



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Romans 16:1-2

“Phoebe: Servant of the Church”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] The Scripture reading for today is found in Romans chapter 16 and just two verses, verse 1 and verse 2. We are having a little interlude between the series that usually characterized the ministry at 8:30, and then at 11:00. And today our topic is Phoebe: A Servant of the Church.

And the apostle writes in Romans chapter 16, in verse 1,

“I commend unto you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, (now just, you may remember, of course, that Cenchrea is one of the ports of the city of Corinth located on the Aegean side of the isthmus. And that was the home of this servant of the church there in Cenchrea, a few miles from Corinth. And the apostle continues,) 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.”

The Greek text has simply, “Of me, myself,” but in our day we like to use the term “self”, “myself”. I don’t particularly like it; I think the best way is to say, “She has been a helper of me.” But good grammar, as well as good pronunciation, good old Southern

accents fading out these days, we've lost so much [Laughter]. So may the Lord bless this reading of his word and let's have a word of prayer together.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee and praise Thee for the gospel of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ. And we thank Thee for the great changes that it produces in the lives of those who have been brought to know him, whom to know is life eternal. We are so thankful for the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. And we are thankful to you for the church, the body of believers who, by God's grace, by the working of the Holy Spirit, Father, had been brought into being as a body worshiping him who has, by his saving work, brought us into the family of God.

We thank Thee for this, the Lord's day, reminding us of the resurrection, that our Lord is no dead savior, but he is living; living at this very moment. And living at this very moment and living through the Holy Spirit in the hearts of all his saints wherever they may be. We thank Thee that we can lift our voices to Thee Lord and know that Thou dost hear our petitions. We pray for the church. We ask Thy blessing upon all of the body. In the midst of the difficulties and trials and in the midst of failures and sins, Oh God, we pray that through the Holy Spirit, through our great high priest and advocate. Thou wilt continue to bring the church through all of the difficulties and trials to the maturity and ultimately the perfection that Thou art intending to do.

We pray for our country. We ask Thy blessing upon the United States of America and its leadership. And we pray Lord particularly for the sick. We bring them before Thee, we ask that Thou wilt so move in their lives that in accordance with Thy will there may be healing and there may also be comfort and consolation and the sense of Thy presence and of the sense of the providential care of our triune God over us. How marvelous it is to know that fact of all the experiences of life.

We thank Thee for the ministry of this church and we pray for our elders and for our deacons and for all who have a part in its ministry, each one of them. We bring them

all before Thee and pray, oh God, that Thou wilt help us in our day, 1991, to be effective representatives of our marvelous Lord. We commit our meetings of the day to Thee, we pray Thy blessing upon each one of them. And especially we ask for the visitors and friends who are here with us, as well as our members, Oh God, through the ministry of the word of God, strengthen each of us and build us up. And if there are some here who do not know our Lord, may the ministry of the word of God be used by the Holy Spirit to bring them to the knowledge of him, whom to know is life eternal. For Jesus' sake.

Amen

[Message] The subject for today, as I mentioned and is found in your bulletin, is “Phoebe: Servant of the Church.” The story of Paul and Phoebe has been likened to Aesop's Fable of the lion and the mouse. And you may remember the fable, I must confess I had almost forgotten it. The story is the story of a mouse and of a lion. A lion who was lying in the field in the midst of the grass asleep. And the mouse came upon the lion, noted that he was asleep, began to play around, and then finally played on the lion itself. And as a matter of fact, got on his body, under the fur, until finally the lion awakened, looked out, saw the mouse, caught the mouse, and held the mouse in his hand or in his paw and as a result of it there was a little bit of a conversation by the mouse and the lion. And as soon as he was caught, the mouse began to plead for his life and finally the lion let him go. But before going the mouse said, “One day I'll repay you for this great kindness, you will see.” And sooner than expected the lion fell into a hunters trap and fell in the midst of the trap made of rope and was caught and began to roar in a kind of helpless fury. And hidden in the deep grass was the little mouse. And the mouse came over, saw the lion caught, and the lion said to him, “Go away little mouse, you can't help me, just look at the size of you.” But the mouse, with his sharp teeth, began to gnaw on the strands of the rope and ultimately gnawed through the rope. And as a result of it the lion was freed and the lion is supposed to have said, according to

the fable, to the mouse, “How can I thank you, it was most stupid of me to think that you were too small to help a big fellow like me.” And Aesop said that he gave the little mouse the very nicest, lionest smile in the whole world [Laughter].

