

Serving Christ

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Date: 27 May 2011

[0 : 0 0] Paul's ministry And when they were come to him, to Paul, he said unto them, You know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, serving the Lord with all humility of mind and with many tears and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews, and how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul says that he was serving the Lord, and there's some things that stand out in what he says here, especially looking at verse 19. He says he was serving the Lord with all humility of mind and with many tears and temptations.

I want to look at these three things. Firstly, to serve the Lord, we need to serve the Lord with humility, with humility of mind, with all humility of mind.

Did you hear about the preacher who said he had a wonderful sermon on humility, but was waiting for a large crowd before preaching it? He wanted to have lots of people to hear how good he put a sermon together on humility.

And we can all think there's lots of little jokes about humility, about humility badges and so on. But of course, humility is something, if we think that we're humble, we can get proud even of being humble, can't we?

[2 : 1 4] And that's a danger that we need to watch out for. And Micah 6 verse 8, the prophet wraps it all up as far as crystallizes everything about really what matters.

In Micah 6 verse 8 he says, He hath showed thee, O man, what is good, and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.

He says that humility is all part and parcel of something that God really treasures and values there. As to what doth the Lord require of thee?

To do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God. And sometimes we can miss that, can't we? We can miss that important walk that we need to walk, the walk of humility, the walk of walking humbly with thy God.

It's important. And humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up. It says in James 4.10. John Flavel said, They that know God will be humble, and they that know themselves cannot be proud.

[3 : 2 3] When we think, really, what have we to offer of ourselves? We've got nothing really to be proud of, of ourselves. Really, all that is good is God.

It's like Paul says, that there is no good in me. How does it go? In me dwelleth no good thing. In me dwelleth no good thing.

This is Paul, the leading light of the New Testament, the one that God used in so many tremendous ways.

Yet he says, In me dwelleth no good thing. And he could state how humility is so essential. 1 Peter 5.5 it says, God resists the proud.

Those that have that pride, those that think that they've got it all together, God resists them, but he gives grace to the humble. If you can just plead his grace, if you can just come before his throne of grace and plead his grace, he will give grace to you.

[4 : 3 6] He will give grace to you. He promises to do that. It's interesting where it says, Be clothed with humility. It's got the sense of an apron. You know, I don't know. I don't put an apron on very often.

I know Julie puts the apron on a lot, doing the dishes and everything. Sometimes we can neglect putting the apron on, can't we? Us, all of us can.

We don't put the apron on of humility. Be clothed with humility. Put the apron on. And do some of that menial work, those things that you might think are beneath you, that we should not have a pride

that has any regard to that.

Whatever we do, whether it's some simple practical things, just as important as any other thing. And 1 Peter 5, verse 6, he says, Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.

I mean, think of how mighty is his hand. I spoke one time before, how he measures the universe in the span of his hand.

[5 : 39] How God's hand is so huge, it's massive. How God is so beyond and above. Anything we can compare him to. As we know, I know there's various preachers that have talked about the universe and the stars and the expanse of the planetary system.

And it's just mind-boggling that we can't conceive of it. And yet we know that we can humble ourselves under that mighty hand and he will exalt us in due time.

It's wonderful to know that he holds us in his hand and we have that wonderful safety and that wonderful blessing of his comfort. And we need to be cautious and careful about pride.

Every one of us, we can all be subject to this dread characteristic of pride. I know I can be so guilty of it very often myself.

I must confess that at times I have pride. And I could be proud about things that are true and right. Like I'm proud of the doctrine of our church, of our stand on truths.

[6 : 41] And yet sometimes when someone differs, we can be lacking tact and lacking courtesy. And we can have a pride that inflates and puffs us up.

And as the word says that, you know, we should be careful and cautious that even though, I mean, the Pharisees, they were straight down the line. They had everything right. They had their I's dotted and their T's crossed.

And they're the ones that the Lord vented his wrath against in the Gospels, aren't they? They're the ones. And yet the Pharisees, and they were so holy, the word Pharisees, I understand it, has got a context of separated.

