

To Serve Christ

Ephesians 3:1-10

In a recent interview, contemporary Christian musician Amy Grant said that several years ago she was once visiting her mother who had Alzheimer's disease. As she was leaving, Amy said, "I've got to go sing, Mom." Her mother said, "You sing?" Amy said, "Yes. I sing and I write songs." Her mom asked about the kinds of songs she sings and if she would sing for her.

Then, as Amy was walking out the door, her mother called after her. "Hey, would you do me a favor?" Amy said, "Yes; what?" And her mom said "When you walk out on that stage, sing something that matters."

Amy Grant's mother, even with Alzheimer's, had it right. If you're going to sing, sing something that matters. And the principle of what she said applies to every other area of our lives, particularly if we are followers of Christ. Whatever we are doing, make it count—do it in a way that matters. Painting a house, teaching a class, baking a casserole, typing a letter, singing a song or preaching a sermon—do it in a way that really matters.

I really believe that the Apostle Paul would agree. We never find him slouching in his service for Christ or even attempting to serve Christ with a half-hearted, sloppy devotion. It was full-steam ahead for Paul in every area of his walk with Jesus.

By the time he came to what we call the third chapter of his letter to the Ephesians, Paul is almost overwhelmed with a special revelation he had received. He called it "the mystery of Christ," at the end of verse four. We've said before that the word "mystery" here is not the same as a "whodunit" type of novel. It means something that had been hidden in the past but has now been revealed. He said in verse nine that it had been hidden from men in other generations, but had now been made plain.

The mystery was that God's eternal plan was to bring Jew and Gentile together into one body. He had emphasized that glorious truth in 2:15-16, where he had written, "*His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross...*"

But he really wanted to make sure they understood it—it was too important a truth to overlook. So he drives the point home in verse six of chapter three, "*This*

mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.”

As Gentiles and with no hope of ever approaching God, they had been brought near by the blood of Christ! And lest we miss the significance of that—***we are Gentiles!*** That’s just one of the many reasons why Paul’s letter to the Ephesians is so important to us in our day. We need to get this!

Focus with me today on verse seven, where Paul wrote, *“I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God’s grace given me through the working of his power.”* Look at that word “servant.” Some versions use the word “minister,” but it’s the origin of our English word “deacon.” It means “one who waits on tables.” In verse one of this chapter Paul told us that he was “the prisoner of Christ Jesus,” but now he focuses on the fact that he was a servant of the gospel.

And from what we read here and elsewhere, Paul was serving Christ in a way that mattered. He wasn’t twittering away his time. Even while in prison Paul was serving Christ in a way that made a difference.

We can do that, too—do you realize that? Even in the most adverse circumstances, we can serve Christ in ways that make a difference for the Kingdom of God and in the lives of others. But how can we serve Him in ways that really matter? Let’s dig a little deeper into the first ten verses of chapter three.

1 To make our service count, we must realize that He is in charge, v. 1

We’ve already looked at this pretty thoroughly, but we have to come back to it for a few moments. Paul was in prison in Rome, because he had been preaching that Jesus was the Christ and that God’s plan included the Gentiles. The Romans didn’t care about that at all, but the Jews had instigated this. But Paul identified himself in verse one as a prisoner of Christ Jesus, not of the Romans. As we saw in our last message in this series, Paul had the option of looking around, or looking ahead, and he chose to look ahead.

I believe that’s one of the things that really made Paul so effective. I certainly am not discounting the role of the Holy Spirit, and neither would Paul, since he talked so much in this letter about the power that had been given him. When we read

Paul's letters, we never get the impression that he ever thought he was the one in charge. He was always dependent upon the Holy Spirit in his service for Christ.

Are we any different? Dare we try it any other way? We may be wonderful people, very skilled, compassionate, loving people, but without Christ in charge, it is for nothing.

When we say that God is in charge, we are talking about His sovereignty. That means that there is no one and nothing above Him. No one and nothing has more authority or power than He does. He is the Most High over all the earth, who reigns forever and ever.

If God is in charge, then I'm not! You're not, either! We do truly want our service for Christ to count, to make a difference, so we need to remind ourselves that we are not the ones in charge. It requires not only an initial submission, but also a daily surrender to the Lordship of Christ in our lives.

2 To make our service count, we must realize that He has perfect timing, vv. 5, 9-10

In verse five, Paul is taking the long-range look. He realized that even though God's plan to include the Gentiles was an eternal plan, God had reached down and chosen Paul in his time to share that amazing truth. For reasons that we cannot completely understand, that was the right time in history for the veil to be pulled back and the mystery revealed.

He told us in verse nine that this mystery *"for ages past was kept hidden in God...."* Then in verse ten, we read, *"His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known...."* Hidden for ages past, but **now** it was revealed. God in His infinite wisdom knew exactly when the right time was to make it known. Ages and ages went by. Generations were born and died. Then one day, Almighty God in perfect timing reached down into time and said, "Here is My Plan for humankind. Paul, I want **you** to be the one who share it."