Now we sometimes think that those who are smaller and weaker than ourselves can never be of use to us. And the story of Phoebe and Paul is really the story of a lion, the Apostle Paul, and a little mouse, Phoebe. We know very little about her but enough is said here for us to know the significant things about her.

It’s a debated passage. Surprisingly I’m sure you might think this passage would never be really important but it’s become rather important because of the feminist controversy and what is stated to be true of Phoebe here. For example, she’s called a servant of the church. Now the term servant that is used here is the term “diakonos” and diakonos is the term that is used for a deacon. And it is assumed by many of the feminists that therefore Phoebe was an ordained minister, an ordained deacon in the church and held church office, and as a result of that, church offices are open, all the church offices, are open to men. And so a great deal is built on this particular passage. Not everything in connection with that controversy, of course, but this has become an important passage. And in my view excesses have been built upon the statement that is made here, “Phoebe, a servant of the church.”

Now aside from that -- and I’ll say just a little bit about it later on -- the major lesson of these verses that we’ve just read is the importance and usefulness and proper recognition of the inconspicuous servants of the Lord, both of women and of men. We really shouldn’t find it necessary to have an exposition in which we lay stress upon the importance of people who are inconspicuous in the work of the Lord because if, for example, we’ve read and pondered 1st Corinthians chapter 12 and the great illustration of the body of Christ, which Paul uses there of the human body, and of all the members of the human body that are essential to the body itself, we should realize that every one of us in the body of Christ has his own - not only his own place, but his own important

place but his own important place. And Paul even goes on to point out that even those who are inconspicuous often are the ones who are the really important ones. Now we all know that, but it's necessary for us to put it in the context of the Christian church. So that's the major lesson and that's the thing that we want to lay stress on in the message this morning.

There is a story about Charles Brookfield who was a British actor, and near the end of his life he was taking a vacation in the Isle of Wight to the South of England. And while he was there he was attacked by pleurisy and word got out in the light of the attack of pleurisy which he'd experienced that he had died. And so as a result of that, the newspapers in the vicinity quickly gathered up as much material as they possibly could about Mr. Brookfield and they published in the paper the next day accounts of his death, but he was still living. And so he had the strange privilege and to him amusing privilege of reading his name in the newspapers and reading also things that were said about him because he was a rather important man.

And so lying in his bed, propped up on his pillows, he read these lamentations and candid criticisms of him. And the climax of his enjoyment he said later, was reached when in the columns of a leading journal he was told that, quote, “Though never a great actor, he was invaluable in small parts.” [Laughter] Well he said afterwards he regarded that as one of the finest compliments that had ever been paid him. Though never a great actor, he was invaluable in small parts.

Well Phoebe was just like that. She wasn't a great minister of the church in the sense of a Paul or a Timothy or a Peter, but she was certainly invaluable as we shall see in what is not simply a small part, but at least in one big part. I read also of a man who was asked by a young preacher what he should preach on. He said, “I've noticed you preach on a lot of different series and frequently the series lasts a long time and I could enter into that with understanding,” and he suggested, “As a young preacher, what would you say that I should preach on?” And the preacher said to him, “Well preach on second

fiddles. Pass by the first fiddles like Paul and Timothy and Peter and others, and preach on the second fiddles of Scripture.” And so when you turn to Phoebe you’re talking about a second fiddle, and Phoebe was one of the ones that he suggested. People like Phoebe, Philemon, Archippus, Onesimus, Stephanas, Fortunatus, Achiacus, Amplius [ph15:06], Rufus, and the like.

