

A Shout Out

Romans 16:1-16

November 20th, 2011

Scripture

"I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae, that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well.

Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well. Greet also the church in their house. Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in Asia. Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you. Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners. They are well known to the apostles, and they were in Christ before me. Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord. Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and my beloved Stachys. Greet Apelles, who is approved in Christ. Greet those who belong to the family of Aristobulus. Greet my kinsman Herodion. Greet those in the Lord who belong to the family of Narcissus. Greet those workers in the Lord, Tryphaena and Tryphosa. Greet the beloved Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord. Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord; also his mother, who has been a mother to me as well. Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers who are with them. Greet Philologus, 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."

My wife and I had the privilege to travel to Louisville KY to witness the investor ceremony of a friend of ours as the newly appointed US bankruptcy federal judge for the western district of Kentucky. Now, our mission was simple. First, we were there to support him as a friend and my son's father-in-law. Secondly, and most importantly, we were there to keep the grandchildren quiet during this most solemn ceremony. Our orders were to keep them quiet and in the federal court room until they robed their Pappy. We did our job and they were quiet. They were never an obstacle; never a distraction to the ceremony, not even one time. Finally they robed Pappy with his robe, and our oldest grandson got to zip up Pappy's zipper. Now, there were four speeches to follow. The oldest made it through the first speech and half-way through the second speech, and then he had all he could stand. Honestly, Papaw had all he could stand too! I was thankful as my wife and I got to take both boys out and spent the rest of that ceremony out in the hallway of the federal courthouse in Louisville, KY! There was a short reception that followed when the ceremony was over. Just as soon as the reception was over, a couple of the people who had come in for the reception said, "You guys got a shout out. The judge mentioned you as the other grandparents." What an honor to have someone who has been nominated to a federal judgeship give you a shout out as the other grandparents!

Not Just a Name

As you read the Scripture for this lesson, I bet many of you were a little bored during the reading. I cannot tell you how many times people brag about reading through the Bible, but if they were to be honest they really do not read through chapters like this. They skip them, or they peruse them. It is kind of like we do the genealogies of the Old Testament. This shout out, like the genealogies, are kind of like those vacations where someone goes where you have always wanted to, but they get to go

before you do. When they get home, they call and invite you to come and see the pictures, and you say thanks (with a smile), but inside you do not really want to go! You know there is no way that those pictures will do justice to where they have been, but we bear it anyway.

My son and I got this driven home in the year 2000. We were in Ocala, FL for several weeks while I was on a sabbatical, and he was there to race motorcycles, as well. On Wednesday night, we would attend the First Baptist Church. They spent the first several minutes of their service naming people that we should pray for. We do that a lot at our church too, and when you know the people behind the name, it means something to you then. But when you do not know the people, they are just names. To Paul, these were not just names, they were people. Can you imagine being in the Church at Rome, and then this great letter from the great Apostle Paul is delivered to your Church? You hear the pastor of the Church read this great letter, this great doctrinal thesis. You hear Paul's heartbeat; he wants to go to Spain because he believes he has fulfilled his circle of ministry where he has been. And when he comes to the end, all of a sudden he gives a shout out to you! Wow! That is what we are witnessing this in this passage.

- **People Matter**

Now, here is a question that I have wrestled with this for a long time. Why would the Holy Spirit of God lead a man to give a personal shout out to people he knew, but most of the Christian world would never know? Why would He put a boring conclusion to one of the greatest letters ever written? I think I have finally figured it out. I think it says that people matter to God, and because people matter to God, people mattered to Paul. Because people matter to God and to Paul, people should matter to you and me.