Now they were separated, they had a holiness. But sad to say their holiness got to the point where it was all about rules and regulations that weren't really in the Bible.

And they made the mistake of going to those extremes. And yet it kind of sticks out, doesn't it, that these are the ones that our Saviour challenged, that their pride that they had was so wrong.

[7 : 47] And likewise too, I've talked how in some doctrinal dialogue I've had with someone that they show a lack of grace, a lack of humility, that they're bombastic and proud.

And if any one of us can think of our standing before God, that we're all unworthy sinners, and we're all inadequate, unworthy of his grace, and if we look at things in that context, then a fellow sinner who's not quite seeing the truth as you would see it, as it stands, we can still implore them and beseech them and seek to correct them, but with that right spirit, that spirit of humility.

And that's what we need to be careful we have at all times. And it's interesting, in the nation of Scotland, I've got this little Scottish quote here, that if you go to Edinburgh, and I've been to Edinburgh and seen Edinburgh Castle, and I'm told that this Edinburgh Castle was a castle with a tower of seemingly insurmountable strength.

But the truth is that the castle was once captured. The fortress had an obvious weak spot, which defenders guarded, but because another spot was apparently protected by its steepness and impregnability, no sentries were posted there.

And at an opportune time, the attacking army sent a small band up that unguarded slope and surprised the garrison into surrender. Where the castle was strong, there it was weak.

[9 : 24] And it can be true of your life and mine, that when we think we've got it all together, and we might point fingers at others about their faults and failings, that really that can be our weakness too, that we don't realise it.

And we can big note ourselves and make that mistake at times. And let's instead have the spirit and the attitude of the greats of old.

And the truly greats were really sometimes quite unknowns. Really quite people that weren't the leading ones, that didn't have their names in lights or weren't recognised by the establishment of the day at times.

But we can look back, for example, at one man called Hudson Taylor. Of course, he is well known. And this young 21-year-old missionary, he arrived in Shanghai and he founded the China Inland Mission.

Twelve years later, he founded the mission and he became the first Protestant missionary to go into inland China. Imagine that, going into this hostile foreign culture and the other end of the earth and taking the gospel message into a language that you scarcely knew the way to speak.

[10:36] And yet God used Hudson Taylor dramatically. And for the next 40 years, he ministered in this missionary work and at the time of his death, in 1905, the mission had 205 stations, 849 missionaries and 125,000 Chinese Christians.

And Taylor also translated the New Testament into the Ningpo dialect, translated the whole New Testament into this foreign tongue. And near the end of his life, two ladies came to visit Hudson. They'd been talking about him and they wondered whether Hudson was ever tempted to be proud. And one of the ladies went to Mrs. Taylor and she did not know the answer to that.

So she went, Mrs. Taylor went to Hudson and asked him the question and he was surprised and inquired, proud about what? Mrs. Taylor replied, why?

About the things you have done. Then immediately Hudson replied with the beautiful answer, I never knew I had done anything. He was right. Hudson Taylor never had done anything for it was God who had used Hudson Taylor and worked in and through him.

[11:52] And that's all for any of us, isn't it? Whether in the Sunday school, whether in the youth ministry, whether in music, whether in whatever activities of the church, Bible studies and prayer times and track giving, sharing personal witnessing, whatever it be that God uses you to do and be, it's God who works in and through us for his pleasure, for his good glory and pleasure.

And his pride stopping you from becoming great in the Lord's eyes. We can seek him, ask him in prayer to humble yourself before the Lord.

Charles Spurgeon said, the higher a man is in grace, the lower he will be in his own estimation. Not because he is comparing himself with people, but because he is comparing himself with the Lord God.

We can be nothing in comparison with Christ. All we can do is thank him for his grace and salvation. All we can thank him is that he's purchased us by the blessed blood that he shed for us.

And he's taken us out of that miry clay and set our feet on the rock. All we can do is thank him for that grace, that he would choose us despite our inadequacy and our unworthiness.

[13:07] So Paul, he said, serving the Lord with all humility of mind. Let that be that mindset that we have, that we serve the Lord with all humility of mind. And secondly, the serving with tears.

