
God's Servants In The Shadows

Scripture reading: Romans 16:1-15 (NKJV)

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P R A Y E R

I N T R O D U C T I O N

As Daniel was reading our scripture text a few moments ago I would imagine you were sitting there thinking of two things:

1. Perhaps some of you were thinking, “You couldn’t pay me a million bucks to stand up in front of a crowd and try to read all those names.” **Daniel did it**

2. And perhaps some of you were thinking, “How in the world can anybody preach a sermon from this passage of scripture?”

Well first of all let me say this: I’m not sure Daniel pronounced all of these names correctly, but if you say them with confidence, it sounds like you know what you’re doing.

And as far as “getting a sermon” out of this passage, I assure you there is a wonderful message for all of us in this scripture.

As you have seen, this passage is primarily a “list of names.”

When we think of men and women in the Bible, generally the first NAMES that come to mind are the names of those who did GREAT and MIGHTY things for GOD.

- We think of NOAH building the ark.
- We think of MOSES receiving the Ten Commandments and parting the Red Sea.
- We think of DAVID slaying Goliath.
- We think of JOSHUA leading the Israelites in the fall of Jericho.
- We think of SAMSON slaying 1,000 Philistines with the jawbone of a donkey.
- We think of ELIJAH calling down fire from heaven.
- We think of PETER preaching that powerful sermon on the day of Pentecost that resulted in the salvation of 3,000 souls.
- And we think of THE APOSTLE PAUL and all the wonderful things he accomplished on his adventure-filled missionary journeys.

But this morning, I want to remind you that THE BIBLE is also filled with the names of many people who are LESS FAMILIAR to us, names which are not associated with ANY GREAT MIRACLES or EXTRAORDINARY ACCOMPLISHMENTS.

They are ORDINARY PEOPLE just like you and me whose names GOD CHOSE TO PERMANENTLY RECORD IN THE SCRIPTURES as a testimony to their faith.

I like to think of these “**obscure unknowns**” as “**God’s Servants**”. The apostle Paul concludes many of his New Testament letters with a tribute to these “**Servants in the Shadows**.” You see, Paul understood the valuable role each

and every one of these people played in the overall work of God's kingdom. Paul understood that while his work would receive more attention, he owed a debt of gratitude to all the "servants in the shadows" who contributed to his work in any way.

And so as Paul concludes this letter to the Christians in Rome, he gives us this extensive list of "servants in the shadows" who were near and dear to his heart.

For a few minutes, let's look at this list of names and consider their behind-the-scenes contributions to the Kingdom of God.

Verses 1, 2

1 I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also.

When Paul thinks of Phoebe, the thing he remembers most about her was her SERVANT'S heart and spirit. Phoebe dedicated her life to serving others without regard for personal glory or praise.

Verses 3-5a

Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. Likewise greet the church that is in their house.

We know of the many grave dangers Paul encountered on missionary journeys. What we don't think about are the names of those who put their own lives in jeopardy to help Paul. Two such people were **Aquila and his wife Pricilla**.

And you notice in the first part of VERSE 5, Aquila and Pricilla had opened up their own home as a **house of worship** where other Christians could come to fellowship.

How vital to the Lord's kingdom are Christian couples who devote themselves to the LORD'S work.

Verse 5b

Greet my beloved **Epaenetus**, who is the first-fruits of Achaia to Christ.

I will always remember the name of **Khaleel Fawachry**, my very first Muslim convert in my ministry.

In this 5th verse, Paul recalls the name of his very first convert in Asia Minor, a man by the name of **Epaenetus**. His name means "PRAISE WORTHY" and no doubt he lived up to that name because Paul refers to him as "**my beloved Epaenetus**"

Verse 6

Greet Mary, who labored much for us.

One thing that really stands out in Paul's New Testament writings is the important role women played in his ministry. The same was true of Christ's ministry.

