

It was late on Good Friday. Many waited to hear what his last words would be. He had been such a great communicator throughout his life, especially in the last years. His messages were always meaningful and inspiring. Surely he would say something profound, something that could guide his friends and all people to be greater. But as the one considered a savior, a great man, and a father of a people approached death there would be no more communications. He had no last words. When Abraham Lincoln was shot he immediately lost consciousness and never spoke again.

The apostle Paul was a great communicator. He could write very profound, very inspiring words too. That was because he was a minister of Christ Jesus. The second lesson isn't his last words before death. Just last words in his letter to the Romans. Before these words Paul had given them all the teaching and doctrinal portions of the letter. Now he moved to personal matters of high importance. There was a distinct focus though on the work he'd done as a minister of Christ.

All too easily we can get caught up in what we're able to do, what we're able to become, and all the while we forget what we really are. This world offers a lot of temptations to us with daily steering to never want to leave. There is so much this world has to offer. But Paul, the minister of Christ, reveals what it can never offer. Along with the Romans you and I have received...

**Grace from a minister of Christ
He proclaimed the gospel of Christ
He makes offerings acceptable to Christ**

All across the country at colleges, universities, and high schools commencement activities are happening. Every commencement wouldn't be complete without speeches. At the college level the commencement address is typically given by someone popular or famous. Someone well-known comes to share wisdom, laughs, or offer a call to action for the graduates. Many will listen but few will remember what was said days or even hours later. I attended high school commencement on Friday and I can't remember a thing that any of the speakers said. I'm sure it was good, I just don't remember.

In the long run whatever the famous person says isn't all that important. The graduates are already graduating. They've completed all the assignments and passed all the tests. They have gained the knowledge necessary to move on from school. Paul said something similar about the Roman Christians. **"I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another."** The Romans had reached a level of spiritual maturity and faith. But what Paul was saying was important. Throughout the letter, Paul had reminded them of many teachings they already knew. They got it, their faith accepted it. They were prepared to proceed safely and securely through life.

Paul included some bold and strong doctrines. What was it that allowed this minister of Christ to write this way? How could he remind them of things they already were familiar with? Paul doesn't claim special authority over them. He likely hadn't even visited Rome yet. No superior intellect or skills that would cause them to listen to him. The only reason is God's grace. **"I have written you quite boldly on some points...because of the grace God gave me to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles."** God's grace made Paul a servant with the task of ministering, serving, writing a message for these Roman Christians. Entirely it was focused on God. God's grace made Paul worthy to serve. God's grace made the Romans open to study, to learn, to grasp what Paul proclaimed. It was grace from God that made Paul a minister of Christ to proclaim to them.

Paul is not here to proclaim to you today in person. I wish that he was, how much better would that be? Imagine listening to the apostle Paul preach. What would he say? In some ways you don't have to imagine. You could simply go back and reread the first fourteen chapters of the book of Romans. There you'll find all the hard things and bold things Paul shared as he served as a minister of Christ. **"The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men."** **"All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law."** **"There is no one righteous, not even one."** This minister of Christ spoke harsh sounding law. Even to us he proclaimed all of us to be sinners, every last one. No one here has achieved enough good works to be considered right before God. We hear it from Paul, but whether it's Paul or me, Paul's words in Romans or Luke's words in Acts, everything comes from God's Word. God wants us, needs us to hear these difficult words of law regarding our sin.

Paul was minister of Christ. I am a minister of Christ too. It wouldn't be enough for Paul or me to leave you with just law. **"I have written you quite boldly on some points...with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God."** Ministers of Christ tackle sin with the gospel of God that centers in Christ. Hear how Paul boldly wrote gospel earlier in the book, **"I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes."** **"God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."** It's the promises of a Savior, that's the gospel of God. That's what Paul shares and I share. The gospel says God loved you and set into motion a plan to save you by sending his own son. That son would face God's wrath for you. That son would gladly offer his life in trade for yours. He would be the only truly righteous person to live. His resurrection from the dead would confirm your new life. Your sins are forgiven and your guilt is too. You are under God's gospel, good news of grace through Christ.

If anyone had reason to boast it was Paul. Thirteen written letters that are in the Bible to this day. Mission work begun all over the Roman Empire. Thousands of believers directly tied to that mission work. Don't you think that Paul had a reason to boast? **"I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done."** Paul made his point. He wouldn't brag about himself. He had done nothing. God and his grace had done it all. God fashioned children for himself out of spiritually dead people. Gentiles, non-Jews, too were set to enjoy heaven because of what God had done. These Gentiles became like an offering Paul could only give to God. It all belonged to God anyway. Paul was making offerings acceptable to Christ.

Who are the people in your life that it might be possible to take credit for some action that seemed to result in their faith? Maybe it was the child you baptized as an infant that still remains in the faith today. Maybe it was the parent you talked to as they were suffering from some terrible disease and before they died they heard you speak Bible verses and believed. Maybe it was a friend you showed a willingness to listen to, a stranger you helped, or someone who came into contact with you somehow and now believes and will be saved. You've been a minister of Christ on more than one occasion in your life, I'm sure. But before anyone hurts themselves with pats on the back, think of what really happened. Did we accomplish bringing faith into their hearts? Was it me that converted them? Can I claim to be a savior? The answer is of course no. Who caused faith to grow in their hearts? Who is their Savior? We are not, God is. These believers belong to him. We belong to God. We all have been made **"offerings acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit."**

It was God's grace. Jesus is the message Paul shared with you. Christ Jesus is the Savior I seek to point you to. Jesus wins and gives you eternal life. Jesus is what you have. Jesus is your reason for glory, both what he accomplished in you and what he'll accomplish through you. He rose from death to life and now that life is yours. He forgives in unconditional love all your sins so that you can forgive in love. Jesus shows you grace so you can show grace.

Paul's noble mission was to never work where someone else worked first. **"It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation."** He wanted to go and do mission work where mission work had never been done before. That was his gift from God. Many build on another's foundation. That's okay. Sharing Jesus that way isn't less important. The work is God's. The results are God's. The good news message and grace are all God's. You have been called to work, to be a minister of Christ. To share and show people the power of the Holy Spirit at work still today. He's working in your life. He's ready to burst out and work in the lives of those around you.

Last words seem important. Many people have tried to catch the last words of especially famous people. President Lincoln didn't get last words to sum up his life or leave inspiring words for greatness. Paul's words today aren't dying last words. But they are inspiring because they were inspired by God. Paul shares grace as a minister of Christ. Grace is what you have also from this minister of Christ. The gospel of Christ proclaimed to you transforming to make you acceptable to Christ.