Paul says that he served the Lord with all humility of mind and with many tears and temptations. Many tears. Where did Paul get the ink? Someone quote here, where did Paul get the ink with which to write his comforting letters?

Where did David get the ink? To write his comforting psalms? Where did John get the ink? To write his comforting revelation. They got it out of their own tears.

When a man has gone through the curriculum and has taken a course in dungeons and imprisonments and shipwrecks, he has qualified for the work of sympathy. It's true, isn't it?

That these men are God. God used because of the life they live, of the experience they had, of the tests and troubles they endured and their faith shone through.

[14:11] Even though there were times of tears. And for all of us, we know any one of us can think back of times and occasions when we've wept, when we've had tears of loss, of tragedy, of grief, of hurt, sad times, times of tests and trouble.

And what are tears? The question we could answer in different ways. The chemist will tell you that tears are a solution of sodium chloride, so salt and calcium, along with a few other chemicals mixed together to make up the solution.

The physiologist will tell us that the tear is the lubricating fluid out of the eyeball, secreted from the glands, is poured over the eyes to keep them from becoming dry.

And some would tell us tears are something to be scorned. But we know that God's word tells us tears are something precious and beautiful.

The psalmist put them in his cup and he counted them. Tears are the distillation of the soul. Tears are far more to do with the soul than they are to do with the body. More tears are shed from the pain that cuts the soul than those that afflict the body.

[15:27] Tears are the concentrated extract of human sorrow. We can think back of loved ones we've lost and we miss, tragedies we've encountered, people that we miss, like folk that have come and gone from this church.

I've wept over that. And brothers and sisters tears are something that grips us, that grip Paul. He said with many tears. He might have had those tears in warning as we know it says elsewhere in verse 31.

He says, Remember that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn everyone night and day with tears. There's times to warn people. As a preacher, as any one of us, we can warn and encourage and as it says that we should restore others and watching ourselves lest we slip up. That we should warn people and exhort people with that love that constrains us with tears, with that urging and that warning, that exhorting.

There's times when you'll need to do that. What more important message can we have than the message of the gospel on our lips? And woe to me if I preach not the gospel.

[16:41] And in Luke 7.37 we hear the account of a woman who wept such tears as to wash the Saviour's feet with them. And what did our Saviour say?

He was blessed by her tears. He counted that a beautiful thing. It was something he treasured and he was blessed by. Those tears of gratitude as they were likely tears of repentance as she came to him to acknowledge the need of him and she wept before the Almighty One bathing his feet with her tears.

Tears of gratitude. Sometimes the Christian walk can mean tears from disappointments. People might hurt you and sadden you. And we know that's par for the course isn't it?

Through life we've seen I know I've seen many things of such that you feel so grieved and hurt and wounded and yet we know it's human nature to be uncaring and thoughtless and you can only leave it with the Lord when people act like that because I suppose we've all failed and we've all all can find fault.

And tears it makes us realise our dependence on God when we realise as that woman did bathing her feet with her tears realising that we are utterly dependent upon Him.

[18:04] The law the Pharisees about only cast hateful scorns and snide remarks you could imagine and yet our Saviour gave His love His forgiveness His unmerited grace to her and sometimes it's through the tears that we can see God it's through her tears that she saw the Saviour isn't it?

It's through her tears that she saw her own lack and her own sinful estate that she could see through those tears she could see the Saviour and she could hear His voice and some yet are too proud to come and kneel at His feet some are too proud to come and kneel at His feet they just they would look astray and aside at this woman and not care about her and not care about their own heart and realise not realise their own absolute need of the Saviour and they're the ones who miss heaven they're the ones who don't bow at His feet in tears and Jesus wept Jesus wept we know in John 11 as He saw His loved one His friend Lazarus He saw He was buried He passed away He saw the grief of Lazarus' sisters and friends about and Jesus wept and if Jesus weeps then so should we