While there are many women named "**Mary**" in the New Testament, Paul remembers this particular "**Mary**" as a very

hard **WORKER.**” I remember our sister Mary who came to our home to ensure that peter and his friends were ok and if there is anything they need she will be there for them. How many Churches are blessed to have hard working women! In fact, it could probably be said of many Churches, **“If it weren’t for the hard working women not much would get done!”**

Verse 7

7 Greet Andronicus and Junia, my countrymen and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.

Paul was certainly no stranger to prison cells. In fact the New Testament records four times Paul was put in prison for preaching the gospel, for a total of 5 ½ to 6 years of his life. In this 7th verse Paul mentions the names of two other men who “served time” for preaching the gospel, Andronicus and Junia. When Paul says, “who also were in Christ before me,” he is simply saying Andronicus and Junia had been Christians longer than he had.

Verse 8

8 Greet Amplias, my beloved in the Lord.

That brief statement says a lot about this man. Paul doesn’t mention any specific thing Amplias had done, other than simply say he loved him!

Verse 9

9 Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and Stachys, my beloved.

Paul especially remembers these two men for their faithful friendship to him. This is how it will be when we appear before the Mercy Seat of Christ, when every deed of faith regardless of how great or small, will be remembered by the LORD.

Verse 10

10 Greet Apelles, approved in Christ. Greet those who are of the household of **Aristobulus**.

Paul remembers Apelles as a man who endured great trials and persecution and through his faithfulness was approved by Christ.

Aristobulus was the grandson of Herod the Great, the wicked King who had ordered the slaughter of every male Jewish child under two years old in his attempt to kill young Jesus. As we can see in this verse **Aristobulus** didn't follow in the footsteps of his evil grandfather. He became a devout follower of Christ.

Verse 11

11 Greet Herodion, my countryman. Greet those who are of the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord.

Commentators are uncertain as to whether Herodian was an actual "blood relative" of Paul or if Paul loved him like a brother. In any case, he was near and dear to the heart of Paul.

The household of Narcissus refers to SLAVES owned by Narcissus. Remember it was Paul who said in Galatians 3:28 (NJKV) There is neither Jew nor Greek, there neither

slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Verse 12

12 Greet **Tryphena** and **Tryphosa**, who have labored in the Lord. Greet the beloved Persis, who labored much in the Lord.

Just as he had with Mary in verse 6, Paul remembers all three of these women for their hard WORK for the LORD and His Church.

Verse 13

13 Greet **Rufus**, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine.

Rufus was the son of Simon of Cyrene, the man whom the Roman soldiers compelled to carry the cross of Jesus. Paul also mentions Rufus' mother, who had been like a "mother-in-the-faith" to Paul.

Verses 14,15

Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren who are with them.

14 Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them.

We must remember in the early days of the Church most

Churches met in HOMES rather than in CHURCH buildings. In all likelihood these who are mentioned in verses 14, 15 were members of the same HOUSE Church who were meeting in private to escape persecution.

A P P L I C A T I O N

There are many valuable lessons we could learn from this passage. Let me just share a couple and then we'll close.

For one, it teaches us something about our Church. In this congregation we have some who have very visible roles and responsibilities. But we also have a number of people who "serve God in the shadows." Both are equally important and vital to the spiritual health of our Church.

- To those of you who prepare communion each month. Who prepare the Bulletin?
- -who make sure the heat or air-conditioning is turned on.
- -who make sure the Church's bills get paid.
- -who set up tables and chairs for fellowship gatherings.

To those of you

- -who make sure the trash is hauled off.
- -who send cards or call to check on those who are sick.
- Who extend a handshake to everyone who walks through the doors?

To all of you "who serve GOD in the shadows" let me just tell you how much you are appreciated and how vitally important your work is to the over-all well-being of this Church.

Thank God for all of you who "serve in the shadows?"

The other valuable lesson we can learn from this is

The LORD will never forget even the smallest of deeds you have done in His Name.

Hebrews 6:10 (NKJV) For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, *in that* you have ministered to the saints, and do minister.

Brothers and sisters, imagine if you will, A CHURCH where NO ONE cares who gets the credit or the praise so long as Jesus Christ receives His due glory!

Thank God for all those who “serve in the shadows!”