

Psalm 144:9-11 (Opening)

9 *I will sing a new song to you, O God;
 upon a ten-stringed harp I will play to you,*
10 *who gives victory to kings,
 who rescues David his servant from the cruel sword.*
11 *Rescue me and deliver me
 from the hand of foreigners,
 whose mouths speak lies
 and whose right hand is a right hand of falsehood.*

To quote Charles Dickens classic

A Tale of Two Cities,

*“It was the best of times,
it was the worst of times,
it was the age of wisdom,
it was the age of foolishness,
it was the epoch of belief,
it was the epoch of incredulity,
it was the season of Light,
it was the season of Darkness,
it was the spring of hope,
it was the winter of despair,”*

OK, that’s just a little melodramatic as an introduction, but if it works for Dickens, it should work for me, right?

So, what am I referring to as the best of times and the worst of times? Well, and this is just for me remember, I’m not a big football fan, so the fact that today is “the big game” number XLVIII (I think that’s 48) isn’t such a big deal. But today is Groundhog Day, which for some reason I think is a kind of fun day. You get to pull some poor rodent out of its bed and ask it what the weather is going to be like. There’s something about how ridiculous that is that just makes it fun.

But that’s just me.

Here’s a question for you though; if you get Peyton Manning out of his hotel room early in the morning and he sees a Seahawk, does that mean there’ll be six more weeks of winter?

I’ve never really been a fan of football, so I’ve never really watched the “big game”. Oh, there’ve been times it’s been on in the room I was in, but I never really watched it. Not a big deal to me.

But, I understand that some people live and breathe football, and if you cut them today they'll either bleed orange and blue or bright green and blue. Either way, no big deal for me; just wake me up when it's over.

I've known people who couldn't get enough of whatever their favorite sports team was. They lived and breathed that sport, and their team could do no wrong; even if they lost. They follow their team religiously.

Some people have been called a "slave to fashion". They are always going out and getting the latest clothes from the best designers, spending huge amounts of money to look the way that the designers (and frankly no one else) think they should look.

It's easy to get caught up in the excitement of something like sports or fashion, or anything else like that. It's easy for some people to get carried away with it. And getting a little carried away isn't a problem. But when it becomes something that takes over your life, that's when it's a problem.

These things in our lives can get turned into things that control us. We no longer control our own actions; we rely on these things to drive us in the direction we need to go. That's when they start being a problem.

Let's take a look at Joshua 24:14, 15. Joshua had led the children of Israel into the Promised Land, after the death of Moses. He led them in some great battles. Then when he was old, and their enemies were leaving them alone, God told Joshua to gather Israel together and remind them of their covenant with God. So, Joshua told all of Israel to come to Shechem and he talked to them about God's promise to them. After he did that, he said this:

Joshua 24:14, 15

¹⁴ "Now therefore fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. ¹⁵ And if it is evil in your eyes to

serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

God, through Joshua, was calling His people to be willing servants, or volunteer slaves if you will. The people of Israel knew what the requirements were, what God expected of them. They knew what the laws were. God wanted them to commit, right then, to being volunteer slaves.

What's a volunteer slave? Well, let's back up a bit to Exodus 21 and take a look.

Exodus 21:2-6

² When you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve six years, and in the seventh he shall go out free, for nothing. ³ If he comes in single, he shall go out single; if he comes in married, then his wife shall go out with him. ⁴ If his master gives him a wife and she bears him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out alone. ⁵ But if the slave plainly says, 'I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free,' ⁶ then his master shall bring him to God, and he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost. And his master shall bore his ear through with an awl, and he shall be his slave forever.