So what we’re doing is we’re taking one of the second fiddles and trying to make some important points out of it today. You know, one thing I note about Paul that is true of David, which we stressed a couple of times in the series, is this. David was always thankful. I even suggested maybe that that was one of the major reasons why God said, “He’s a man after my own heart,” because he was thankful. Even in the midst of his failures there was a thankful attitude about David. And that characterizes the Apostle Paul. He was a thankful man. Think of the many people that he mentions in his letters with gratitude and thanksgiving for them, saying very little about them specifically but their names are there and he remembers them.

I think of Believers Chapel often and I sat down at my desk this week and said now, who are the second fiddles in Believers Chapel. And aside from people who stand up like I do in front of you constantly, what do we have in Believers Chapel in the matter of service that is significant? Now of course I thought about our office staff and I thought also of the tape ministry staff that labor so faithfully about four days out of the week, from the morning till noon, sending out the tapes, answering the mail. Things like that that have to do with that ministry. The radio ministry staff, those who work in our radio ministry and those who record our messages and make them available for the radio stations. Send them out to the stations regularly, in time. Some people do double duty in these ministries. There is the building maintenance staff with Jim Bartlin and others who help out. And I was reminded of Martha the library staff, don’t forget them. And not only does she work there but she has invaluable help in doing it. And this is one of mine: the nursery staff, would that it were larger. The nursery staff; important for Believers Chapel,

high important. Teachers, the deacons, the elders, the mercy ministry, all of these ministries performed by various people of whom most of us are ignorant. And then I did not make the statement I should have made. I should have said, “And all of those others who help out, you know who you are,” but I forgot to say it. And here I was sitting with the organist over here and a pianist over here, and omitted those who help out in the ministry of the music, playing the instruments; so important for us as well.

And so all of those now that I have forgotten to say anything about, you know who you are. And if you'd like to stand up right now [Laughter] we'd be glad to give you a hand. But we are so grateful, really, for the many people who work in Believers Chapel and make it possible for this small church, relatively speaking, to carry on its ministry, and actually extend widely its influence. This morning after the message two men came to me, one a former student of mine at the seminary, graduated in 1979, and with another man from India, and told me of how the tapes from Believers Chapel are being translated and spread in India. Others are doing this too, but I met this young man face to face and he's carrying on the ministry of Believers Chapel by translating our tapes and then spreading the word among the Indians.

But now coming to our text, and verse 1, Paul gives us his commendation of Phoebe. Phoebe, incidentally, is the first of over twenty-five people who are mentioned in this 16th chapter that Paul is thankful for. The name itself, someone has suggested, means bright or radiant. And she was probably a gentile. Paul long was captivated by a yearning to go to Rome, remember. He had never been to Rome. And so he wanted to visit the Big Apple of the ancient world. And when he was in Corinth and writing this particular letter he realized it was going to be necessary for him to go back to Jerusalem. You read the Book of Acts and you can put this letter in the context of Paul's visit to Corinth. And there news came to him that made it necessary for him to go back to Jerusalem. But he expresses to the Romans his great desire to visit them and that to this point he had been hindered in doing it.

So Jerusalem is calling. He wanted to go to Rome, what can he do? Well he can at least write to the Roman church and that's what he does. He sits down and he dictates this letter to Tertius and the great Roman epistle, the greatest of the Pauline epistles, practically all commentators agree, the greatest of the Pauline epistles. Perhaps the greatest book in the New Testament, some have even suggested, but at least this great book is written by the apostle. But now the question arises who's going to take the letter to Rome. They didn't have a postal service like ours. And in fact if they had one like ours it might be discouraging [Laughter] but nevertheless they didn't have one like ours. The only postal service that they had at that time was the imperial service and it was only for people who were in the government and who had friends. And so if a person wanted to write to Rome he had to find some personal means of getting the letter there. And so Paul writes the letter because the great land has a mouse that will take it to Rome for him. And that mouse is Phoebe. It's very obvious because he writes, “I commend to you Phoebe our sister,” and she's the one carrying the letter to the church in Rome.