There are two extremes in the Church. One extreme puts truth above people, and the other extreme puts people above truth. Did you catch that? You see, when we study the book of Romans, we do not study it to

see the people Paul loved and had an intimate relationship with, we study the book for truth, and for doctrine. The book of Romans is not paralleled anywhere on the face of the earth when it comes to great theological truths being explained in a way that you and I can grasp. The very heart and mind of God fully expressed in the book of Romans for people who were born in sin, Jew and Gentile. But on the other hand, the book ends by letting us know that God cares about people, and that is why He did what He did. Do not ever believe you can be at one extreme or the other. One extreme is a person who pursues truth, and biblical knowledge, and biblical doctrine, to the exclusion of loving people. But I also do not believe you can be that person who in your pursuit of loving people, does not follow the truth that God has carefully revealed in the Word of God. In your pursuit of loving people, if you do not offer the truth of God's Word, you offer them nothing of lasting eternal value. You might change their life here on earth only, but you want the change they experience on earth to truly matter for the rest of their life, and for them to spend eternity with God forever. I want to challenge us. Did you know you could be a worship leader or musician, and you could love your song more than you love the people you are singing to? Did you know you could be a teacher in a class, and actually love teaching and preparation of a lesson more than you love the people you are teaching? You could actually be a pastor and a preacher, and love the prestige of preaching and delivering messages, more than you love the people you preach to. Do not ever let us go to one extreme or the other, we must be balanced. Truth matters to God, but the people God is delivering that truth to matter to Him as well.

Phoebe's Commendation: verses 1-2

In these 16 verses, the 1st thing Paul does is give a commendation to a lady named Phoebe. Now here is what we believe, we do not know this to be true because the Bible does not state this explicitly. But in these first 2 verses it is implied that Phoebe is delivering this letter Paul has written in Corinth, to the Church in Rome, and that is why he is giving her the commendation. Can you get this picture just for a moment? You are

Phoebe, and in your hand you are holding what we call the book of Romans. That is in your hands, and you have been given the responsibility of getting it from Corinth to the city of Rome. Have any of you ever held a newborn baby in your hands? If you have a newborn baby in your hands, you think only about the baby in your hands. You do not hold a newborn like you do a football or a basketball, or your ham sandwich that you had for lunch. Have you ever noticed how Bro Ricky walks up on the steps when he has a newborn in his hands...very deliberately, very carefully? How do you feel on Sunday night when you hold the cup and the bread in your hand? You feel different do you not? You realize the value of what you are holding in your hand. Can you imagine being Phoebe and holding the letter that Paul wrote to the Church in Rome that would literally shape the Church for the rest of its life? The one book, more than any other book, which would cause the Protestant Reformation, and would shape churches in America just like us, forever and ever! Paul is writing her a letter of commendation because as she started on her travels from Corinth to Rome, she could not just stop and check into a Motel 6, or a Hampton Inn. For you see when the early Church traveled they depended on other Christians in other places to give them a worthy welcome, to take them in, and to help them on their journey. So Paul writes for this lady what you and I would call a reference letter, so that the Church would not be afraid of her, but in all towns between here and there, would know who she is.

Paul identifies her in 3 ways. Now the name [a Phoebe](#) literally means "bright and radiant one". Her name is a derivative of the moon god that the Greek world worshipped. So literally when she was born, a pagan mom and dad looked into her little face and named her "light of the moon". And now she is going to be the "light of the Son" because of who she is in Jesus Christ. She is bearing the light of the gospel, the book of Romans. Is God good or is He good! Paul first calls her a (1) **sister**, he then calls her a (2) **servant** and then he calls her a (3) **patron**.

Sister

You know we talk a lot about brothers, we talk a lot about family, we talk a lot about the brethren, and normally that is in a masculine tense. But when Paul singled out Phoebe, the 1st thing he said about her is one of the greatest things you can say about someone. That is to call someone your sister in the Lord. There was no doubt in Paul's mind that this lady was, she was his sister. They had the same bloodline, royal blood, the blood of Jesus Christ flowing through them spiritually, and he called her his sister.

Servant

Then he calls her a servant. It is not my intention to go into this in great detail, but I would not be doing my job as a pastor if I did not make you aware of this. When Paul calls her a servant, the word he uses is the feminine form of the same word that we use for the men set aside in this Church that we call deacons. Therefore if you read the RSV, or a few other English versions of your Bible, they do not translate Phoebe as a servant, but they call her a deaconess. Now I realize when I say that in Western KY, it is going to scare you and me to death...but scholars and pastors actually debate over whether or not Paul is using this word in an unofficial or official sense. But he calls her a deaconess, a female servant of the Church in Cenchreae. Cenchreae was the eastern port city of Corinth.