This kind of slavery was usually done to pay off a debt that couldn't be paid off in any other way. So, if someone owed more than he could pay, he would become a slave to the person he owed until the debt was paid, or until the seven years were up, whichever came first. But, if the man who became a slave was single and got married during his servitude, his wife and his children would still belong to his former master. If the man wanted to stay with his family, and was willing to stay a slave, he and his master would go to the doorpost and pierce his

ear with an awl to show that he would forever be a slave, by his own choice. It says something similar in Deuteronomy 15:16, 17

Deuteronomy 15:16, 17

¹⁶ But if he says to you, 'I will not go out from you,' because he loves you and your household, since he is well-off with you, ¹⁷ then you shall take an awl, and put it through his ear into the door, and he shall be your slave forever. And to your female slave you shall do the same.

All that, by way of introduction to our scripture that we're actually looking at today, Romans 1:1-7.

Romans 1:1-7

¹ Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, ² which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, ³ concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh ⁴ and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, ⁵ through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, ⁶ including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,

⁷ To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul's letter to the Romans was probably written sometime in the 50's or so, in the first century AD. He was probably in Corinth at the time because he talks about Gaius, Erastus and Quartus, who were from Corinth in the closing of his letter.

Romans 16:23

²³ Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer, and our brother Quartus, greet you.

Paul expresses to the church in Rome how he wants to visit them, later on in chapter 1; yet another example of how we should be careful what we wish for, because Paul was brought to Rome in chains for trial before Caesar. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

Back to verse one of Romans 1. This is more than an introduction; it's a sermon all to itself. Paul introduces himself to the church in Rome as a servant of Christ Jesus. But the Greek word translated as servant would be better translated as slave. The Greek word is *doulos*. A *doulos* was a slave who had no standing in society, and was his master's property. You could be a *doulos* by birth, by being the child of a female slave, or by choice, by selling yourself into slavery to pay a debt.

Paul isn't the only New Testament writer who introduces himself as a slave. James does it, Peter does it in his second letter, and Jude does it, too. It's a common term that the Jews used to describe those people who serve God in a great way.

Moses is called a servant of God in Exodus 14:31. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are called God's servants in Exodus 32:13. Joshua is called a servant of God in Judges 2:8. Job is called a servant by God himself in Job 1:8 and again in 2:3. And David is called a servant of God in several of the psalms. Being called a servant of God was a big deal.

Paul continues in verse one by saying he was called to be an apostle. The Greek word translated called here is *kletos* (*klay-tos*); it can mean called, as in spoken to or yelled to, or it can mean invited, as in called to a feast. Paul of course is referring to his conversion experience on the road to Damascus, when he was struck blind and Jesus appeared to him. Jesus told Ananias that Paul was "a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel." He was chosen by Jesus for that purpose, an apostle to the Gentiles.

Like Paul, we're all called in some way. Maybe not quite like Paul was called, but we're all called. Jesus says in John 6:44

John 6:44

⁴⁴ No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.

God gives us the push, the calling, the interest in finding out more about Jesus. God draws us by calling to us.

Finishing verse one, Paul says he was set apart for the Gospel of God. Remember, the Greek word translated as Gospel is euaggelion (yoo-ang-**ghel'**-ee-on), which was the term used by the ancient Greeks as a proclamation of victory in battle. The word translated as “set apart” is aphorizo (af-or-**id**-zo). A better translation may be appointed for a particular purpose. Paul’s particular purpose for being appointed as an apostle was to deliver the victorious message of God to the Gentiles.

Paul continues by explaining the idea of the good news, the news of victory. God provided the news to His people long before Jesus arrived on the scene. The prophets told over many years that there would be one coming who would be the Son of God, descended from David by the way that humans figure lineage. Paul uses this to confirm that Jesus was in fact a man; fully human.

Then Paul goes on to say that through God’s power, by Jesus’ resurrection from the dead, He was declared as God’s Son. There are a few other times that Jesus is declared as God’s son, verbally. The first is at His baptism in the Jordan River by John, when God says “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” And the second is on the mountain with Peter, James and John, when God says the same thing, but adds “listen to him.” That’s power.

