is, those who have not heard any information concerning the gospel, that nothing had been announced to them, no gospel appeal had been made to them. They had never heard the word about how they could go to Heaven.

Back in Isaiah 52:14, you will see indicates that Paul is there talking about the Gentiles. And he is talking about Gentiles, kings and their people. Isaiah 52:14 says, "Just as many were astonished at you, My people, So His appearance was marred more than any man, And His form more than the sons of men," speaking, identifying, that he is talking about Jesus Christ. In fact, Isaiah 52:13 is very explicit, "Behold, My servant," indicating Jesus Christ. Then you will notice that Isaiah 53 is the chapter which follows. And in Isaiah 53, you have that terrible picture of how Jesus Christ was brutalized by the Roman authorities before He was crucified, so that when they were finished with Him, He didn't even look like a human being.

Now, this is the context in which these kings, these Gentiles, are being told something about a Savior who has suffered with such intensity that their sins have been forgiven by almighty God because He bore them while He had this suffering. And furthermore, Isaiah 52:15 begins with the words "He will sprinkle many nations," referring to what was done by the high priests in the Holy of Holies when He sprinkled animal blood on the mercy seat for the forgiveness of the sins for a nation. Here's the pictures of Jesus Christ sprinkling Gentiles with His blood in order to bring them to salvation by atoning for their sins.

So, what, Isaiah 52:15 is saying and that Paul is quoting, is that these Gentiles are going to hear about the servant of God, Jesus, this one who is going to be lifted up and exalted on the cross. See, Isaiah 52:13 says, "He will be high and lifted up and greatly exalted." This one who will be lifted up on the cross and then exalted in resurrection and the Ascension, this one is going to cause the kings of the Gentiles to stand in awe before the Messiah and to subject themselves to Him.

[referring to Romans 15:21,]"They who had no news of Him, shall see." The word is "horao," h o r a o. "harao" means "to have a panoramic overview." Most Jews would not see Jesus Christ as the Savior. These Gentiles would see Him for what He really is. They, by personal knowledge through the preaching of the apostle Paul, would have their spiritual blindness removed and they would see Christ for what He really is.

And then Paul says, "They who had not heard shall understand." The word "heard" is the Greek word "akouo," a k o u o. This refers to hearing sounds of speech with your ear. These who had previously never heard the gospel, Paul says, are going to hear it sometime in the future and furthermore they will understand it. What he is referring to is that they will grasp the significance and the meaning of what he has said. The Gentiles, in other words, are going to see the light of the gospel. They're going to understand what their problem is as lost sinners, their incapacity to help themselves in any way to secure eternal life. And they will understand that all this has been done for them by God, because He is a loving God. They will understand a true plan of salvation.

All of this is going to come about because the apostle Paul was willing to be a missionary, a pioneer missionary who went where no man had gone before and proclaim the gospel of the grace of God. Paul says, 'I am doing this kind of pioneering work because I am fulfilling Isaiah 52:15, which predicted that the Gentiles would receive such a message and that they would respond with overwhelming enthusiasm.' Paul's outreach to the Gentiles in the East now, he says, is complete. He finally feels free to start going westward toward Rome and beyond.

**Occupational Hazards of Christian Service**

So, Paul comes to facing what is going to be his final victory Paul faced, as do we all, an occupational hazard of Christian service. So listen carefully! Paul faced what all of you are facing, an occupational hazard in the business of Christian service. You parents are faced with an occupational hazard in misdirecting your children in an understanding of Christian service. Paul faced the occupational hazard of becoming weary of the fighting that's involved in spiritual combat in the angelic warfare. The apostle Paul knew what it was to get tired in God's service.

Notice 2 Thessalonians 3:13. Paul says, "But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary of doing good." He could say this because he understood this with all the hardships of covering the Jerusalem/Illyricum access to ministry, he knew how wearisome Christian service can become. Add to that Galatians 6:9. Some of the first churches that he [Paul] had founded, he gave them this advice, "And let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary."

