

TERTIUS

Psalm 100:4 reads “Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise: be thankful unto Him and bless His name.”

Of course being thankful and singing praise is not always an easy task. What I noticed first about this passage though is that it mentions Him and His three times in a short passage. The focus is on Him, and if we keep the focus on Him it will be easier to be thankful and sing praise. I heard a woman say yesterday that these days have shown us who our people are and I am somehow able to relate that to that passage. You see, we have been dealing with this COVID-19 for a while now and it has affected a lot of lives. Businesses have been closed, schools closed two months early, people are being asked to wear masks in public leading to confrontation and through all of this we have learned who our people (friends) are while I have been able to personally grow and discover a little bit about myself.

I have been spending a lot of time in the book of Romans and it has brought some wonderful perspective to this situation. You see, my life hasn't been terribly affected by the situation other than having to wear that terrible mask, work a few more hours and getting to interact with my children a bit more due to a lack of sporting events and extracurricular activities in the afternoon. So while skimming through Romans I think of what matters most, what is most important and what comes first. We all have characteristics, attributes and roles to play. I am a middle-aged man (44), American of Irish descent, Caucasian, husband, father, son, produce manager of a grocery store that will one day belong to my wife, Air Force veteran of a few conflicts, and I am certain that there is more. All of those things mean something to me, they play a big part in my identity. I love my wife, adore my children, take pride in my job, am proud to have served my country, love my country and its history and even feel a deep connection to the history, conflict and struggles of my Irish ancestors. Most importantly, however, is that I am a Christian. I have heard, believed, repented, confessed, been baptized for the remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit, and do my best to rely on God and stay faithful to my dying day all the while falling short on a daily basis thus relying on His saving grace. So what does that have to do with anything? What does that have to do with coronavirus, Romans, etc.?

While considering the book of Romans I considered the scribe that penned it for the apostle Paul. His name was Tertius, which in the Latin means “third” and was a common name for Roman slaves. I believe that he was Roman and not Jewish because of the name and near the end he takes a moment to greet some friends back in Rome. So while considering the book of Romans, the scribe who put pen to paper I considered the outlook of the one listening to Paul speak as he was being guided by the Holy Spirit. As some is probable, some is speculation but nonetheless seems plausible considering his identity and that we don't really know anything about him other than he listened and wrote while Paul put together the book of

Romans. Roman, slave, man, disciple of Paul, slave to Christ is how I would describe him and those are all of the things that he will feel a connection to as he writes down this epistle for Paul.

Paul starts out gunning, speaking on God's wrath on unrighteousness and declaring that those who profess to be wise are fools in God's eyes. The judgement of God will render each person according to his or her deeds. Our deeds as such are not what get us in God's good graces so much as the submission of the heart to the will of God that leads us to do good almost out of habit. As a former slave to the Roman Empire, Tertius may have been thinking "yeah, all of you Romans are nothing but fools. You think you're special because you're Roman but you're not." A little childish but anything is possible, and he wrote it down nonetheless, possibly praying for strength from God to forgive his un-pure thoughts concerning those who once persecuted him. Paul then takes it directly to the Jews, letting them know that they are just as guilty as the Gentiles because all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Their circumcision means nothing because there must be faith to accompany the action. Abraham had faith in God before he was circumcised, proving which one must come first, and this would resonate with the ones who claimed to be descendants of Abraham. The faith that he speaks of is faith in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The righteousness of God is revealed through faith in Jesus to all who believe. Once again, we may have seen a little animosity coming from Tertius. He was someone who heard of the power of Christ and acted on it while the Jews were the ones who denied, crucified, and continued to deny His deity. Tertius may have felt like Jonah preaching the gospel to the Ninevites. While begrudgingly doing the will of God, secretly praying for the people to burn. Again though, listening to the conviction of Paul making a plea to save the Jews from eternal damnation was likely thought provoking and humbling.

Paul reminds us that while we were without strength, Christ died for the ungodly and that included the likes of Tertius. Praise God that our Creator had the patience to save the likes of Tertius and us rather than letting us suffer eternally while we were still sinners. Paul reminds us that Adam brought the sin but Christ crushed it so we must certainly sing His praises because without His sacrifice we would be damned. However, just because the sin was defeated doesn't mean that it can't still penetrate our lives if we aren't on guard. This likely affected Tertius as he reminisced on the days of a Roman and a slave, days of wishing death upon soldiers and masters. The days of smiting the ones who raised the whip to him. He could no longer look upon those thoughts with glee or joy. This was a time for him to look back on those thoughts and ask for forgiveness, than God that they are a distant memory and to pray for the salvation of the oppressor. How hard that must have been for Tertius, especially as Paul uses the word slave and moves into the suffering of this lifetime. Tertius certainly knew a thing or two about suffering, more than most of us could imagine. Listening to Paul, he is reminded that the suffering of this world cannot compare to the glory of the next. How glorious that must be because God willingly gave up His Son. His Son willingly gave up His life, who could possibly

separate us from that kind of love? No one is the answer. The only separation is to personally walk away and deny your Savior.

Back to the Jews, Paul makes it a point to remind us of their rejection, as well as God's purpose and God's judgement while informing us that it is still not too late for the Jews. We as well as Tertius were slaves to sin who rejected the glory of God but He had patience and mercy so that we could see. Now was the time for Tertius to pray that the Jews came to the realization the way that he did before it's too late. That is the behavior of a Christian, which Paul eludes to next. "Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord, rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer, distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality." Then Paul takes it a step further by saying that we are to submit to the government. First, Tertius has to think about the oppression that he faced as a Roman slave and the oppressors that he has to think kindly of and pray for, now he has to submit to a government that held him down and didn't even consider him a human? How hard must this have been for Tertius to swallow, to not just hear these words, but know they are from God and pass them along to the people who kept him down for so many years. That kind of submission and forgiveness would be difficult to muster.

Paul finishes up by letting us know how detrimental it can be to put stumbling blocks in front of our neighbors, disputing over trivial or petty things. We must glorify God together because He is more important than us or our petty peccadillos. We must put on Christ while making no provision for the flesh. This will help us to bear the burdens of our brothers because we all have our struggles, setbacks and mishaps. Paul reminds us of this in chapter 12 verse 3 by letting us know that we ought not think too highly of ourselves. Once you begin thinking highly of yourself you look lowly on others, that is inevitable and when that happens you become the fool that professes to be wise. See how that went full circle?

What we see here is a letter written by Paul to a people that he had never met but looked forward to seeing them and sought to encourage them. It is likely that many a night were spent around the camp fire listening to Tertius and his history with Rome. He was well aware of his past, his conversion, his enslavement and oppression. With all of this in mind, he was not willing to mince words or condemn the Roman people. He was looking forward to being in their presence and wanted to encourage Jew and Gentile alike. This had to be a thought-provoking experience for Tertius and likely a groundbreaking time for forgiveness and gratitude. In the event that he still held any animosity for the Jews or the Roman government leading into this book, it was likely squashed by the time it was written. We can all learn a little bit about a former Roman slave who watched the Jews deny Jesus, act as the scribe for Paul as he forms a letter encouraging love, submission, unity and faithfulness among many other things. It may have been the last thing he wanted to hear but was likely a transforming experience.