We know that in the biblical world at this time there were certain things to do that were set aside, and the ladies greatly assisted the pastors and the elders of the Church. Some examples were taking care of the sick, taking care of the poor, or the prisoners, or being hospitable. There were some places in the early Christian parts where they baptized people in the nude. A person would actually come down into the water and they would strip off their old garment, and go down into the water. When they came up out of the water, they would put a new white robe on them to signify the old life being stripped away, and a new life put on in Christ. The Church being godly, in no way would let a male pastor go down into the water with a female. So in the places of the world where this took place they would

have ladies baptize ladies. Now in no way is Bro Ricky saying that ladies should be ordained as deacons of the Church, but please hear what the great Apostle Paul is doing. In this time, for him to publicly call Phoebe a servant of the Church, and use the feminine word that he does, greatly placed emphasis on the dignity and the status of a lady in the early Church. A lady was not a piece of property as the Romans, and many Jews had believed she was. She had a place of equal standing before men at the foot of the cross, even though her responsibilities were different. Does that make sense? So Paul was addressing Phoebe as a servant of the Church, and he uses a word that would cause the Roman Church to stand at attention at who she was; not only his sister, but also a servant.

Patron

He also called her a patron. Now we have a little phrase where we talk about people being a patron of the arts. When I did research on the Cunningham family, I discovered that our family was the patron family of the great Robert Burns. Did you know he was the greatest Scottish poet of all time? If you have ever read a poem, or any of the writings of Robert Burns, you should thank me and my family! If it was not for my family, he would not have had the ability to write. I mean he had the ability to write, but he would not have had the means, because he would have been out doing what the Cunningham's were doing, and that is work! But because our family (and I do not know where we got cut out of the tree) had a certain amount of wealth at that time, we patronized Robert Burns. Paul calls Phoebe a patron of many and of him, meaning what? In that day and age, she was one of those ladies that was such a business lady, with such financial means, that she would actually come in alongside and help write the cost of certain people when they did certain things. This word [b](#) *patron* in the biblical world literally meant "to be a defender of the poor". Wow! Is it not amazing that this sister in Christ who served the Church was a defender of the poor! It is exactly what servants of the Lord should be engaged in. Paul writes to the Church and says to welcome her in a manner worthy of the saints. He is saying when Phoebe arrives you roll out

the red carpet for her, you kill the fatted calf, you give her the best seat in the house, you make sure every need she has is met! This lady is special...I think one of the reasons Paul wants her to be welcomed is because he knows what she is holding in her hand is not just from his heart, but is from the very heart of God.

The Shout Outs

Now he is going to give a shout out. Now if I have counted right, in verses 3-16 there are actually 24 different people, 2 families, a household, a mother, a sister, a group of brothers, and a group of saints named. 18 times Paul says greet so and so. 16 times specifically, he calls out a name, and 2 times he gives a general greet. "Greet one another with a holy kiss. All of the churches of Christ greet you". He does this because people matter to God and people matter to Paul. Can you imagine being on this list in the Bible? If I would have met the Apostle Paul I would have remembered him, but I would not have expected him to remember me. Do you ever have that relationship with people? People that you know and you know their name, but 6 months later when you run into them, there is no way you expect them to remember who you are. These people Paul remembered. Wow! I think that is significant. When he begins to go down the list he begins to give a shout out. According the urban dictionary on the internet, [c](#) *shout out* literally means "a public expression of thanks or gratitude". So most of these people he not only gives a shout out to, but he tells them why they get a shout out. For example, why did Bro Ricky and Mrs. Celisa get a shout out in federal court Friday? It is because we were the other grandparents. Now if you are a grandparent, you know there is not anything else you had rather be shouted out for, amen. Paul beings to give some shout outs. Now what I want us to do is to notice the shout outs and see if they are here in Hardin as well. If Bro Ricky was to write back to this Church in 20 years and mentioned some people, would these things be mentioned?

