



HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

The Joy of Church

November 8, 2020

Romans 16:3-16

Clint Pressley

³Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, ⁴who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well. ⁵Greet also the church in their house. Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in Asia. ⁶Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you. ⁷Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners. They are well known to the apostles, and they were in Christ before me. ⁸Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord. ⁹Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and my beloved Stachys. ¹⁰Greet Apelles, who is approved in Christ. Greet those who belong to the family of Aristobulus. ¹¹Greet my kinsman Herodion. Greet those in the Lord who belong to the family of Narcissus. ¹²Greet those workers in the Lord, Tryphaena and Tryphosa. Greet the beloved Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord. ¹³Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord; also his mother, who has been a mother to me as well. ¹⁴Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers who are with them. ¹⁵Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them. ¹⁶Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.

(Pastor prays)

Sunday is a good day, a necessary day, the Lord's day, when we gather to worship, sing, be fed, rejoice in Jesus and have our hearts prepared for the week ahead. As I looked over the passage before us, I had to ask: what do I do with this list? There are at least 26 names on it! This has to mean something. One thing I know it means, I heard Voddie Baucham say: God knows names, and when they are written in the blood of Christ, the names are the names of His children. Lists of names in the Bible are nothing new. Whether it's Genesis 5, the promised seed, or Matthew giving us the genealogy of Christ, they mean something!

Connie and I were walking and talking about this list. She said maybe it is the first group text in Christian history. Maybe so. But I think there's something else here that is worth our time looking at and thinking about. There is something in here for the church. It's a template, an example. It's a reminder of who we are and why we exist. Let's get the context of the passage. Paul is finishing out a letter that he has written to the church in Rome. It's a church that is living under one of the most corrupt emperors in all of Roman history, Nero. They are living under that godless government and thriving, growing, ministering, moving, evangelizing, discipling and sending out missionaries. And in this passage Paul begins 16 sentences in a row with the word "greet." And as he does we get an inside picture of the makeup of the church. Look, there is beauty here and encouragement here. There is focus and clarity and life in this text as we think about being the church in the days ahead. We have just finished a week of celebrating 65 years of Hickory Grove. Let's look forward to the future with hope as we consider who we are and who we are supposed to be in light of this passage.

God Made This Church for This Moment

The church must be radically focused on the Gospel

There are a lot of ways to get at this point, but the best way is to go through the passage and look at how many times Paul uses the phrase "in Christ Jesus", "in Christ," or "in the Lord." Nine times in 13 verses. If this were a hymn, "in Christ Jesus" would be the refrain, reminding us that the very heartbeat of this fellowship and our movement itself is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and that gospel is the reason for our existence and the core of our being. And the minute we are known for something besides the Gospel, we have become cultural hyenas eating the leftovers of some other movement.

Now when I say Gospel, I want to be clear on just what I mean. Paul's letter to Rome is saturated and inundated with the Gospel. Paul talks about the holiness of God, the sovereignty of God, the wrath of God in Chapter 1. He talks about the goodness of God and the love of God. A good God who has created all things. He also talks about man. Man being the crown of God's creation, created in the image of God. But that image has been disfigured by your own sin that has corrupted your entire character, and separated you from God with no real hope. God sent Christ to earth to live perfectly in order to redeem us at the cross. There on the cross, God poured out the full wrath that we deserve on Jesus. Jesus died in the place of sinners, was

raised from the dead and now He rules over Heaven and Earth. And if you believe that, turn from your sins, you will be saved. Now when we lose sight of that, we turn on one another and our light is snuffed out. And that can't happen! When everything is coming apart, how does the center hold?

This is what we believe: the sovereignty of God, the authority of the Bible, the centrality of the cross, the substitutionary death of Jesus on the cross, our need for repentance and the call to mission. What threatens to knock you off Gospel focus? What sin are you battling? Whose life are you speaking the Gospel into? Who do you need to forgive? The church must be radically focused on the Gospel.

The church must know how to love

This passage is permeated with real affection for people. In verse 5 Paul speaks of Epaenetus. He says, "Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in Asia." Think of that connection. In verse 8 there is Ampliatus, in verse 9, Urbanus, in verse 12, Persis. I don't know when the church got so hard and hateful, but as James said, "my brother these things should not be!" It's one of the dangers of not being together, meeting and seeing and praying for one another. I have no doubt that brothers and sisters in Christ will disagree, and sometimes do so profoundly, but those who are in Christ have no choice but to love like Christ loves. To rebuke sin is to correct and then pray with and build up other Christians. It's what the Christian church does. There are times when Paul excoriates people. He follows with affection and prayer and love. The cross reminds us of that love, grace and patience of God. If you are a part of the church at Hickory Grove, how are you tangibly showing the love of Christ? If your display of love is misinterpreted, what are you doing to follow it up and make sure it's communicated rightly? We are loved by God in Christ and the church must be a people that knows how to love.