Now commendatory letters were the way in those days by which Christians move from one place to another. They needed hospitality so, if for example, I were traveling from Corinth to Ephesus I would ask the elders of the church in Corinth to write for me a simple commendation letter that I might take the letter to the church at Ephesus and they would recognize me and receive me into the meeting and allow me to observe the Lord's Supper and become a part while I was in Ephesus of the ministry that was there. And so commendatory letters were absolutely essential.

As a matter of fact, I've carried commendatory letters myself and which, going to a far place, I've presented the letter to a local church which they have read and read out in a meeting. And it's not uncommon today for individuals to take letters of commendation. It was necessary because in those days there were conmen too. And as a result of it there were individuals who were something like a spy or a conman and so they would travel from place to place, knowing the Christians were softhearted. True believers in Christ

generally are softhearted. They're generous and they're kind as a rule and so they knew they could take advantage of them, and as a matter of fact this was so common that there is actually an ancient writing describing a particular individual who did this constantly, described [indistinct]. So it was kind of a necessary thing for individuals traveling. And Paul makes reference to it in his letters in 2nd Corinthians 3:1 he says to them, “Do we begin again to commend ourselves or do we need as some others epistles of commendation to you?” What Paul is saying, in effect is, “Look, you know that through the preaching of the gospel by me and the others with me, you came to the knowledge of the Lord so you don't need any letters of commendation from me. Others may need it who don't know you, but you know me as the one who preached the gospel to you.”

So he is commending Phoebe and she undoubtedly has that epistle in her purse, in her bag. So can you not imagine the apostle with these sixteen chapters and this scroll which he has written, giving this to Phoebe, and Phoebe putting it down in the midst of her bag and amidst all those other things in there. It might have been lost right there, of course [laughter], and then seeing Phoebe off with the message for the church at Rome.

Now I don't know what kind of experience she had on that journey but I have a hunch there was a storm on the Adriatic when she tried to cross it. If that's the way that she traveled she may have traveled across the isthmus to Corinth and the port on the Adriatic, on the Adriatic side. Took a boat there across to the Appian Way which comes all the way across to the Adriatic Sea, and then made a journey by land. And there were brigands and gangsters and others in those days just as there are today and it's possible for her to be attacked. And there was storms on the Adriatic and I can just imagine that if we had known what was transpiring we would have had some anxious moments. To lose the Epistle to the Romans, what a loss that would have been. But the providence of God overcame all of the elements and finally this letter was delivered.

The way Paul describes Phoebe is so interesting. He describes her first as, “Our sister.” He means, of course, sister in the Lord. She's a member of the body of Christ, so

is he, she is our sister in the Lord. And then, “A servant in the church.” Diakonos, a servant in the church. Now in my opinion, this is the non-technical sense of diakonos which is often found in the New Testament. It means simply “a servant”. In some places we have the official sense and it has been the contention of some of the feminists that this is an official sense at this particular place but there doesn't seem to be any real evidence of that. As a matter of fact, in the New Testament itself there is no certain indication that there ever was a deaconess. Even 1st Timothy chapter 3, in verse 11, is capable, and I think naturally capable, of different interpretations. And so the Christian church largely has felt that the office of elder, the office of deacon, are reserved for the masculine sex.

But a great deal has been made over it and I think far too much. The excesses of the feminist movement have in many cases become extreme. There is one lesson we should learn from it, and that is that perhaps we have not treated the women with the kind of respect that we ought to treat them in the Christian church. We have lots of Phoebe's and lots of others with more significant ministry perhaps than Phoebe apparently had that we should remember, and we should give the proper regard for.

I noticed incidentally recently that Random House has come out with a new dictionary, it's gender neutral, it's politically correct, and according to Time Magazine it's an English lovers disappointment. I don't know how you've been spelling the plural of woman but perhaps you've been spelling it W-O-M-E-N. That's the way I've been spelling it for quite a few years. But now Random House has suggested that we should spell the plural of woman as W-O-M-Y-N and that will eliminate the sexist reference to men in saying men and women. I don't think that will catch on.

