

The Commonplace Christian is the Glory of the Church

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I want to speak from Romans 16 if you'll turn there. I want to speak on the commonplace Christian - the glory of the church. The commonplace Christian is the glory of the church. I'm not going to read the whole chapter. You could follow in verses, but I have chosen these greetings by Paul to the unknowns, to the forgotten, to the ones nobody remembers. So Romans 16:1. I hope I get all the names right. "I commend to you Phoebe, a servant of the church." Verse 3, "Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers." Verse 5, "Greet the church in their house." Verse 5, "Greet my beloved Epaenetus." Verse 6, "Greet Mary." Verse 7, "Greet Andronicus and Junia." Verse 8, "Greet Ampliatus." Verse 9, Urbanus and "my beloved Stachys" Verse 10 and 11, Greet Apelles and Aristobulus and Herodian. Verse 12, "Greet these workers in the Lord, Tryphaena and Tryphosa." What a name for twins! Some of you want biblical names. Tryphaena and Tryphosa. "And greet the beloved Persis." Verse 13, "Greet Rufus and his mother who has been a mother to me also." Verse 14, "Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the brothers with them." Verse 15, "Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas and all the saints who are with them." Verse 21, Timothy and Lucius and Jason and Sosipater - they greet you. Verse 22, "I Tertius, who wrote this letter, greet you..." How many of you remember that Tertius wrote Romans for Paul? Verse 23, "Gaius who is my host greets you." "Erastus... and our brother Quartus greets you."

What a line up of unknowns! Anonymous saints. We either know nothing about or we know very little about them. Oh, we know about Timothy and Phoebe a little bit. We know that she probably may have been the one who brought the letter from Paul to the Roman church. But, Andronicus? Who is that? Sosipater? What a name! But apparently, what a brother in Christ he was. And what made Epaenetus and Ampliatus and Persis and Stachys so especially loved by Paul that he says to the whole Roman church those four are beloved to me?

Commonplace Christians

I want to speak this morning to the beaten and the bruised here, to the alienated, the afterthoughts, the defeated, the discouraged, the downcast, the fainting, the fearful, those who are condemned and uncared for, the hopeless and the hurting, the lowest, the least, and the last, the poor and the needy, the weary, the weeping, and the wandering. You say, but that's our preachers and elders and deacons. No, hold on. It's many of us. Every Christian is often right there. The commonplace Christians. These common ones at the end of Romans, mostly just Christians, not anybody to this world, little insignificant people in the big Roman empire. They were nobodies in the eyes of this world, yet Paul makes them a big deal not only here, but in six books of the New Testament. Ninety-nine percent of the church are these people - the church of Jesus Christ in all of history. And it's these little people in little places in the Roman empire - the slaves, the servants, the workers, the laborers - normal, common Christians, most of whom aren't elders or pastors, yet they are in Paul's eyes often the heart and the fabric of the Kingdom

of God. Francis Schaeffer years ago had a sermon: "No Little Places; No Little People." Every Christian in every place is significant and noteworthy regardless of their public status, their gifting, their notoriety. This chapter, as does the book of Acts, 1 Corinthians 16, Colossians 4, 2 Timothy 4, and the book of Philemon show us this neglected fact that commonplace Christians are the heart and the glory of the church of Jesus Christ. Think about that. Ninety-nine percent of those in the body of Christ are commonplace Christians. Not common to God, not common in the bad meaning of the word to this world, but average, commonplace believers who love the Lord and are serving Him and nobody may know their name.

The Lord's Heart for His Lambs

So let's think from this chapter today a biblical theology of the heart and soul of the church and your place in it if you're not a pastor, an elder, a leader or something public. See and hear the Lord Jesus about such people. Matthew's Gospel, speaking about our Savior's ministry, His coming - He was going to bring truth and justice to the Gentiles. It says in there in Matthew 12, He will not break the bruised reed. He won't quench the smoking flax, the smoking wick, the flickering candle. He's not going to put the least one out, the bruised one, the neediest one that's almost gone, the Lord Jesus says I'm going to care for them. I'm not going to break the bruised reed. I'm going to preserve that one. Or the flickering, the faintly smoldering hint in the heart of the love of Christ that's almost gone out, the Lord Jesus says His ministry was going to especially be about those. That's how I am toward those bruised reeds and smoking flax. To the ones almost gone in other words, the Lord Jesus' ministry gave special attention.