The church must be genuinely diverse

In this passage you are going to find Jews and gentiles. In verse 3 you will find Prisca and Aquila; they are Jews. In verse 7 there are Andronicus and Junia; Paul says, "they are my kinsmen." There is Herodin—he is obviously Jewish— and then you read a whole bunch of Greek names. Jews and Greeks, this is normal. There are male and female. You know what is not normal is the number of women Paul mentions in this list. One-third of the names on the list are women.

There are nine of them. Paul doesn't make a big deal out of it, which is a *big deal* in itself. There are slaves and free. Several of the names on the list are slave names. There are slaves and maybe former owners sitting together. It's not like in the American past, but here they are sitting as brothers and sisters in Christ. I think it's significant that you have old and young mentioned. There is Rufus's mother and, in verse 13, Paul says "she was a mother to me." I think it's significant that there are married couples and singles mentioned in the list.

My point is the church is the last place we need homogeneity. Do you know that word? It's the quality or state of being all the same. Real diversity makes the Gospel of Jesus Christ shine brighter because it and nothing else is holding us together. Ephesians 2 says that in Christ there is the one new man in place of the two. As a member of the church, who are you intentionally loving that is completely different from you? How do we make sure diversity is not for diversity's sake but for the glory of the Lord Jesus? The church must be radically focused on the Gospel. The church must know how to love. The church must be genuinely diverse.

The church must be ready to work

³Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, ⁴ who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well. ⁵ Greet also the church in their house.

Prisca and Aquila are mentioned six times in the New Testament. Paul was especially close to this husband and wife missionary team. Paul met them in Corinth on his second missionary journey. Acts 18 tells us that they shared the same secular trade, they were tentmakers. They helped Apollos get a better doctrine of Christ and risked their necks doing work. Chapter 5 tells us they held a church in their house. They worked. Verse 6 mentions Mary, she worked. In verse 9 there is Urbanus, work. In verse 12 we meet Tryphaena and Tryphosa, they are probably twin sisters. They are women and they work. Persis, Paul uses the Greek word, *Sunergoi*, fellow worker. There's a partnership. There is partnership in the Gospel ministry. Each person has a role to play and they are all different and sometimes *extremely* different and yet they are still a coworker in the Gospel ministry.

Are you an attender or investor? Are you a spectator or a player? Are you a doer or a watcher? Are you a thermometer telling everyone what the temperature is or a thermostat that can

make a change? The church must be radically focused on the Gospel. The church must know how to love. The church must be genuinely diverse. The church must be willing to work.

The church is made of people who are eager to celebrate

In verses 3 through 5 there are Prisca and Aquila, missionaries. ⁷*Greet Andronicus and Junia my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners. They are well known to the apostles, and they were in Christ before me.* Andronicus and Junia, a married couple that were fellow prisoners. Verse 5 tells us of Paul's first convert in Asia, beloved Epaenetus. In verse 13 there is Rufus. His story is incredible. In Mark 15:21 we hear of Simon of Cyrene coming from the country. He was the father of Alexander and Rufus. It was Simon who was charged to carry the cross of Jesus. Rufus and his mother are in that church. His own dad carried the cross of Jesus and his mother was like a mother to Paul. Or in verse 12, how about those two girls, Tryphaena and Tryphosa. Most think they are twins and their names are translated from "delicate" and "dainty." They are workers in the Lord! My favorite is in verse 15. Philologus means "loves to talk"! All these people are celebrating what God has done for us in Christ, the blessing it is to be a child of God at this time in this place for God's glory.

I could go on talking about the suffering. These people were risking prison, risking their necks. But God speaks to his church for the church to be strong. The church must be radically focused on the Gospel. The church must know how to love. The church must be genuinely diverse. The church must be willing to work. The church is made of people that are eager to celebrate.

So as we close today, let's do so with some questions:

How do you need to realign your focus on the Gospel of Jesus?

Who do you know that's hard to love that you will love this week?

How can you break out of your sameness for the Gospel?

How will you work for mission?

What do you need to celebrate?

(Pastor prays)