At any rate, Phoebe is described as a servant of the church. And I think in the non-official sense. We don't have time to talk about it in detail. And I suggest to you that the reason primarily that Phoebe is referred to as a servant of the church is that she lived in a port city of Cenchrea and because she lived in the port city of Cenchrea where many ships docked and where, as a Christian in the local church there, she had many visitors,

knew many visitors from all over that world who would come and then seek to find the body of Christians. That they needed someone who would be something of a protector of them in that society, they needed that. And they also needed hospitality. And it's likely that Phoebe was an individual who was influential, probably wealthy like Lydia, north in Philippi. I don't know whether they were in the same business or not but Lydia was a very wealthy woman who had her own business. She dealt in purple dye, you'll remember, and if she was influential and was somewhat wealthy she would have a great opportunity to care for the Christians who came to the land of Greece, and specifically to Cenchrea on the way to Corinth. So the chances are that when he says, “A servant of the church,” he's referring to the protection and the hospitality that Lydia had given to many people, and in fact to the apostle himself.

Some of the feminists have sought to make this word mean “a leader” and if it were to have that sense then the apostle is saying that he actually was lead by Phoebe, which seems so totally contrary to the sense of the passage. So we're not going to make out of it what some have made out of it. He commends Phoebe and the aim of the commendation is expressed in verse 2, he said, “That you may receive her in the Lord, in a manner worthy of the saints.” She has received many and therefore you received her, she has exercised protection and hospitality for so many Christians, you too respond similarly. He is asking the Romans to be a patron of Phoebe, protector of Phoebe, hospitality toward her, this woman who has been useful in the church of the Lord in Cenchrea.

And secondly he says that she has been – that you may receive her in a manner worthy of the saints and assist her in whatever business she has made of. It has been said that she came there on a legal matter, but the fact that Paul says, “Whatever business,” would seem to indicate nothing specific is in mind and I rather take it that way. But now the important thing is, and I think this is one of the reasons for the commendation too, the fact that Phoebe has in her purse or pocketbook the apostolic communication.

Just think for a moment of the value of that letter in Phoebe’s possession. On the trip across the Isthmus to the ship to Rome, Puteoli, however she traveled, all the way for weeks, perhaps, here this precious epistle inspired by the Holy Spirit of God in and among her belongings. It’s fantastic to think about it. But just think about the Roman epistle itself, the knowledge of man. No epistle in the New Testament, no writing in the New Testament, gives a better understanding of man than the Epistle to the Romans. It begins with the statement of man’s sin as gentile, man’s sin as Jew, and the fact that all men are under sin, under condemnation from God. So plainly, so clearly, the point is made. In fact, this epistle has been called the first great work of Christian theology. And Samuel Taylor Coleridge, a man who was noted as an English man of letters and whose poems you probably have read, called this letter the profoundest book in existence, an amazing statement from Coleridge. John Calvin said, with reference to the Romans as he starts his commentary on it, these words, “I’m in doubt whether it would be worthwhile to spend much time in speaking of the value of this epistle. Mine certainties do only to my fear that since my commendation of it falls far short of its grandeur, my remarks may merely obscure the epistle.”

This will prove to us beyond any doubt that among many other notable virtues the epistle has one in particular which is never sufficiently appreciated. It is this: if we have gained a true understanding of this epistle, we have an open door to all the most profound treasures of Scripture, the knowledge of man. And then in chapter 3, taking us all the way through chapter 8, we have this magnificent exposition of the doctrine of justification by faith or the doctrine of salvation in its various aspects. I must admit, some of those chapters are chapters that still disturb me and thrill me at the same time. Go back and read Romans chapter 7 and read Paul’s struggle with sin in the believer’s life. And you’ll understand something of true biblical psychology, “What I hate, this I do. What I want to do, that I do not do.” That’s true, that’s true of Christians in my opinion. Every one of you in this audience, if you will look carefully within your heart you will

discover that in the midst of your highest spiritual attainments there is the touch of indwelling sin within you.

