

## ***Whose I am and Whom I Serve***

Acts 27:20-26

### **Scripture**

<sup>20</sup> *When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging, we finally gave up all hope of being saved.*

<sup>21</sup> *After the men had gone a long time without food, Paul stood up before them and said: "Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete; then you would have spared yourselves this damage and loss. <sup>22</sup> But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed. <sup>23</sup> Last night an angel of the God whose I am and whom I serve stood beside me <sup>24</sup> and said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.' <sup>25</sup> So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me. <sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island."* Acts 27:20-26 NIV

### **Introduction**

Look again at verse 23. I want you to underline the words "...the God whose I am and whom I serve."

This past week Pam and I spent four days away just recharging our batteries. We went to our little one room camp house in Uriah, AL. I call it the farm but it is really just a place for us to tinker, hunt, rest, and study.

Before leaving on Wednesday, I received some news on Tuesday that was very difficult for me to swallow. The mini-vacation was already planned and proved to be good and bad in light of my news. It was good in the sense that I had an opportunity to be alone and digest what I had been told. It was bad in the sense that I had a lot of time to sulk and dwell on the bad news.

Upon hearing this news, I vowed to keep it a secret. I decided for whatever reason that I would not tell anyone other than my wife and children. I especially did not want you my church family to know about this.

The news I received on Tuesday was the confirmation that I have diabetes and probably have had it for some time. I recognize that many of my church members are diabetics and I have heard you speak of it often. But diabetes scares me to death. When we lived in Mississippi, I watched my neighbor lose his foot, then his leg and shortly thereafter, his life to diabetes.

Being told I have diabetes has weighed on me like a load of bricks on my shoulders. I must confess I have felt sorry for myself, I have brooded and I have even thought the worse. As I stated, diabetes scares me.

Don't misunderstand me. I have not been angry about the news. At no point have I been angry with God or even questioned God as to why this would happen to me. I have been too blessed in my life to go down that road with God.

But I did my share of brooding. By Sunday, I was weary from all the sulking and fretting. Sunday morning I wandered off into the woods just to have some time to pray and seek God for clarification.

When we pray, we also need to listen to God. God will usually provide answers and comfort if we will take the time to listen.

This morning I would like to share with you the things God laid on my heart last Sunday morning in the woods as I sought His guidance to my struggle.

### **Content**

## 1. Why the big secret?

As I began to pray about this disease of which I am so afraid, God first spoke to me about my commitment to keep this news private. ***“Why was it so important to keep everyone from knowing I am a diabetic?”***

I suppose my best answer is I did not want to talk about it. I did not want diabetes to be the topic of conversation whenever I saw you in public or at church. I love talking about life and what God is doing in people’s lives. I did not want diabetes to be the prevailing topic.

To this God posed another question. This question was one of authority as a father to a son or a master to his slave.

***“Since when do I want you to keep things private and not use them for my glory?”***

This question hit me right between the eyes. It forced me to instantly realize the selfishness of my desire to keep this diagnosis private. I have prided myself in making everything I have available to the kingdom of God. I am not selfish with the things I have been blessed with and enjoy seeing them used for ministry.

But, when it came to my health and my feelings, I guarded them. I selfishly placed them off limits. I wasn’t willing to expose the privacy of my heart for anyone or for the glory of God.

As the prayer continued God said not only will you not keep it private but you will share it this Sunday with your congregation. You will trust me and I will use it for my glory.

So here I stand today speaking this to you. It is not easy for me but I am being obedient and trusting God for the outcome.

For God is *Whose I am and Whom I Serve*.

## 2. How does this make my ministry better?

After being rebuked for my commitment to secrecy, I moved on to some questions for God. These were not questions from an angry heart but from a hurting heart. These were not questions of rebellion but questions from someone searching for guidance.

The first question I asked was how could this possibly help my ministry? Looking back I realize how foolish of a question this must have been. I have seen God use everything in my life in one way or another for ministry. Through our experiences good and bad, he shapes us and uses us for His purposes. The storms in life help us rather than hurt us when we stay close to God.