But more than just listen to Him, we’re called to obey. That’s part of what Paul talks about in verse five. The obedience of faith which we bring to all nations. Paul says that like him, we have received grace and apostleship. Our apostleship (with a little “a”) is slightly different than

Paul's Apostleship was. What is apostleship? The Greek word apostole (ap-os-tol-ay) is where we get the word apostleship. It was used in ancient Greek to describe sending someone away to do a specific thing; sending with a purpose. In that sense, we're all apostles. We have a purpose we've been sent out with. Our mission is to be a messenger of the victorious good news about God and Jesus; wherever we go.

In Matthew 28, starting in verse 19, Jesus does the sending out. He gives a commission to his followers who were there, and to all of us who follow him to this day and beyond. Most translations just say "Go", but a better way of understanding what Jesus says here is this:

Matthew 28:19, 20a

19 Therefore when you've gone out, make students for me from all nations. Immerse them by the authority of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. 20 Teach them to obey everything I commanded you.

So, there you go; our mission. We've been sent out with a purpose. And that purpose is the same as what Paul is telling us in Romans 1:5, to be a catalyst in our interactions with whomever we come in contact with. In chemistry, a catalyst is a substance that causes a reaction or a change in another substance, but remains unchanged by the reaction. So, we are to influence the world around us, without being influenced by the world around us.

Paul was more than just a slave for Jesus. He was a catalyst for the Gospel, causing change through his interactions with the people he came in contact with. We are called to do the same thing. As we walk through our daily life, we come in contact with lots of people; people in the grocery store; people in Wal Mart; people on the street; people on the highway. The way we interact with those people will cause a change in their lives. If you are a Godly example to those people you come in contact with; if you show them God's love for them, it's more likely that you will have a positive impact on those people, and

eventually they will be drawn by God to ask those important questions, starting with “What is wrong with you!? Why do you act that way?” They may not ask you, but you may be one of the people that influence them to ask someone, to be drawn to someone who answers their question, and helps bring them to the obedience of faith that Paul is talking about.

A slave always does the will of his master, or faces the consequences of their actions. As Christians, we are slaves to Christ, just like Paul says that he is a slave to Christ. Our Master has told us to influence people by our actions, so that God will draw them to Him.

None of us here are likely to be great prognosticators of climatology like Punxsutawney Phil, the groundhog in Pennsylvania. None of us are likely to be seen on a world-wide televised broadcast of a sporting event. But we all have the God-given ability to influence people around us, if only by our actions, to seek God and to find out that He wants them to be with Him.

1 Corinthians 7:20-23 (closing)

²⁰ *Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called.*

²¹ *Were you a bondservant when called? Do not be concerned about it. (But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.)*

²² *For he who was called in the Lord as a bondservant is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a bondservant of Christ.* ²³ *You were bought with a price; do not become bondservants of men.*

Questions

1. How is Joshua's call to choose whether to serve God in Joshua 24:14, 15 and Paul's call to "bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of His name" in Romans 1:5 the same? How are they different?
2. In Deuteronomy 10:16, 17, there's a description of making an outward sign of becoming a voluntary slave. What is the outward sign of our becoming a voluntary slave to Christ? Does that mean I should bring in an awl and pierce all our ears against the door of the church?
3. In John 6:44, Jesus says "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him." What drew you to want to follow Jesus? How can you use that as a catalyst in your interaction with people who aren't followers of Jesus?

James 1:1

*¹ James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,
To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion:
Greetings.*

2 Peter 1:1

*¹ Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ,
To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the
righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ:*

Exodus 32:13

*¹³ Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, to whom you
swore by your own self, and said to them, 'I will multiply your
offspring as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised
I will give to your offspring, and they shall inherit it forever.' "*

Judges 2:8

*⁸ And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of
110 years.*

Exodus 14:31

*³¹ Israel saw the great power that the LORD used against the
Egyptians, so the people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD
and in his servant Moses.*

Job 1:8

*⁸ And the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job,
that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man,
who fears God and turns away from evil?"*

Psalms 89:3, 4

- 3 *You have said, “I have made a covenant with my chosen one;
I have sworn to David my servant:*
- 4 *‘I will establish your offspring forever,
and build your throne for all generations.’ ”*