And later in Matthew 20, the Lord Jesus says this: See to it, see that you, make certain that you don't despise one of these little ones. He's not talking about children. He's talking about believers. Make sure you don't despise even one of them, the least, the lowest, the neediest. Don't despise one of them. Because you know what? Their angels are always seeing the face of their Father in Heaven. Charles once in a message said, "If it's not beneath the dignity of angels to care for and serve any believer, then it's not for us either." Don't despise one of the least of these little ones. Now the Lord Jesus at the end of John's Gospel, He's soon ascending. And we know the Great Commission, but He speaks to one of the fallen ones temporarily. He's soon ascending. In His apostolic pastoral admonition, He says this: "Feed My lambs." Feed My lambs, My little lambs. Feed them. Peter, that's what you're to do. You're not a big shot. Feed the lambs. Tend My sheep. Feed My sheep. These are the ones on the Savior's heart. As far as all the sheep, to our great Shepherd of the sheep, we're all sheep equally. We're all a part of the flock of God. We're all stones in the building, all family members in the household of faith with equal standing before our Father who has loved us and saved us. Christ doesn't need celebrities. It's workers - workers that are at the heart of the Kingdom in the person of the common Christian. The nobody who's somebody to Christ.

Paul's Heart for Believers

Hear Paul's heart in the New Testament. This transparent love he's always expressing in his epistles. We often miss this - Paul's heart toward all the believers. You college students, perk up your ears. You teenagers, you singles, you young Christians, you wives and mothers, take heed and take heart. Paul's heart toward all: "We were gentle among you like a nursing

mother." We took care of you like a mother takes care of her own children. "Being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share even our own lives because you have become very dear to us." To the Corinthians, "I wanted to come to you." I wanted to visit you. I wanted to let you know the abundant love I have for you. "It is for you and your welfare because the love of Christ constrains me for you, saints." You, Corinthians. I have spoken freely to you. My heart is wide open. Make room in your hearts for us. I feel a divine jealousy for you since I betrothed you to Christ. I seek not what is yours, but you. I will gladly spend and be spent for your souls. Paul's heart toward every saint.

Now, Paul addresses such brethren as he did here in Romans 16 at the end of several epistles. Read 1 Corinthians 16. You see the same thing. Read Ephesians. Read Philipians. Read Colossians 4, 2 Timothy 4. It was the lesser knowns and the unknowns, not the leaders that Paul spoke to and about at the end of six epistles. Philemon was about one runaway fugitive slave, a prisoner, and Paul wrote an epistle in the New Testament about him and the redemption of Christ of his soul and to reconcile his owner with this unknown forgotten despicable slave. All the saints are in Paul's heart. The most carnal, the weakest, the neediest, the most marginalized on the fringe of the church, the one who feels like a shrimp every time they go to church and they're around the mature ones. All the saints from the leaders to the struggling believer, all are valuable and important to Paul. And Paul says to the Corinthians some remarkable things. Remember, he says this: "To those who seem to be less..." you're not less. And to those who feel: I'm not a hand. I'm not an eye, so I'm less. They're not less in any way Paul says. And those members who seem to be less, are not to be viewed by anyone as being less, but rather as indispensable and necessary and honored and significant.