Beloved: throughout verses 5-12

You see when you get home if you will explore verses 3-16, one of first things that he shouts out is a beloved brother. If you read on down the list there are a couple of other times where he mentions someone and he calls them beloved. Most people that I know who are beloved and have that adjective describing them, are actually people who in and of themselves, know how to love other people. Do you not agree? I have never met a beloved person who did not love back. Honestly they do not love back, they initiate love. Therefore they hold a special place in your heart because of their ability to choose someone to love, and then evaluate their need, and elevate their need. Then they look within themselves and become that person who just always finds a way to impart of their own resources to meet the need in the life of the one being loved. Who are you beloved to? Has there been anyone in the Church that you have just felt compelled by the Lord to just choose them out, check on them, and find out what their needs are? Once you find out what those needs are, you elevate that to a place in your life, and on a repeated basis you are giving of your own resources to meet that person's need. We need a lot of beloved people in the Church.

Hospitality: verse 4

We also discover in this passage there were some people in the Church who were very hospitable. You will not find the word hospitable in these verses but you will find the concept. In verse 4 as Paul greets Prisca and Aquila, they are mentioned 6 times in the New Testament. There are 3 times in the book of Acts, and 3 times by the Apostle Paul. If you will look at the ending chapter in 1 Corinthians, when Aquila and Prisca were in Corinth, they opened up their house and let the Church gather there. Now they are in Rome and they have opened their house again and are letting people gather there in the name of the Lord. That is called being hospitable. Did you know the concept of being hospitable is where we get

our English idea of a hospital? Now no one wants to check into the hospital and stay. You know the difference between a condo and a hospital. You know the difference between a home and a hospital, but our actual word hospital comes from where we get our English word hospitable, and here is what is happening. In the early Church you had people that no matter what they had, they opened it up to the larger body of Christ and said why do we not meet here at our house? Now I have no idea what it was like to be a housewife in those days. So I do not know if on the night before, the housewife stayed up all night cleaning, and cooking, and vacuuming, and dusting. I have no idea if the man had to weed eat with his machete because everyone was coming over, but people who are hospitable are more into people than they are into things. We need people like that in the Church. If we decided next Sunday we were not going to meet here at Hardin but we were going to meet in our communities, how many would open up your home and say I will take 4 or 5 families at our place? Or how many of you would say oh no? You would have a list for your husband of things that would have to be finished before you could have anyone over to your house. We are losing that art in the Church because we are getting more into things, and more about what people think about our things, than we are into actual people. As a matter of fact, if some of you who do not keep a good house, and cannot cook very well, would start opening up your house, more people would open up their house, because more people are like you. If the only homes the Church ever meet in are those showcase homes, in 25 years no one will ever meet in a home again in the Church. Are you listening to me? We need people who are hospitable because there are times when people need not to sit in a sanctuary, or a worship center, but they just need to sit on a couch in a living room and be able to pour out their heart. Not to a large group of people that they are not intimate with, but to a smaller group of people that they know really well. Now in today's society we do not have to choose between a public building and a house church, we need both. We need a place that will hold the family in our entirety, and places that will hold us in our smallness, and our intimacy.

Hard Workers: throughout verses 6-11

Nest we see some people who are hard workers. Now when you read down through there you will see twin sisters whose names are d *Tryphaena* and e *Tryphosa*. In the Greek their names mean "delicate and dainty". Get this picture, we have twin ladies in the Church named *Delicate* and *Dainty*, now with those names we expect them to be hosting the house Church service amen, pouring their tea, or their coffee! No...do you know what these *Delicate* and *Dainty* ladies have done? They have rolled up their sleeves, and Paul calls them hard workers. 3 or 4 different times Paul is going to give a shout out to someone here because they are hard workers. That is what we need in the Church. We need a group of people who have that ability to roll up their sleeves and do not mind getting dirty, because they know the job needs to be done. Most of the time when that job is being done, they are not ever going to get any credit, or glory. No one will ever make mention of them unless they get a shout out, and that is about all they will ever get. They will never have their name on a marquee, they will never have a book written about them, but they might get a shout out. That is until they stand before God, and He reviews their life, and He honors them as one of the greatest who has ever lived. You see with God, it is reversed. If you want to be great, you become the least. The way you become the least is by being a worker, being a helper by being a servant, willing to take off your shoes and someone else's shoes, and wash their feet.