Amen because He should be our model He should be our model we should weep with those who weep we should care about those who are grieving He's the man of sorrows Isaiah 53 He was acquainted with grief He knew exactly what it was to grieve to weep He was acquainted with grief and just the same as He knows exactly how to comfort those who are grieved or distressed it's wonderful Hebrews 2.18 says for in that He Himself has suffered being tempted He is able to succour them that are tempted what that's saying there in that He has suffered being tempted or tested and tried our Saviour is tempted and tested as we know yet without sin He was tested in every way as we are tested and tried in that He has tested and tried in that He suffered being tempted He's able to succour which means to run to the aid of to run to the support of to be a help to to relieve to bring comfort and soothing to here's the one so friends today we know we can all have lonely times sad times

He is able to relate to you He is able to empathise with you He is able to be moved with the feelings that you are moved with because He was moved with them Jesus wept and He is able to come to your aid to come to your help so come as one who would bring soothing and comfort to your life and it might be that Paul cried when he had to warn people with tears as it says and Spurgeon described tears as liquid prayers prayers are liquid tears sometimes it's all we can do isn't it as it talks in Romans how it's prayers that we can't scarcely utter we can't form words to say it could be just groanings that can't be uttered and it could be that the tears we cry are the prayers that God hears sometimes maybe you can get to that point sometimes maybe you are at that point or have

been at that point sometimes where you're just at the end of your strength that all you can do is just cry and just weep before Him and yet the Lord recognises that and He's blessed by that could be tears of joy over His blessings tears of gratitude they're beautiful tears too aren't they tears of gratitude for what He has done for us and tears of a burdened heart for those that are without Christ for those that we care about who are not saved we can have tears for them too and for us for all of us

I pray that we've had those tears of repentance whether they've been shared or certainly that sense of repentance that reality of our repentance you know Paul says that we should have repentance towards God and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ when we come to the foot of the cross and we realise the extremity of what He has done for us we realise the inadequacy of anything we can ever do to appeal to His grace then we must come in repentance and we must come in acknowledgement of our burden of sin like the pilgrim did in Pilgrim's Progress that beautiful story as He pictures there as Bunyan pictured the pilgrim carrying this massive heavy load this bulky weight on His shoulders the weight of His sin of the conviction of the dread affliction that was His sin and what did He do?

[23 : 16] He came to the cross and He left the burden down He left the burden there as He gave the burden of His sin to Christ as Christ paid the price for His sin at the cross of course it's figurative that it shows the picture there that when we come to Christ the burden of our sin is torn away from our back the Lord looses us from that weight from that guilt from that shame and as those tears of repentance come as we bow our knee our heart to Him we find His salvation His saving grace tears of desperation friends as a Christian I think sometimes we lack that those tears of desperation those tears of travail we should care about the lost we should care about those without Christ we should care as the word urges us that the love of Christ constrains us there's a constraining there's an emotion there isn't there there's an emotion that the love of Christ

His love in us our love for Him it constrains us it compels us to have that message on our lips to have that message imparted to those around about however we can and friends so think of that think of the tears Paul had tears I'm sure as he preached as he witnessed as he testified both to Jews and to Greeks of that repentance of that faith that message those tears of warning and Joel 2 verse 12 it talks about therefore also now saith the Lord turn ye even to me with all your heart and with fasting and with weeping and with mourning and rend your heart and not your garments and turn unto the Lord your God for He is gracious and merciful slow to anger and of great kindness and repenteth him of the evil think of that there turn ye tears serve Him serve Him with humility of mind serve Him with tears lastly serve Him with trials

Acts 20 19 Paul goes on serving the Lord with all humility of mind and with many tears and temptations this word temptations has the sense of trials of tests of troubles of temptations of trials of tests of troubles and the trying of our faith is something that should make it stronger knowing this that the trying of your faith worketh patience James 1 3 the trying of your faith worketh patience so as a Christian when trying times come it's actually going to make you stronger it worketh patience in other words it's going to make you more persevering it's going to make you stronger more steadfast think of Paul what did Paul face he had a whole arsenal of trials and troubles in such huge number we look at the accounts I'll read some of them accounts of Paul's life and we can see he had some avowed enemies that were out to kill him they were actually out to kill him committed to that in Acts 23 12 it talks to some that they had bound themselves together under a curse to not drink or eat till they had killed Paul 2 Corinthians 6 verses 3 onwards he talks about that the ministers of God or the servants of God which all of us are we should be approving ourselves he says in much patience in afflictions in necessities in distresses in stripes so being flogged with the whip in imprisonments in tumults in labours in watchings which are sleepless nights in fastings by pureness by knowledge by long suffering by kindness by the