Respect of Persons

Now brethren, we sin this way often in the church subtly and we don't even realize it. Respect of persons. Do we ever show it? The popular, the important, the well known, the gifted, the whatever. Do we show them respect of persons? Do we treat them differently than the newest babe in Christ? Than the most struggling saint who needs our love and our attention and a word in season rather than our favorite friend in the church? Jesus said the least of these. The least of these. That's Me. In that you've done it to the least of these, you've done it to Me. That's who I lovingly identify with - the unknowns. Just believers, followers of Christ. No celebrity status. Not remembered. Who don't care to be known. Who don't need to be recognized. Insignificant but powerful lives. The lemon pepper and the season salt of the Kingdom. Infiltrating, effecting, shaping, functioning in church life and Kingdom life. You all, the Lord said, are the light of the world and the salt of the earth. You all. God has been bringing and broadcasting the Kingdom of God through ordinary Christians throughout church history; building His Kingdom by taking the Gospel through 99% of His church nobodies. The commonplace Christians aren't known publicly. How many anonymous missionaries and martyrs have died alone - some were buried, some were not - and they're names are never known? And won't be known until eternity? Like Paul, can you imagine sending personal greetings to 35 Christians in a letter to a church, many of whom you've never met? Paul did - caring about them, commending them, honoring them, recognizing their service. Paul got it. But

we don't get it enough. "The glory of the church is found in all its saints in the glorious body of Christ," as Kuyper put it.

Now if you played high school football, guys, if you weren't a starter, you were a scrub, a bench warmer, a substitute, a backup. I remember early in high school the coach would walk by. All the subs were getting too close to the line of the playing field. He'd walk by: "Back up, back up, back up, boys." So we called ourselves lovingly "the backups." We're the backups. So if you're on a football team, you played in either one of four places: offense, defense, special teams or the bench. But contrast that with the Kingdom of God. There aren't three phases of the game. There's one phase. And everybody's a starter. No backups, no substitutes. No bench warmers. If you're warming the bench, and the pew in church, soaking it in and you're not advancing the Kingdom, get off the bench because you are in Romans 16, and they were workers. If you're a member of a church - 100, 500 - you're a full team player. So many Christians who aren't preachers or have any public ministry feel like they're a second team substitute. I don't do anything really in my church. I take up space. I love the sermons. And I love the church lunches. But I don't have any real significance. I mean, when it comes down to it, I'm not really needed. I wouldn't be missed a whole lot if I left. I don't make much difference. It doesn't matter a lot if I miss some days. I'm not really anybody. And then the devil comes to you and he steals the truth from you with lies like: See there, you're really not important. It doesn't matter if you go. It wouldn't matter if you left. You're not a blessing much to anybody. You're always struggling. You're a burden at times to others. It'd be better if you leave, because you're really insignificant and not important. You're just a member.

Just a Member?

Just a member? That's right. Just a member. Just a Christian. Just a child of God. Just an heir of Heaven. Just an ambassador of Christ. Just a follower of the Lamb. When the disciples returned with joy from ministry significance, they came back: "Lord, even demons were subject to us in Your name." Jesus burst their bubble. "In this, I say, rejoice not." Don't rejoice in this, that demons are subject to you, but rather rejoice what? That your name is written in Heaven. Your joy is not in what you do, what you accomplish, but it's in who you are - being a Christian. Not on what you do - your performance, your experience - but that you are a believer, a Christian, that you're an heir of Heaven. Just a member of Christ's glorious church.

What are we then? We're workers. In Romans 16, Paul calls a number of them workers, laborers. Laborers in the vineyard. The house of Stephanas devoted themselves to the service of the saints. Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. Greet Mary. And we know Mary and Martha. We know Mary the mother of Jesus. We know Mary Magdalene. This Mary - we know nothing of this Mary, and Paul says greet Mary who has worked hard for you. Mary, the hard worker. Urbanus, our fellow worker. Greet those workers in the Lord, Tryphaena and Tryphosa. Greet the beloved Persis who has worked hard in the Lord. And don't forget how Colossians ends. Aristarchus, Mark, Justus - my fellow workers for the Kingdom of God who have been a comfort to me. No little places and no little people. Workers. Givers. Servers. Encouragers. Prayers. Helpers. Goers... to Lebanon, to Nicaragua. To Poland, to Ecuador. Every Christian in their calling and gifting, significant to be a worker in the Kingdom.