As foolish as the question might have seemed, God gently answered, ***“You will better understand the fears of my people.”***

We have a prayer list filled with people who are hurting and facing struggles. The majority of people on our prayer list are facing major medical problems and desperately need our prayers. I commented this week that if Robyn reduces the font any more to make the list fit, we won’t be able to read it.

Through my fear of diabetes and the strength God will provide, I will better understand the fears of others. I will better relate to their fear and struggles and God willing, I will be an example to them. Together we will share our experiences and inspirations with one another.

What was to be secret must be proclaimed as God wants to use everything in our life for His kingdom.

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### 3. How does this make my faith stronger?

The next question I posed to God was how does this make my faith stronger? This question was more of a search for insight. I wasn't asking if it would make my faith stronger for I knew it would. I was asking how it would make my faith stronger.

Again God gently answered ***"You will learn to trust me with the things that are out of your control."***

I realize diabetes requires some major changes in my eating and life style. I cannot dodge this bullet. I must rise to the challenge and find the courage and discipline to do the things I am required to do. At the same time, I must trust God with all my heart.

Illus: This week my son called and said Corbin was taking his first steps. Pam and I rushed over to their house to witness our grandson walking. It was marvelous to see how he is growing, learning and tackling life. I was reminded that God is the giver of life. He breathes life into our bodies and sustains us for experiencing life.

God will strengthen me in my moments of fear. God will provide guidance and wisdom to deal with diabetes. Ultimately, God is the giver of life. I must do my part but I must also trust God's wisdom.

I am not a lazy person and I have always enjoyed working hard. I have never made it a habit to shirk my responsibilities. If I can fix what is broken, I make it my business to do so.

There are some things in my life we have to accept. There are some things we don't have the ability to fix. And, there will be some responsibilities that are laid at our feet whether we want them or not.

These things will strengthen my faith as I trust God for the results; this includes life itself.

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### 4. How does this help Barnwell Baptist Church?

When I went to the woods to seek God's answers, I thought I had a lot of questions. As it turns out, I had only three. The final question I asked was how does this help Barnwell Baptist Church?

I reasoned with God that this church had already been through the pain of losing a pastor to death. I would not even want this church to go through having a pastor who is out due to illness let alone lose another pastor.

This time God's answer was not so gentle. ***"I know what is best for Barnwell Baptist Church."***

Hearing God's answer, I felt ashamed of myself for asking. Who do I think I am that I would be so important? God sustains this church and will continue to do so with or without my help.

The message was clear. Just as I do not know what the future holds for me or anyone else, I do not know what is best for the future of Barnwell Baptist Church. It is not my job or my calling to predict the future of any church.

My calling is for today. My calling is to serve the Lord with all my heart and soul today and leave the future to God's divine providence.

God has graciously placed me here. And as long as He calls me here, He will provide the strength and resources to do His work.

So in the words of Paul, *"...forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."* *Philippians 3:13-14*

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## Conclusion

So, today I have been obedient. I have spread my heart open wide for you to see my weaknesses, strengths, fears and assurances.

A long time ago, I gave my life to Jesus Christ. Not a day has gone by I have regretted that decision. Likewise, not a day has gone by I haven't learned more about what that decision meant. Some days I learn more. Thanks to diabetes my learning grows deeper.

There are times in our life when God calls us to take on what we do not desire. It may not be convenient and it may not be fun but it is our responsibility. I know many of you have traveled this road and others will one day. Trust me, you do not want to stand before God and acknowledge you failed or you turned your back on the challenge he placed before you.

Illus: I shared with you about going to Austin and Janet's home to see Corbin taking his first steps. It was more precious than I can explain. When I got there I squatted down on the kitchen floor and held my arms out for my grandson to walk to me. Holding his arms out as if he was walking a tight rope, Corbin wobbled his way to me. With a huge smile on his face, he lunged into my arms when he was still a couple of feet away. I was there to catch him before he landed on the brick kitchen floor.

Likewise, I will cautiously continue through life wobbling my way the best I can but I know my Savior's arms will always be open wide to catch me.

For God is *Whose I am and Whom I Serve*.

Oh how I pray that God uses my words today to strengthen someone. I pray that the Holy Spirit speaks clearly to your heart through these jumbled words.