Holy Ghost by love unfeigned there's a lot of trying times there isn't there that Paul had he says in verse 8 by evil report and good report we can all face that as deceivers and yet true as unknown and yet well known as dying and behold we live as chastened and not killed as sorrowful yet always rejoicing as poor yet making many rich as having nothing and yet possessing all things look at the record of his life imprisonments tumults which is like riots in labours sleepless nights going without food we've got nothing in comparison have we brother sister tonight what Paul faced he served in trials in temptations and he goes on in a like account in 2 Corinthians 11 verse 23 in part he says in labours more abundant in stripes above measure in prisons more frequent in deaths oft so

frequently he was at the point of death he frequently got to the point where he was just about to cark it he was just about to give his last breath he says in deaths oft of the Jews these five times received I forty stripes save one thrice was I beaten with rods once I was stoned thrice I suffered shipwreck and night and a day

I've been in the deep in journey often in perils of waters in perils of robbers in perils by my own countrymen in perils by the heathen in perils in the city in perils in the wilderness in perils in the sea in perils among false brethren in weariness and painfulness in watchings often in hunger and thirst in fastings often in cold and nakedness beside those things that are without that which cometh upon me daily the care of all the churches in perils brothers and sisters Paul's life was filled with perils and crises 1 Corinthians 4 a like account verse 11 even unto this present hour we both hunger and thirst and are naked and are buffeted and have no certain dwelling place so here he is Paul's saying we have no certain dwelling place he's wandering around homeless and labour working with our own hands being reviled we bless being persecuted we suffer it being defamed we entreat it so being defamed being slandered we entreat we are made as the filth of the world as the off-scaring of all things to this day you know

[30 : 00] Paul hadn't heard about the prosperity gospel he couldn't tune in to TBN and watch the health, wealth and prosperity gospel and hear how God's going to give him a Rolls Royce and all this caper you know he had perils perils, troubles afflictions torment trial in 2 Timothy 3 he writes to Timothy of persecutions and afflictions which came unto me what persecutions I endured but the Lord delivered me out of them all and he says yea and all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution so people tonight if you're living godly in Christ Jesus get ready for some persecution it's guaranteed God says it will happen you shall face it you're going to suffer persecution and will we be like those of Revelation 12 where it says they love not their lives unto the death you know it could come to it one day where we will be martyrs you know we should be his witnesses we should be his martyrs in the sense that we should be willing to die for our faith but even more important tonight to close is thinking about are you willing to live for Christ are you willing to live for your faith live the faith 24 7 by 365 are you willing to have that kind of mindset that Paul had a humility of mind not walking around holier than thou puffing yourself up with the wisdom that you have as I have you know woe unto me

I'm just the scum of the earth I'm just the off scouring I'm just the filth of the world in his sight there is none good so have that humility of mind that humility that humbleness of spirit that as the psalmist cried that you can have that the broken in heart that brokenness in your spirit that he will receive he will receive that brokenness of your spirit of your heart as you come in repentance to him you can have those tears those tears of repentance those tears and you can see him through your tears you can see his reception of you as many as received him to them gave him the power to become the sons of God even to them that believe on his name wonderful isn't it to think that he would receive you as we trust him he receives us and we can weep tears of gladness and joy today and we can think we can serve him through the temptations through the trials through the troubles that might dog your path through the opposition that might face you through the persecution that you might have to endure as a man of God as a woman of God you might have to face some tough things serve the Lord through it all like Paul did and he'll see you through the Lord will see you through and he'll say well done be encouraged be humble be prayerful and be steadfast and