Remember in 1 Samuel 30, David and the spoils. The Amalekites had raided Ziklag and they took everyone and took everything. David and his men went after them. Some became too tired to continue. Remember what they did? They stopped. They stayed by the stuff and some went on. They recovered all. And then some of them said when they came back from the spoils, hey, we get it, those guys can quit. No, they're just caretakers. They were the maintenance guys. They did the work of lesser. They just get their wives and children back. David said, no, it's not like that in my system. It's not like that in my kingdom. Those who do more or better are more important? No. The warrior and the cook and the janitor, equal in my kingdom. And David said for as his share is who goes to the battle, so his share will be who stayed by the luggage. All significant. David had the kingdom heart like Jesus and like Paul about every, every laborer in the kingdom being significant.

Believers are God's Treasured Possession

Beloved ones, listen to me this morning. You timid ones, you fearful ones. You who feel like you don't fit in and in your heart of hearts you don't truly feel needed. Your Kingdom significance is at the top of Jesus' list because of Romans 16. Because you are His own treasured possession. And if your importance or your significance is tied to a position, being a great homeschool mom, and showing the world how great your children are - you say I'm just a carpenter, a plumber, a wife, a mother, I drive for a company, I'm a student, I'm a corporate guy, but I don't mean a lot in terms of the Kingdom - if your view of yourself is wrapped up in your reputation or your accomplishments, you are on the wrong track with wrong thinking. The disciples said to Jesus: Lord, we had a whale of a time in ministry - great power. Don't find joy in that. Find joy in who you are. Your name is written in Heaven. Not what you've done, but who you are. I'm a Christian. There's the eternal joy. There's the eternal significance. Most of us will never be known outside our family and our church. But if we are a faithful Christian, a faithful husband and father, and a faithful church member, that's enough and it places us in Romans 16.

In the 19th century, there was a young couple from Georgia - Charles and Mary Colcock Jones. What a last name! Colcock Jones. I like to hear the British say that well. Colcock Jones. Lived in Georgia. Charles Jones inherited several plantations. He had 3,000 acres of prime Georgia land. Some inland, some nearer the coast. And [he was] a godly young man. He died 2 years before the Civil War ended. His wife Mary died 3 years after the Civil War ended. They were plantation owners in Georgia. And from their singleness and their time of engagement, they were all about the Gospel and all about the Kingdom. They were humble. They weren't aristocrats in their own minds, though others would have viewed them that way. They owned slaves that they inherited. And they had this view in their hearts: we think this is wrong. But we can't change it. What can we do now? What can we do now in this? And this wealthy young plantation owner said here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to become an evangelist to all the plantations in Georgia. And he went and talked to the plantation owners and said can I come and preach the Gospel to the blacks here and in the community? And he had a reputation among them and they allowed him to begin to do that. He became an evangelist in those years prior to the Civil War and into it. And thousands of blacks in that era came to the Savior in the South because of Charles Colcock Jones. He established a church and there were blacks in it

and whites in it that loved each other. And they sent out missionaries. And the record was that the blacks and whites would be weeping together, praying together as they would commission missionaries to go different places. And they loved Charles Jones and his wife. And he loved them right to the end. And they saw really what would have been a revival in those years in Georgia among the African American people. They are unknown today. Charles and Mary Jones. Forgotten, but known to God.

Believers are Known to God

And listen, brethren, you and most of us will not be known by this world or remembered in church history. You'll be a memory for a little while when you die. Loved by your church, loved by your brethren, loved by your family. But as years pass, you'll be a memory. Forgotten by the world. But, you as a little person who is not little, in little places that aren't little, you're known to God. And you're the heart and the glory of the church in the earth. Ninety-nine percent of the church in Christian history is Romans 16 people. And pastors and elders and deacons, it's them we better love especially and treat with honor and respect and tender care because the Lord Jesus does and Paul did and the New Testament rings with this reality of these saints - all the saints - possess the glory of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's pray. Father, would You give us the mind of Christ in this area? To see all Your saints as You do? To love them the way You do? To feed the lambs, to tend the sheep? Lord, every believer can do that with one another also. I pray that every Christian in here who feels like they're in that category of being on the fringe, being marginalized, not being important - I pray today, Lord, You would change their view of things. I pray You'd give us all a Kingdom perspective about the church in the earth. Lord, help us. Blessed be Your name. Bless Your Word for the honor and glory of Your Son. Amen.