



BATTLEGROUND
COMMUNITY CHURCH

Leader Guide
Sunday, December 9, 2018

My Times Are in Your Hand

Sermon Text: Psalm 31

Study Texts: Romans 12:9-21

Sermon Recap: Main idea: “Even in the face of difficulty and uncertainty, the faithful take refuge in the LORD.” Psalm 31, like many that come before, is a heart’s cry from David in the midst of difficulty. David uses such language as “in distress”, “sorrow”, “a reproach”, “an object of dread”, “forgotten”, and “failing strength” to refer to his situation. However, in the midst of this tribulation David declares ultimate trust in the LORD. David points us to the LORD as his (and our) “rock of refuge” and “strong fortress”. David cries to the LORD for deliverance as he professes, “My times are in your hands.”

Sermon Connection: Chapter 12 of Romans is highly practical. Paul is instructing the believers on the true marks of a Christian’s life. Specifically in verses 9-21, Paul teaches them how to live in a God-honoring way in the midst of difficulty and uncertainty. Paul makes a number of assumptions, namely, that evil exists (v.9, 21); tribulation is ever-present (v.12); the saints have needs (v.13); persecution comes (v.14); weeping is a reality (v. 15); discord is present (v.16-18); spiteful revenge is a temptation (v.17,19); and Christians have enemies (v.20). So, in the face of these realities the faithful must take refuge in the LORD.

Lesson Plan

Lesson Goal: To live in such a way so as to honor the LORD, the unmoving rock of refuge, in the midst of an uncertain and fallen world.

Lesson Points:

Point 1: Love is a distinguishing mark of the Christian in the face of tribulation. (v. 9-13)

Point 2: Humility is a distinguishing mark of the Christian during uncertainty. (v. 10b, 13-15,16b)

Point 3: Unity is a distinguishing mark of the Christian during disorder (v. 14-21)

The Context: The book of Romans was written by the Apostle Paul around 56 A.D. Toward the end of his third missionary journey as he prepared to travel to Jerusalem to provide assistance to the saints there (Rom. 1:1; 15:22-33). The purpose of the letter, which is rich in doctrine, is to teach the powerful truths of the gospel of grace to the believers in Rome, and provide practical instruction for living out a faithful life. (Rom. 1: 11,13, 15). Although the church in Rome did not know Paul personally, he had heard of their strong faith and therefore, desired to instruct them both doctrinally and practically. (1:8-15)

Opening Question: Why is the way a Christian lives important? (Discuss representation, association, etc.) *Anytime anyone is labeled something, their behavior is a direct reflection of the thing he or she is associated with. We see this all the time in sports. When an athlete is accused of a crime (domestic violence, racism, etc.) the owner of the team usually cuts the player and issues a statement saying something like, “the actions of this person do not reflect the beliefs and values of this organization.” The reason for that disclaimer is because there is a certain amount of representation that accompanies association. This representation is heightened for Christians as we bear the name of the risen Christ.*

Transition Statement: 2 Corinthians 5:20 teaches us that we, as followers of Christ, are His ambassadors. Galatians 4:4-7 calls us children of God. This means that the way we live represents God in the same way an ambassador represents a country, or a child represents his or her parents. In Romans 12:9-21, Paul provides practical instruction to help us live in such a way so as to honor God in the face of difficulty and uncertainty.

Point 1 Love is a distinguishing mark of the Christian in the face of tribulation. (v. 9-13)

There are 13 exhortations in these 5 verses (v.9-13), list them and briefly discuss each exhortation. In parentheses you’ll find some additional information to guide your discussion.