Do we have any Christians here this morning that are weary of what you have been doing in Christian service for so long and so intensely? Then this is the message to you! The admonition is if you've been on the line in the spiritual warfare of God's work, don't get tired out. Don't ever allow yourself to say, 'I'm burned out.' Do not get weary in doing the good things of the of the Lord's work to which you've been called. You ever have the feeling that you wish that somebody else would take on an area of Christian service, which you have done so long, in spite of the fact that you have learned to do it so well? Do you notice how Christians, when they have really become proficient in doing something, about that time, you wish somebody else would take it over and do it next time?

The apostle Paul understood this problem. Notice 2 Corinthians 4:16-18. Paul says, "Therefore, we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. [17] "For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, [18] "while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." Paul says, 'Yes, my outer man is decaying.'

Those of us who have been in this ministry at Berean for over three decades have observed some of you decaying before our very eyes as the years have passed. We have seen the inroads of that decay of the years passing by, and that decay brings with it a little less strength, a little less agility, a little less capacity. And pretty soon you're saying, 'I'm just too old to be doing this.' You're wondering if somebody that is younger and more capable, even though you're the most experienced and now have the greatest expertise, whether someone else should really do it.

The apostle Paul says, 'Yes, I know what that is.' You've got to remember, this man went for that many years himself in the ministry, well over three decades, and he knew what suffering and demands there were. But he says, 'All that's light affliction concerning with the weight of glory that's going to rest upon him someday for faithfulness.'

We face the occupational hazard of maintaining our motivation and drive in God's work when we're under all the kinds of pressures that come to us from life in general. In 1 Corinthians 15:58, the apostle Paul says, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord." Paul says, 'Yes, you're under pressure. You're under demands. But don't cut out. Don't desert.'

Don't as one of my people in the band yesterday said, 'What is this retiring from musical service that we are observing?' [another said,] 'Well, I'm just under other pressures in life, it's so demanding. I'm at a stage of life where it's just a pressure.' Paul says, 'That's wrong! I can tell you right now, that's wrong if you cut out!

We're under the occupational hazard of keeping a sense of priority between our pursuit of money and ambition and our Christian service opportunities. Jesus tried to put this in perspective in Matthew 6:24. Oh, the pursuit of the good life and the good things of life. Jesus said, 'please remember this,' "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to the one and despise the other." You cannot serve God and money.

And if we are the last generation, if we're the generation of Matthew 24:34 that has seen the picture of the Second Coming of Christ, the background picture falling into place, (and we are that generation, make no mistake about it.) then Jesus said, 'you people who are alive when you see this picture forming as the backdrop of the Second Coming, (not of the Rapture, but of the Second Coming,) you people aren't going to die before that happens. You're going to be taken out by the Rapture.' When you see this picture forming, you better take note, as you would of a fig tree, that when it throws forth its new leaves, summer is near at hand.'

Our problem is to keep on putting our service to God ahead of service to ourselves. Matthew 6:31-33, Jesus says, "Do not be anxious when saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'With what shall we cloth ourselves?' [32] "For all these things the Gentiles eagerly seek; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. [33] "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." Oh, that's so hard to do. It is so hard to put Christian service ahead of personal service. It is so hard to remember that our Heavenly Father takes careful note of everything that we do for Him because people are not always appreciative. And so we want to chuck it because they don't deserve it. They're not worthy of it. They don't have any sense of what we have personally given because we're not mouthing off about all of the funds we're putting in, and all the time, and all the effort, and all this. Yet they have no sense of what beneficiary's they are.

In the Book of Hebrews, the Holy Spirit says, 'Let me give you some insight about that, Christian!' Hebrews 6:10-12, "For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints. [11] "And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, [12] "that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises." The writer of Hebrews says, 'Don't slow down; keep on the job.'

You see, what the apostle Paul was worried about was the thing that any sensitive Pastor/Teacher is worried about today, and that is the trivializing of the lives of the members of his congregation, how Christians will trivialize their lives. They don't realize the tremendous potential impact of eternal investment. Instead, they fritter away their lives on the most stupid temporal passing little things, inconveniences. They are not gutsy, on-the-line, good soldiers of Jesus Christ.

The apostle Paul instead was ambitious for making his life count and making it count for eternal rewards. In Philippians 1:21, he said, "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. [If I live, I'm living the life of Jesus Christ. If I die, I go to be with him.] [22] "But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. [As long as I'm alive, I'm storing treasures in Heaven. I am not trivializing my life, I am making it count, but he says, 'I really would like to go to Heaven.'] [23] "But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; [24] "yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake. [25] "And convinced of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you for all your progress and joy in the faith, [26] "so that your proud confidence in me may abound in Christ Jesus through my coming to you again."