Cooper has put it so beautifully, I think. He wrote these stanzas: “My God, how perfect are Thy ways! But mine polluted are; Sin twines itself about my praise, And slides into my prayer. When I would speak what Thou hast done to save me from sin, I cannot make Thy mercies known, But self-applause creeps in.” How many times when God has given me the ability to say something real well before I’ve thought of it I said, “You did pretty well on that.” How many times have you got down by the side of your bed and prayed, and prayed earnestly, and in the midst of your prayers, like Mr. Spurgeon says often happened to him, a vulture flies across the sky, to use his words, and the thoughts come in the midst of your prayers, “I’m getting along real well in the spiritual life. Here I am, a prayer warrior.” Anybody who knows anything about spiritual life as a Christian knows that that is true. You look deep down within your heart and the sin principle still dwells there. And one of the most magnificent things about the salvation that God provides is that in the midst of a situation such as that with the sin principle dwelling in our life, nevertheless, by the power of God things are accomplished that are pleasing to him. And we look forward to the day when the sin principle is eradicated from human nature but it’s not eradicated yet and every day we have indication of that fact.

I think if you look in your heart you cannot say anything but within yourself, “You are saying absolutely that which is true, Mr. Johnson.” Romans chapter 7, one of the greatest of the chapters in the word of God. One that expresses under the term I, a comprehensive man, the person, and then also under the term I, two egos, one the I, the man who has the new life within him speaking, the new life, the total man speaking, and they are as within this one body contradictory, one to another, as long as we’re in the flesh as we have it now.

There’s nothing greater, of course, than those last words of Romans chapter 8 where the apostle argues concerning the salvation that we possess. In fact, he challenges

the whole of the universe and says to them, “All of the powers of this universe that are contrary to us,” he says, “Yet, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.” And now notice how he challenges the universe, he says, “I’m persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord.” The inalienable love of the Lord God in heaven for his saints and in the midst of the trials of life, in the midst of struggles with sin, if that individual by God’s grace has been brought to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus, he’s the object of inalienable love and he will ultimately enter into the presence of the Lord God in heaven. What could be more marvelous than that? What could be more marvelous than these marvelous promises of the 8th chapter of the Epistle to the Romans? All that, mind you, in Phoebe’s purse, unknown except to Paul and Phoebe.

I have a hunch that on the boat as she was traveling she looked at it, Paul must have said, “You can read it if you want to.” And I can see her come out every morning looking out over the Adriatic, seeing a friend and saying, “I want to show you something I read in Romans last night.” Well, we don’t stop at that point, Romans continues with the knowledge of the plan of the ages in Romans 9 through 11. The Old Testament is linked with the new promises, consummated by the Savior’s sacrifice. Israel and the gentiles are brought into relationship, a harmonious relationship and Paul also says, “We look forward to the completion of the own conditional promises in the ultimate salvation of Israel as a nation. And so while Israel shall be saved and Paul has that magnificent section in chapter 11, verse 28 through verse 32, in which he sets out his philosophy of the ages.

And then he comes to chapter 12; I don’t want to miss chapter 12 through chapter 16 because in chapter 12 through chapter 16 we have Paul’s dissertation on ethics. During this week when I had a Bible class for some of the men and we were studying the Epistle to the Hebrews I looked in one of my notes and I had a little note from a former

student of mine many years ago, over twenty years ago, twenty-three years as a matter of fact, he wrote a paper for me in the course on the Epistle to the Romans that I taught for over forty times at Theological Seminary and this little section was in his paper and I copied it down because I thought it was good. He said, “Christian ethics is for Christians who know Bible doctrine. The Book of Romans first deals with ethics in the 12th chapter which is preceded by discussion of sin, justification, sanctification, security, and the relationship of Jews and Gentiles.” In other words, there are eleven chapters of solid doctrine before Paul gets into the subject of ethics. The reason for this, and this is an important statement, I thought, is that Christian ethics are supernatural ethics.

Supernatural ethics: being impossible apart from regeneration and the power of the Holy Spirit as well as an understanding of God’s purpose for us in this age. That’s well put in my opinion. No one can live the Christian life but one who is a Christian.