- 1) (“genuine” means “without hypocrisy”)
- 2) (Paul is indicating a choice, i.e. “Choose to hate evil.”)
- 3) (“hold fast” is used for sexual intimacy in 1 Cor. 6:16)
- 4) (“one another” refers to fellow believers in the church)
- 5) (How do we do this? “Outdo honoring one another.”)
- 6) (cross reference verse 8 in Rom. 12. “zeal” in ESV)
- 7) (“fervent” means the opposite of “slothful”)
- 8) (cross reference Rom. 16:17-18)
- 9) (“in” carries the idea of “being rooted in”)
- 10) (tribulation is the context for all of verse 12)
- 11) (“be constant” can also be translated “persevere”)
- 12) (cross reference Lev. 19:33-34)
- 13) (“practice” implies continuous action)

- 1) *Let love be genuine.* This is the theme for the whole passage. Paul is reiterating what he taught in 1 Corinthians 13:1, that even if we speak with tongues of men and angels but have not love, we are a clanging gong and a noisy cymbal. If we are hypocritical, it will be hard for anyone to truly listen to anything we have to say.
- 2) *Abhor what is evil.* Note that Paul is teaching something contrary to our modern world which is that there is *objective* evil. The world says, 'Things are evil because I hate them.' Paul says, "choose to hate what is evil." Big difference.
- 3) *Hold fast to what is good.* The word for "hold fast" is very intimate. It implies an inner devotion. We must be committed to what is good.
- 4) *Love one another with a brotherly affection.* Paul returns here to love. Paul is teaching that we should love those inside the church like our family. There is a deep connection cultivated through familiarity and unity that should exist among brothers and sisters inside the church.
- 5) *Outdo one another in showing honor.* Another word for "honor" is respect. The literal reading is to "lead someone" or "go before them". The implication is to be the first one to show honor. Cross reference 1 Tim. 6:1 and 1 Cor. 12:23.
- 6) *Do not be slothful in zeal.* Laziness is a danger to all Christians as we can grow weary of doing good. (Gal. 6:9) Apathy can also arise when things become difficult. Paul is teaching us to be passionate and hard-working in our work for the Kingdom.
- 7) *Be fervent in spirit.* This is the opposite of "slothful in zeal." We should care about what we are doing. God has called us to join His mission and we should be excited, diligent, and ardent in our task.
- 8) *Serve the Lord.* Paul makes it clear what our task is: serve the Lord. The passion and fervency is not for your child's soccer game, your job, your house, your favorite sports team, or whatever else this world contains. The fervency in spirit is to serve the Lord.
- 9) *Rejoice in hope.* John Piper says the ground where joy grows is hope. We hope unlike the world because we have ultimate reason for hope. Even when things in this world fail or cause us to suffer, our joy should never waver because our joy is rooted in hope in Christ (Rom. 5:1-2). He never fails.
- 10) *Be patient in tribulation.* Paul is addressing the ever-present tribulation that comes when we live as children of God in a fallen world. (1 Pet. 4:16). Why be patient? 2 Corinthians 4:17-18 teaches us that our affliction is momentary and light (in comparison to Christ's suffering on the cross) and is producing in us an eternal weight of glory. So be patient, God will have the last say.
- 11) *Be constant in prayer.* Prayer is the greatest privilege we have as Christians. To have unhindered access to Almighty God is extraordinary. David's prayer in Psalm 31 is a great example of praying in times of trouble.
- 12) *Contribute to the needs of the saints.* This was Paul's original intent in traveling to Jerusalem (Rom. 15:25-26) so it's clearly important to him that followers of Christ take care of followers of Christ.

13) *Seek to show hospitality.* Hospitality is a duty of the Christian. The command to be hospitable is scattered throughout the whole Bible (1 Pet. 4:8-9; Heb. 13:1-2; Is. 58:7; Lev. 19:33-34)

Transition Statement: The overarching focus of verses 9-13 is “let love be genuine”. Each of the exhortations (hating what is evil, loving what is good, rejoicing, being devoted to one another, showing hospitality, etc.) is essential to love. Followers of Christ must seek to do these things at all times, but especially in times of affliction...

Point 2: Humility is a distinguishing mark of the Christian during uncertainty. (v. 10b, 13-15,16b)

How does showing hospitality take humility? Or what is the connection between hospitality and humility? Hospitality requires humility because people are welcomed into your world when everything is not perfect. True hospitality allows them to see your life “unplugged”. Most of us clean the house incessantly before company comes over, or take showers, put on makeup, dress our kids in nice clothes etc. Hospitality says, “you get to see my real world” and that is very humbling thing.

