

## What Makes A Great Church, Part 2 - Romans 16:3-4 – October 27<sup>th</sup>, 2013

- Today's teaching will be part two of a new series we began last week titled, "What Makes A Great Church."
- The Apostle Paul ends his epistle to the Romans by greeting 35 people, all of which he knew personally throughout his years of ministry.
- The common denominator with all of them is they speak to how the people in the church are what make great church as we saw in vs. 1-2.

### 1. Faithful Women (Verses 1-2)

- Here Paul begins by greeting a woman by the name of Phoebe, who was so faithful and trustworthy that he has her hand deliver this letter.

### 2. Risk Takers (Verses 3-4)

- v3-4 Paul sends his greeting to Priscilla and Aquila as fellow workers in Christ who risked their lives for Paul and all the Gentile churches.
- It's interesting to note how that the Apostle Paul's first greeting is sent to a woman, and the second greeting is to a wife and husband team.
- You'll notice I said wife and husband not husband and wife, this because of the six times this couple is mentioned Priscilla's name is first.

- This begs the question of why? Commentators suggest that it's because Priscilla possessed spiritual gifts that Aquila, her husband did not.
- I suppose you could say Priscilla being the second on Paul's list of greetings, after Phoebe, further reinforces the role of faithful women.
- It's also interesting to note the similarity of how Phoebe was a great help to Paul, so too had Priscilla and Aquila risked their lives for Paul.

- If the truth be known, they had risked their lives for Paul, by virtue of how they had already died to self, and thus lost their lives in this world.
- Absent this willingness to lose our lives, we, as His church, can never hope to experience the fulfilling life that Jesus promised He'd give.
- Perhaps better said, a great church comes vis-à-vis those in the church who have truly lost their lives in this world, to live their lives for Him.

Matthew 10:10a, 39 NKJV (10a) I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly. ... (39) He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.

Jim Elliot, (October 8, 1927 - January 8, 1956), one of the five missionaries killed when bringing the gospel to the savage Huaorani people of Ecuador said, quote, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose."

When a less famous missionary by the name of James Calvert brought the gospel to the cannibals of the Fiji Islands, the ship captain tried to turn him back, saying, "You will lose your life and the lives of those with you if you go among such savages." To which, Calvert replied, "We died before we came here."

Thomas Hale, an even less known missionary, who had risked his life in bringing the gospel to Nepal was quoted as saying, "The biggest hindrance to the missionary task is self, self that refuses to die, self that refuses to sacrifice, self that refuses to give; self that refuses to go."

- I think of Esther who didn't refuse to go, knowing full well she risked her life, so much so, that she's quoted as saying, "if I perish, I perish."
- In recent weeks, while studying God's Word, the Lord has been ministering to me concerning powerful lessons found in scriptural contrasts.
- Let me explain, there's a profound and even prophetic lesson to be learned in the contrast between both Queen Vashti, and Queen Esther.

- Here's what I'm thinking, Queen Vashti refused to go to the King when commanded and as such, she would in effect lose her life as queen.
- Conversely, Queen Esther, willing to lose her life and go to the King when not commanded and as such she saves her and her people's life.
- In other words, Vashti, the first Queen refusing to go loses her life, whereas Esther, the second Queen willing to go risking her life, saves.

- Also, Saul, the first King refused to obey when commanded concerning going into battle and as such, he would literally lose his life as King.
- Conversely, David, the second King, was willing to lose his life concerning going into battle and as such, saves his and his people's, life.
- Interesting side note parenthetically both Queen Esther and King David were relatively young at the time they were willing to risk their lives.

- When we study 1 Samuel 9 Lord willing in a couple of weeks, we see Saul looking for lost donkey's contrasted with David tending to sheep.
- At the risk of reading too much into the contrast of the first with the second, to me, it speaks to the contrast of the first birth with the second.
- Namely, the first birth physically, which brings death ultimately, is contrasted with the second birth spiritually, which brings life eternally.