No one can live ethically, approved by God, if he’s not been regenerated by the Holy Spirit, brought to faith in Christ, and justified through the bloodshed on Calvary’s cross. So important. John Wesley, how indebted he was to Phoebe because Mr. Wesley was a preacher and an unconverted preacher, and there are a few around today. He was an unconverted preacher, came to the United States to save the Indians but as, he says, was not saved himself. Went back May the 24th, 1734 I believe it was ’38, May the 24th, 1738 he was in a group of believers and they were reading Luther’s preface to the Epistle to the Romans. And these are the words he read, the famous words, you’ve heard them before, at a quarter before nine while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, “I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death. Humanly speaking, all of this hanging upon Phoebe and her service of the church in Cenchrea and the mission that the apostle put her in.

Why listen, this is far more important than any gospel campaign carried on for years by some of us. What that woman did, that one trip, has affected the history of the whole western world, transformed in the 18th Century the land of England and Scotland and has had its effect over here ever since. A.W. Tozer, not a Calvinist, but a very thoughtful thinker who said many, many good things. Everything he wrote is worth reading. He said, “The first step down for any church is taken when it surrenders its high opinion of God.” That’s the thing I fear for, for Believers Chapel. My feeling is that the first step this church takes down is the step when we lose our high opinion of a sovereign, unfrustratable God who saves men sovereignly by his grace. Through the ministry of the Holy Spirit who brings regeneration that we may believe and be saved. If we don’t have that and we move away from that, that’s the first step down from our high view of God.

Well, humanly speaking let me sum it up. Three people gave us Romans: Paul, Tertius, and Phoebe. You might say the lion, and the mouse, and the person who was the friend of both, Tertius. The passage speaks of the glory of Christian service, a servant of the church. Actually, Paul calls himself a bond servant in chapter 1, verse 1. He gloried in that. He called himself a servant of Jesus Christ. He cannot realize how great that title was because in the Old Testament, and Paul is a Jewish man, a Jewish Christian man, he’s one of the remnant, in the Old Testament the prophets were called the servants of Yahweh. The servants of the Lord. Paul calls himself a servant of Jesus Christ. The word that is used by the prophets of the Lord God and their service of him now in the mouth of this Jewish man is, “I’m a servant of Jesus Christ.” And he didn’t say, “I’m not longer a servant of Yahweh, I’m a servant of Jesus Christ,” but he said this man who, above everyone else, revered the title the servant of Yahweh speaks of himself as the servant of Jesus Christ for the simple reason that Yahweh is a term that applies to him too, that’s why. He saw no limitation in the full deity of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ. And he saw himself as a servant, the high calling of a servant. The Lord Jesus calls himself a

deacon also, remember? The Son of man came not to be deaconized, it's the same word diakono, it's the same root, came not to be served, came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give his life a ransom for many. To serve, like Phoebe, servant of the church.

When the Archbishop of Canterbury preached at the coronation of King George VI, he took the text, “I am among you as he that servith.” The supreme dignity of the king is to serve the people. When the Prime Minister calls together the members of the Imperial Cabinet the official summons reads, quote, “The servants of the king are commanded to meet,” unquote. On the crest of the Prince of Wales there stands the words, “I serve.” The glory of service, the glory of Christian service. The glory of serving the one whose made it possible for us to live eternally. May each one of you who are servants of the Lord have the great privilege some day of hearing him say to you, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

If you're here today and you've never believed in our Lord Jesus Christ we remind you that he who said, “I came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give my life a ransom for many,” has come, has served, has given his life a ransom for many, and the invitation goes out to all to come to him. Come to him. Believe in him. Trust in him. And enter into eternal life. May God in his grace touch your heart to that end. Let's stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, how marvelous it is to reflect upon the word of God and the great truths that are found within it. And oh Father, may this church never take the step that moves away from its high view of God before our Lord comes. We thank Thee for those who are here today. We pray that in their hearts there may be the working of the Holy Spirit in regeneration and faith. If that has not taken place yet may at this very moment someone be saying, “Lord I know I'm a sinner. The Son of man has died for sinners...

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[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]