He writes this from prison in Rome. This is his first imprisonment. God has told him that he'll have his trial before Nero and the Senate and he'll be proclaimed not guilty. He'll be turned loose. He knows it's coming. He's writing to the Philippian Christians saying, 'I'd just as soon they took my head off and sent me home. I really would like to go to the Lord. I'm tired of the burden of this pioneer missionary business.' But he says, 'I know that's not good for you. You people need to be taught. You need the information that I can give you. Therefore, I am pursuing that goal and I will get with you again.'

Isn't it amazing how we parents so subtly and so foolishly teach our children, 'whenever you have to make a choice between a Christian service activity or a personal ambition and making of money, go for the money, go for the ambition? Put the Christian service activity aside.' You think they're not going to learn that lesson and learn it well? Let's hope you won't regret that a few years down the line.

**Paul's Crown of Righteousness**

The apostle Paul said, 'I'm going to stay in there on the job trying to keep you oriented to your real eternal values. However, Paul paid dearly, as you well know, and I don't have to review that for you. He paid dearly for this kind of devotion to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. He paid dearly at great personal expense.

The time came, however, when it was all over, and this time at his second imprisonment, he knew he wasn't going to be acquitted. He could say what maybe some of you will never be able to say in 2 Timothy 4:7-8. Paul says, "I have fought the good fight." At the end of his life, the apostle Paul could say that he had stayed consistently in the spiritual warfare against Satan and his demons. 'I stayed in there. People always knew I was going to be on the line. People always knew I was going to be in my place in the local ministry, in the Christian service activity that I was in. They knew I wasn't going to exchange that for money or for fame, or for ambition, or for something trivial. They knew I was going to be there. I fought the fight. I have finished the course.' Paul at the end of his life could say 'I have run the course that God has laid out for me.'

Remember, back in Ephesians, God says that God has created you as a trophy of His grace, for you are His workmanship created for works which He has preordained for you to perform. Paul says, 'I've done that. I've run the course. When God told me what he wanted me to do on the Damascus road, I never veered from that. [back in 2 Timothy 4:7,] "I have fought a good fight, I have finished the course, and I have kept the faith." Paul could say, 'I have consistently stood by true doctrine and I consistently taught true doctrine.'

Paul anticipated then for that, he says, "A crown of righteousness." 2 Timothy 4:8, "in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, [The crown of righteousness, you will remember, is that which is given to Christians who maximize their life in temporal fellowship. They stay in the inner circle because they are in the will of God. For those who have spent their lives mostly in the inner circle, there will be a special recognition,] which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me, but also to all who loved His appearing."

Well, the time came when the mission was accomplished. Paul was arrested by the Roman authorities the second time about the year 66 A.D. That time he found himself deserted by other believers who were in deadly fear, and rightly so, of the madness of Nero and of his brutality. Paul was shackled. He was thrown into a prison cell like a common criminal. He was treated much differently this time than he was the first time where he had been given some respect. Paul was tried as one of the Christians who Nero accused of starting the great Roman fire, which Nero himself had ignited. Paul faced Nero in the court. And Paul said to Timothy 'No one stood with me. All the Christians backed off. They wanted to distance themselves from me because of their fear of Nero and the authorities.' But Paul fell back on Bible doctrine to sustain him, and he proclaimed the gospel to that court.

The reports we have, and the conclusions we draw as we put together the picture in the Scriptures is that he was acquitted on the charge of arson, but he was found guilty of a capital crime of propagating the forbidden cult of Christianity, which denied the divinity of the emperor, that was viewed as an act of treason.

At this time, when Paul was finally condemned to death, he says Demas had deserted him. He had sent his other associates off on the Lord's work. Only Dr. Luke was left with him. In that second letter to Timothy he wrote to Timothy and he asked Timothy to come to him, 'bring John Mark with you.' He said, 'come as soon as you can Timothy, before I'm executed, before winter.' In this letter, he admonished Timothy to keep on preaching doctrine unashamedly in the face of suffering, opposition, indifference, and rejection; whether Christians were ready to hear it or not, give them the word and keep your eyes on the Lord. In that letter, he asked Timothy to stop by at Troas and bring his warm cloak that he had left there, that he'll need for that cold wintertime before his execution. And he asked him also to bring his parchments and his writings.