- Here in today's text we have a most poignant contrast with this wife and husband, Priscilla and Aquila, with yet another husband and wife.
- Their names, Ananias and Sapphira; you might remember this infamous couple of who were told in Acts 5 both lied, and died in the church.
- I would venture to say that I speak on behalf of everyone here in this great church, that we're all grateful we were not attending that church.

Charles Spurgeon captures this contrast when of this he wrote, "When two loving hearts pull together they accomplish wonders. What different associations cluster around the names of 'Priscilla and Aquila' from those which are awakened by the words 'Ananias and Sapphira'! There we have a husband and a wife conspiring in hypocrisy, and here a wife and a husband united in sincere devotion."

- Talk about literally losing your life trying to save it, and in stark contrast to Priscilla and Aquila saving their lives by their willingness to risk it.
- By the way, you'll forgive the play on words here, but it would seem that the Gentile churches were both great and grateful, to this couple.
- The reason I point this out is because it's evidenced in what Paul says in verse four of our text, which if you don't mind, I'd like to re-read.

Romans 16:4 NIV They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them.

- Now, I could end my sermon on this contrasting note, however, I'm not going to close yet, as I'd be grossly remiss for a number of reasons.
- Chief amongst these reasons is what I see as the paramount importance of identifying when it was and where it was they risked their lives.
- I'm of the belief that this sincerely devoted and united couple, as Spurgeon refers to them, risked their lives in Ephesus as recorded in Acts.

- Actually, we're first introduced to Priscilla and Aquila in Acts eighteen where we're told they were tentmakers, both like Paul and with Paul.

**Acts 18:1-3 NIV** After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. (2) There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, (3) and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them.

- The reason I highlight this is because of the tent-making component, if you will, and how lay leaders in a church, make for a great church.  
- Indulge me for just a bit as I go a step further and suggest, it's the Priscilla's and Aquila's in the church today that make for a great church.  
- Here's why, they're married. I realize this is a firm grasp of the obvious but what are not so obvious are model marriages in a great church.

- That said; let's get back to the account of when they risked their lives. It's found in Acts chapter nineteen verses twenty-three to forty-one.  
- In lieu of reading the narrative, I'll quickly give you the back-story, as it were, then, seek to connect the dots and fill in the blanks in closing.  
- The whole thing started in Acts 19:23 where we're told there arose a great disturbance about the "Way," which escalates into a full-on riot.

- It seems everywhere Paul went a disturbance soon followed. Paul not only disturbed, he wasn't disturbed by the disturbances he disturbed.  
- What's so disturbing is Demetrius, a financially successful businessman, starts losing money due to Paul's preaching, which is disturbing.  
- This because Paul preaches "that man-made gods are no gods at all," and the problem is that Demetrius' business is making these gods.

- They become furious and begin shouting, which is what sparks this riot, and what does Paul do? Of course he runs in fear for his life! No!  
- He risks his life, because he's already died to self and lost his life. He fearlessly tries to get in the middle of it but is subsequently stopped.  
- Who stops him, you might ask, to which my response would be, "I'm ever so glad you asked, because I believe it was Pricilla and Aquila."

- Here's how I get there, Luke records, as Paul rushes into this riot to get before the crowd he's stopped by his companions and disciples.

**Acts 19:28-30 NIV** When they heard this, they were furious and began shouting: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" (29) Soon the whole city was in an uproar. The people seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia, and rushed as one man into the theater. (30) Paul wanted to appear before the crowd, but the disciples would not let him.

- It's at this time that everyone is thrown into confusion, shouting just to shout, and most of them didn't even know why they were shouting.  
- Then a man named Alexander, who's not our friend, tries to silence them so he can make a defense, to no avail; they shout for two hours.  
- All the while, Paul, who undoubtedly could hear all of this from outside the theatre, has to calmly, and prayerfully wait it out as it plays out.

- I would submit it was Pricilla and Aquila that calmed Paul down enough to wait this out, and in so doing, risked their lives, to save his life.  
- Had they refused to take this risk, I wonder whether or not this would have played out, and worked out, as Paul who's saved waited it out.  
- Here's the bottom line, show me a great church, and I'll show you a church that has risk takers who've already lost their lives in that church.