

Title: I Long To See You

Text: Romans 1:8-15

Date: September 18, 2011

Place: Decatur Church of God

Theme: Romans

Deb and I got engaged on February 14th, 1972 while sophomores at Gulf Coast Bible College. There was no doubt in my mind that this was the girl that God wanted me to marry. I still have that opinion and conviction.

That summer Debbie traveled with a trio of girls from GBC representing the school and holding concerts throughout the Western United States.

While she was gone, each day we sent cards and letters back and forth to each other. The truth was, I longed to see her. I missed her and couldn't wait until the trio tour was done so that we could be back together.

Paul writes to the church at Rome with a similar passion. He has dreamed of being there with them for years. It has driven him. It has consumed him and he wants them to know it. So, he writes them a letter.

Notice what he has to say...

Romans 1:8

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world.

I. Paul is thankful for them.

A. He is pleased with their faith.

* God told Abraham that he would bless him with family more numerous than the stars. Abraham believed God and God was pleased with his faith. The Bible tells us that his faith was reckoned unto God as righteousness. Let's demonstrate that kind of faith!

B. It is a faith that others acknowledge.

Application: I would write the same about you. You have a faith in Christ that impacts Decatur and other points around the globe. Our Indiana State ministry and our national Church of God Ministries both have acknowledged your contribution to the work of the Kingdom of God.

Romans 1:9-10

⁹God, whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you ¹⁰in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you.

II. **Paul remembers them and prays for them.**

A. With God as his witness, he professes his concern for them.

B. He prays for them and for the opportunity to come and be with them.

Application: It is no different for me and other leaders of our congregation. God knows that we pray on your behalf. We are not so bought into the mechanics of having a “church” as we are in celebrating our opportunity of being the “church.”

*Two brothers had traveled to the western edge of Zimbabwe to raft the Zambezi River. They boarded their raft at the base of the Victoria Falls. Massive amounts of water spilled over the top of the giant falls and dropped almost a thousand feet; the roar was deafening. The falls are the largest in the world, more than a mile wide and three hundred feet high. Mist from the spray that fills the air like fog can be seen for fifty miles; the locals call it "Smoke That Thunders." The water from the falls rushes down the gorge in torrents, creating the world's largest rapids. In the United States,

the highest-class rapid you are allowed to raft is a Class 5. The Zambezi's whitewater rapids can top 7 and 8

As they sat on the edge of the eight-person raft, all suited up in a tight, overstuffed jacket and a thick crash helmet, they felt like overcautious tourists about to mount an overpowered moped in Honolulu or rent roller-blades on Huntington Beach. The Zambezi can't be that dangerous, can it?

But then the guide [said], "When the raft flips ..." There was no "If the raft flips" or "Or on the off chance we get flipped." But "When the raft flips." He went on, "... stay in the rough water. You will be tempted to swim toward the stagnate water at the edge of the banks. Don't do it. Because it is in the stagnate water that the crocs wait for you. They are large and hungry. Even when the raft flips, stay in the rough water."

Stagnancy will kill your spirit The church of tomorrow must resist stagnancy. God needs us out there in the rough waters, pouring our lives into people Live in the whitewater. Live where it's just a little bit uncertain and unsafe.

Celebrate the opportunity.

Romans 1:11-12

¹¹I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong-- ¹²that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.

III. Paul wants to encourage a mutual giftedness that will enhance their mutual faith.

- A. Paul wants to help them discover their spiritual gifts.
- B. Those gifts are to be used in expanding the ministry of Jesus.

Application: Later in the letter Paul will spend several chapters expanding on this issue of spiritual gifts. For today, let us suffice to say that our prayer is that every member of the body of Christ, especially those who call themselves the Decatur Church of God

would receive from God through the presence of the Holy Spirit spiritual gift or gifts. The gifts that God gives to us are not for our own edification but for the work of God. They are not meant to make us feel good but rather to make our ministry for Christ successful.

Romans 1:13

13I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles.

IV. Paul wants them to know his heart and that his plan is for them to love God and serve God completely.

- A. Don't think that this letter is a sudden whim or that my absence is because I don't care for I have sought to be with you for some time.
- B. I want to be with you and help you become a powerful force in winning the Gentile world to Christ.

Application: It is a human weakness that many of us display in forming conclusions based upon our own assumptions rather than on the real facts. I too want you to know my heart. There is much that I have sought to share with you and much more that I still want to impart. Just as Paul sought to see the Roman church make a difference in their community, I seek today to be a force in Adams County that will make a difference for Christ.

Notice that Paul was not focused on building a church community or just making it numerically larger. Paul was focused on expanding the Kingdom. He wanted people to experience Christ. Could it be that we have become so focused on our own spiritual growth that we no longer really care if others around us know Christ or not?

When you talk with a non-believer do you see them as a pre-Christian? Can you honestly say to them “**I long to see you**” as my brother or sister in Christ?

Romans 1:14-15

¹⁴I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. ¹⁵That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome.

V. Paul wants everyone to hear and respond to the “Good News” of Jesus Christ.

A. There is no prejudice in Paul’s intent. He wants everyone to know Christ.

B. Ultimately, this connects him powerfully to the people of Rome.

Application: In our community, it makes no difference what color, cultural background, financial position, or social standing a person may have. If they have a need for Jesus, they should have our love and our time. Everybody needs to know Jesus!

* Toy Story 3, Scene 33, "Goodbye Andy," 1:28:55 to 1:32:05;

In the movie Toy Story 3, Andy, the owner of Woody, Buzz Lightyear, and other toys, is preparing to leave for college. At the end of the movie, he decides to give his toys to a young girl named Bonnie.

The scene starts with Andy entering the front gate of Bonnie's home and showing her the box of toys. Andy tells her, "I'm Andy. Someone told me you're really good with toys. These are mine, but I'm going away now, so I need someone really special to play with them." Then as Andy proceeds to hand the toys to Bonnie, he introduces them by saying something special about each one.

He begins with his toy cowgirl Jessie: "This is Jessie—the roughest, toughest cowgirl in the whole West. She loves critters, but none more'n her best pal, Bullseye."

Andy then hands Bonnie his toy Tyrannosaurus, Rex, "the meanest, most terrifying dinosaur who ever lived."

For the Potato Heads, Andy says, "The Potato Heads—Mister and Missus. You gotta keep em together cause they're madly in love."

Slinky the Dog "is as loyal as any dog you could want."

Andy blesses Hamm, the Pig, by saying, "He'll keep your money safe, but he's also one of the most dastardly villains of all time, Evil Dr. Pork Chop!"

Buzz Lightyear is "the coolest toy ever. Look, he can fly, and shoot lasers. He's sworn to protect the galaxy from the evil Emperor Zurg!"

Finally, for his pal Woody, Andy says, "He's been my pal as long as I can remember. He's brave, like a cowboy should be. And kind, and smart. But the thing that makes Woody special? Is he'll never give up on you—ever. He'll be there for you, no matter what."

Conclusion: I think the question we must ask ourselves today is whether we really long to see anybody? Have we become so self-satisfied and inner-focused that we really don't have a heart for others?

Or maybe you do long to see others come to Christ. How can we make this a more visible and intentional ministry?

1. Increase our frequency and passion in prayer.
2. Make our discussions and verbal exchanges more Christ-centered.
3. Live our lives with the intention of being a Christ-like example.
4. Quit laughing at discriminatory jokes and begin to truly love people who are different from us.
5. Express our desire to others that "we long to see them."