In the year 67 A.D., the apostle Paul was taken in chains to the place of execution. On those occasions people would fall in with the executioner and the others, and no doubt they looked upon Paul, whom history tells us and tradition tells us was a short man. Pictures of him on the walls in the catacombs indicate that he was bald, and he had a beard. And he himself indicates that he had some eye problems that didn't always look attractive when you looked at him. So, this crowd probably looked upon him as a filthy little Jew who was on his way to shame and defeat. But Paul knew better.

It had really indeed, been a long time as he walked along, perhaps reminisced about the Damascus Road and his salvation, that dramatic incident where he'd seen Jesus Christ. Whatever the crowd thought, Paul knew that this was his crowning day. Once more he's going to see Jesus Christ. Of course, Paul remembered the good things, and he remembered the bad times as he walked along.

Perhaps his mind went back to 2 Corinthians 6, the things that he had written there, when Paul reminisced in that area of 2 Corinthians 6:1-10 about the sufferings, the things that he had gone through, the things that he had had to provide for his own ministry and so on. He remembered. In 2 Corinthians 6:1-10 Paul says, "And working together with Him, we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain- [2] "for He says, 'AT THE ACCEPTABLE TIME I LISTENED TO YOU, AND ON THE DAY OF SALVATION I HELPED YOU.' Behold, now is 'THE ACCEPTABLE TIME,' behold, now is 'THE DAY OF SALVATION.' [That was Paul's message. 'It is now.' And then he said, I delivered that message,] [3] "giving no cause for offense in anything, in order that the ministry be not discredited, [4] "but in everything commending ourselves as servants of God, in much endurance, in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses, [5] "in beatings, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in hunger, [6] "in purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in genuine love, [7] "in the word of truth, in the power of God; by the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left, [8] "by glory and dishonor, by evil report and good report; regarded as deceivers and yet true; [9] "as unknown yet well known, as dying yet behold, we live; as punished yet not put to death, [10] "as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing yet possessing all things."

Probably he reminisced on those good times and those hard times, as he summarized in there. He probably remembered the statement that he made in his last book to Timothy, in 2 Timothy 1:12 where he said, "For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day."

Paul knew, as he marched along toward his execution site, what was ahead of him? He had committed his soul. He had committed his eternal future to Jesus Christ. He knew he was secure. Perhaps he remembered Romans 8:18 that he had once written. "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us."

Paul was probably tied to a low pillar. He remembered the grace of God since that day on the Damascus Road, all of the ups and downs. And now finally, the moment that he had hoped for was upon him. He kept the faith. He'd been true to the Lord, true to doctrine. He had not trivialized his life. He never substituted a temporal thing when he had an opportunity to invest in an eternal. And he never taught anybody else to do that.

He was probably tied to a low pillar in a kneeling position which left his neck open to the executioner. I cannot help wondering, if in that moment as he waited the strike of the blade, whether he thought about another passage that he had written to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 5:6-8. "Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord - [7] "for we walk by faith, not by sight - [Paul knew so well that as long as he was in the body, it just meant that he was absent from the Lord. And his mind thought about verse 8.] [8]"we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body [a flash of the sword!] and to be at home with the Lord."

**Benediction**

Our Father, we thank Thee for Paul and we pray for this great man's devotion to duty to become ours. So, the things that he exemplified in a man who made his life count would be our ambition as well. We do pray that we would take seriously that we are the generation who have seen the events of the world coming together and all of its deceptions of peace and the establishment of Eastern religions and the deifying of man himself. We are the generation forming the background of the events of the Lord's Second Coming. If the year 2000 begins the millennium, we don't have much to go. We pray that we shall maximize our lives, teach our children, to invest their lives in true values and to remember that someday they too will have their heads, so to speak, on the chopping block. And even as the sword comes down, absent from the body - present with the Lord. We thank you in Christ's name for that promise and the truth of it. Amen.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1977

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