Chosen in the Lord: verse 13

Then he talks about a man whose daddy was in the right place at the right time. Have any of you ever been fortunate to be in the right place at the right time, and your life completely changed? There was a guy named Rufus, and the adjective that Paul uses to describe him is chosen in the Lord. Wow! That phrase chosen in the Lord means he was special. He was choice, he was grade A, he was prime rib, and he was filet mignon so to speak, in the Lord. When you investigate Rufus, here is what we know

about him. We saw him in Mark's gospel, chapter 15. Do you remember when Jesus was going to Golgotha and had to carry the cross? They found a man by the name of Simon of Cyrene to bear his cross, and Mark mentions his 2 sons, Alexander and Rufus. This is he. Did you realize that? We think we know that because Mark's gospel was written to the people of Rome, or near Rome. When he is writing his gospel he is not writing a diary during Jesus' ministry and then publishing this a few hours after His death and resurrection. It is years later that Mark is writing, and he knows that one of the greatest Christians in the city of Rome is a young man by the name of Rufus, so he weaves his story into the gospel story. Mark is the only writer who does this. Now if Mark mentions a man by name, and his 2 sons by name, you know something is going on, amen? Simon, Rufus' dad, just happened to be in the right place at the right time, and he bore the cross of Jesus. Now watch this; when Paul writes his letter to the Church in Rome, he gives a shout out to Rufus and his mother. We do not know about Simon, but here is what I have to believe. Because dad was in the right place at the right time, I do not think Rufus ever got over that. We do not know exactly why they came to Jerusalem, except we trust they came to honor the feast as so many others were, but they got drawn into the crucifixion story. Can you imagine that little boy, with his brother Alexander, following their daddy as he took a cross down the *Via Dolorosa*? I just happened to think they hung around long enough to watch what would happen, and they saw that Man die on a cross, a cross that daddy helped to bear. And then later they heard that He was resurrected from the grave, and that He is the Messiah, and then Rufus came to know Jesus as his Lord and Savior, and he gets a shout out. Some of us need to be thankful that our mom, or dad, or grandparents were where they were, when they were there, because that is one of the ways we came in contact with the gospel. It had nothing to do with us; it had to do with someone else. But because they were in the right place at the right time, that blessing is in our life.

Approved: verse 10

There is another word used in this passage called approved. Paul gives a shout out to a man who is approved. That word *approved* means "tried and tested". It was used in the metal works to talk about silver or gold that had been carefully tested and was found to be pure. I pray that in the Church at Hardin, there are some of us here who have lived so long that we have been tried and tested by the tribulations and trials of this world, and there is no doubt the community can look at us and say, "100%". "My mind is made up, I will never doubt them again because of what they have been through, there is no way they are not a true believer". We need those kinds of people in the Hardin Church.

Mothers: verse 13

Now I want you to watch this. Paul gives a shout out to a mother, Rufus' mother. He said she is my mother too. Now he did not mean physically. Here was this mother who had the ability to mother everyone around her, and she mothered Paul. Can I say this to you ladies? I do not know anything that could be better said of you than that you mothered your children, you mothered God's servants, and you mothered the Church! How can some of you let go on what you see go on, and you act like it is none of your business? Have not some of you lived your life long enough that you see some young people making some terrible mistakes, and you let them make them? You never try to bring that little girl under your arms, or you never try to bring that person under you, in order to give to them. We need mothers in this Church. Mothers are the nurturers. You note the little sniffle that could turn into the pneumonia that could turn into the cold. They would have to be dying before we dads would ever notice! Ladies, help us be the Church at Hardin that God wants us to be. Let us pray...