What is our natural tendency to do to those who persecute us? How does Paul teach us to react? Revenge is a natural reaction when being persecuted. Avoidance and doing whatever possible to get rid of the persecution are also common reactions. Paul affirms what Jesus teaches in Matt. 5:39ff when Jesus says to “turn the other cheek.” We are to resist fighting back when others persecute us.

At the end of verse 16 Paul tells us to “associate with the lowly.” Literally it means, “to be carried away with the lowly (things and people)”. What does Paul mean? How does this help us be humble? The term “carried away” is only used two other times in the New Testament. In Galatians 2:13 Barnabas is “carried away” with Peter’s hypocrisy and in 1 Peter 3:17 the people are “carried away” with the error of lawlessness. The word means to be affected by, moved by, drawn to. There should be something about humility and humble things that moves us. This helps us be humble ourselves because we see what it looks like and are being sanctified from the inside out.

Transition statement: Pride is a dangerous sin that Satan can use to keep us from showing hospitality, from empathizing with our brothers and sisters, even from evangelizing. The follower of Christ must be marked with humility....

Point 3: Unity is a distinguishing mark of the Christian during disorder (v. 14-21)

What is another way to translate “never be wise in your own sight” from verse 16b? How does this help foster unity? “Don’t be arrogant” or “Don’t think you’re the smartest person in the room” are other possible translations. Understanding that all wisdom comes from God

helps us stay humble (Prov. 3:7). Also, acknowledging that we once were sinners deserving of God's wrath but recipients of His amazing grace should help us stay humble.

Shouldn't we try to live peaceably with everyone? Why does Paul add, "so far as it depends on you?" in verse 18? Paul is indicating the fact that peace may not be possible. You may do everything "right", desire all that's honorable, show humility, desire unity, and seek peace but the other person(s) may reject you. Understand that the gospel offers true peace and when someone rejects you they are rejecting, for various reasons, the peace that God offers. Jesus teaches in Luke 12:51-52 that the gospel may divide.

Verses 19-21 offers some sobering language such as "leave it to the wrath of God", and "vengeance is mine I will repay", says the Lord." Where is the gospel found in these verses? The Gospel is found in the offer of reconciliation that the evil person has apparently rejected. The followers of Jesus have been wronged and Paul is teaching them to not seek revenge but rather, let the Lord deal with it. The Gospel not only offers peace with God but peace among men. Also, the vengeance the Lord speaks of is in reference to the final judgement.

The Big Picture

The way you live your life matters. Your actions matter. Your words matter. The way you spend your time matters. When people know you are a Christian then everything you do reflects on God, either negatively or positively, especially in times of difficulty. Do we only live right when things are going well? That is a form of hypocrisy.

The reason Paul can exhort us to do all of these things is because they are rooted in the character of God. God is just, loving, and good. He hates evil and loves good. He humbled himself at the incarnation and on the cross. He is all of these things and more. Only through a relationship with Jesus can we be restored to a right relationship with God and obtain true peace and restoration. The gospel is the peace that God offers. If this peace is rejected, one will be left to the wrath of God. It is in this God, the strong fortress, that we take refuge in times of tribulation, uncertainty, and disorder.

Application Questions

- 1) Which of the 13 exhortations do you find the easiest or most natural? Which is the most difficult?
- 2) Hypocrisy among religious people is one of the most listed reasons for people in Gaston County not attending church. Why do you think "religious people" have such a problem with hypocrisy and how can we work to overcome this?
- 3) If you have not already, define "hospitality" and discuss how this can be a bridge for lost people to the gospel. Discuss some practical ways you can be more hospitable.
- 4) Revenge is a natural tendency for us all, even children. How liberating should it be to obey and trust verses 19-21?

5) If your family was the star of a reality show called, "The Christian family," would people be drawn to Christ or turned away from Him after watching? What kind of ambassador is your family for Christ?