His perfect timing is at work in our lives today, as well. He never says, "Sorry, I got held up somewhere else." He is never too late, even if we don't understand the delay. There may be times in our service for Him that we wonder what is going on, why things happen the way they do. That is a normal, human reaction to something we don't understand. It can get frustrating, especially when we've searched our

hearts and done everything we can think of to be pure in our spirits. And we wait, and we wait, and we wait.

That is when trusting Him really begins to mean something. It is one thing to say that God's timing is perfect, but it is another thing altogether to really trust Him, even if we don't understand what He's doing. If He truly is God, and we believe that He is, and if He truly knows everything and has our best interests at heart, and we believe He does, then we must also believe that His timing is always perfect. We must believe that His actions do not lack any thing. We want to serve Him, and do the very best we can, so we have to trust that He not only knows exactly what He is doing, but also that His timing is perfect.

When we look back on our lives, we can see how God has worked things out in His scheduling of events and relationships so that we are blessed and He is glorified. That's one of the things that will utterly amaze us when we get to Heaven—the ways that God orchestrated and arranged every detail of our lives and our service just...so. We will then be able to see it clearly for the first time, and understand with absolute clarity that God's timing has always been perfect. His creation of the world, His plan for providing a Savior, and His working in our lives and our service are all examples of His timing that is and has always been flawless.

He is the One Who knows the plans He has for our lives, plans to prosper us and not to harm us, plans to give us hope and a future. He is the One Who withholds from us those things we should not have and do not need. He is the One Who knows that sometimes the delay increases our faith and strengthens our walk with Christ. He is the One Who knows the end from the beginning, and provides everything we need in between.

3 To make our service count, we must realize that the power to serve Him comes from Him, v. 7

Focus on verse seven once again. Paul wrote that he became a servant of this gospel "*by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power.*" This wasn't Paul's power or expertise. It wasn't Paul's charisma, good looks or skill that enabled him to make a difference in his service. It was a gift. The power of God had given him grace to do a lot of things he could never have done himself.

We might not like to admit it, but any power or ability to accomplish anything in His Name comes from Him. It's not our power. We may have been blessed with

high intellect and may be talented in many areas, but we need to acknowledge that all of that came from Him. This is especially true in our service for Him.

Look back. Do you remember that difficult situation you faced, and you wondered how you were going to handle it? Do you remember that tough conversation you knew you had to have with a loved one, and the right words came just when you needed them? What about that crushing grief, when you didn't think you were going to make it through another hour? But you did. That was the Holy Spirit, working in your life to give you the strength and the power to do exactly what needed to be done, at just the right time.

Making a difference, doing something that really matters, requires that we not only acknowledge that the power comes from Him, but that we are so dependent on Him that we don't even attempt to do those things apart from Him. From Isaiah we read these words, *"He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint"* (Isaiah 40:29-31). The power to do something that really matters comes from Him.

4 To make our service count, we must realize that without His power we would never be able to do this work, v. 8

Paul said in verse eight, *"Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ."* When Paul calls himself "less than the least of all God's people" this wasn't false modesty. He's not putting himself down. He's probably thinking about the time when he persecuted Christians, having them arrested and even killed.

And even though Paul had one of the finest educations available in his time, and even though he had been very meticulous in following the Law of Moses, he realized that there was nothing in him that would make him worthy of being allowed the privilege of sharing the glorious Gospel with anyone, much less the Gentiles. He couldn't do it at all without the power of Christ.

Isn't that what Jesus said? *"Without me you can do nothing"* (John 15:6). You may be the most respectable person in your community. You may have a lot of resources at your disposal. You may be the most beautiful or most handsome person in your

circle of friends. You may a well-educated, well-rounded individual. But without Christ and the power He provides, you can do nothing.

Dwight Moody was an evangelist of another generation, greatly used by God. He was preaching in Britain once, and one of the British reporters went to interview and watch Moody as he preached, because he was trying to find out the secret of this man's success. His article included these words: "Mr. Moody uses bad English, has a high pitched voice, speaks with a nasal tone, is overweight and generally rough. I can see nothing in Mr. Moody to account for the success of his work."

When Moody read that, he said, "That's the secret! There is no way to explain this work except for the power of God!"

You and I can be busy, very busy, in the service of Christ, and we may actually accomplish some very good things under our own power. But if we really want to make a difference, if we really want to do something that matters, we need the power of Christ in our lives.

What is God wanting to do through you? Henry Blackaby once wrote, "When God was ready to judge the world with a flood, He came to Noah. When He desired to build a nation for Himself, He turned to Abraham. When He heard His children groaning under Egyptian bondage, He appeared in a burning bush to Moses. They were three of the most ordinary of men. But God had work to do, and He knew just who to do it with. God has always given His people assignments that are too big for them to handle alone, so that a watching world can see--not what we can do--but what God can do."

Your name may not be Noah, Abraham or Moses. It may be Wesley, or Terrica, or Brad, or Gary. But there is still something -- a great something -- which God has for you -- and me -- to do. The teaching of the Scripture is that we should do it in a way that really, really matters.