



# TWO FIRST CENTURY MAIL CARRIERS: A LETTER TO ROME AND A LETTER FROM ROME

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I want to congratulate you on finishing Servant Leader Training. You've had a great opportunity to be involved in a very good life changing program. You have learned principles of service, and you've also learned how to share the gospel. Evangelism at Camp Elim has always been a team effort. We all want to see boys and girls come to know Christ.

The office keeps things organized. The food service keeps people fed. Maintenance supplies us and keeps us clean. The nurse keeps us healthy. Activities keep us happy and hopefully a little tired. There's wonderful music to make us joyful and praise the Lord. There are speakers who clearly give the gospel. And, yes, counselors who love the kids and have the privilege of shepherding their little flock for five and a half days. They are always ready to share the gospel in small groups and on one to one.

During the Second World War when England was being pounded by their enemy and stressed to the limit, Winston Churchill said that there was a great need for energy from the coal mines in order to win the war effort. Many of the coal miners wanted to join the army but Churchill said, "No. You need to stay in the coal mines. We cannot win this war without energy." After the war, the submarine sailors and the Army and the RAF would have had great stories to tell.

But Churchill had said, "Cut coal to win the war". Because through coal, they got power to run the trains, the factories, the ships, and have electricity. He wanted the miners to see that their work was directly supplying the war effort and very important.

We can see from this illustration that whatever your job is at camp that that you are supplying directly to the effort, if you do it for the Lord. Your job is important.

I want to tell you about two people in the New Testament that we know carried Paul's writings from one place to another. The first person was a sister in Christ from the city of Corinth named Phoebe, who was given the Book of Romans from the hand of Paul to take from Corinth to Rome a distance of about 600 miles.

Her responsibility was to deliver it to the believers there. In his book he calls Phoebe a sister, a servant and a helper of many. From this we see that she was a great help to the church and quite a leader.

It was a dangerous journey for her to take the Book of Romans with her from Corinth to Rome. She would have to travel quite a bit on the sea and on the land facing many dangers.

But it must have been a great joy when she finally arrived to give greetings from Paul to the church there at Rome. Imagine what that was like when she showed up at the church at Rome, and from the folds of her cloak she brought out the greatest theological treatise ever penned. The Book of Romans. “It was a responsibility of considerable magnitude”, one author said.

They would immediately see from Paul’s commendation of her (Romans 16:1,2) why she was sent with this treasure. She would be greatly appreciated and respected by them. Phoebe was a woman who had the joy of taking this incredible document to Rome. It was a one-of-a-kind that was written by the hand of the Apostle Paul himself. She faithfully accomplished her task to deliver it to the believers. This same 2000-year-old document defines the gospel of salvation by grace through faith apart from works and has affected the entire doctrinal foundation in the history of the church even the world. Today, you like Phoebe hold the truth of the Gospel and need to faithfully accomplish your responsibility too.

One of my former students tried to run far away from the Lord and while still a high school age young man, sold drugs and weapons right here in this city. His distraught father could only think to just get him out of town. The father had a friend in Australia who agreed to put him to work. When the job finished there, the young guy ended up all alone in Melbourne, Australia, and finally came to the end of himself. One day, while wandering around the city, he was looking in a bookstore and saw a dusty Bible on the bottom shelf. He bought it and went back to his hotel room. He remembered what he had heard about the Book of Romans in his Christian school and read it all by himself and in that hotel room got saved. He repented of his sin and rebellion, went back to his father and in the coming days found a wonderful way to preach the Gospel to the Muslim world.

There was another letter that was written and sent by Paul called Philemon. It was a small letter, just about the size of a thank you note with 455 words (25 verses). Not like the book of Romans which had 9422 words (433 verses). The Book of Philemon was very short.

The story behind it was that there was a wonderful Christian in the city of Colossae, which was 1200 miles (830 as the crow flies) miles away from Rome. This believer’s name was Philemon. He and his wife, Apphia, had a church in their home. They were apparently quite evangelistic and a great help to the church there in Colossae.

One of Philemon’s servants, named Onesimus, stole some of his goods and ran away, making it all the way to Rome. It was very dangerous for him to do this, because there were

slave hunters everywhere who either would kill runaway slaves or try to sell them. But this slave, Onesimus, made it all the way to Rome where he was thrown in jail.

Well guess who he was imprisoned with. The apostle Paul. These two became cellmates during Paul's first imprisonment in Rome.

This rebellious slave was probably angry and upset when he first met Paul. However, what he found was an older man who was very loving and who told him the truth about life, the Savior, and eternity.

During this imprisonment Onesimus became a Christian. Paul refers to him as his "son" (1:10) in the faith. Eventually the Apostle encouraged him to go back to Colossae and to make right, the things he had done wrong. Paul knew that Christianity is not, "A revolution but a complete regeneration of the heart". Onesimus carried this note to Colossae and would seek forgiveness from Philemon.

Although this book is very short. It's an incredible illustration of the doctrines of Christ's substitution, Christ's advocacy, and the doctrine of man's reconciliation. Because in this book the Apostle Paul tells Philemon that if Onesimus had stolen anything that, he, Paul himself, "would pay it back in full." (1:19) That is what the gospel teaches us. Jesus told the Father, that he would pay the price for my sin and pay it in full. "I restored what I did not take away." (Psalm 69:4)

There's one more point that I want to make with you regarding what Paul says to Philemon. He tells him that, "You owe to me even yourself." (1:19) One writer said, "How great is the obligation which is owed to those who have won souls?"

I would encourage you to remember the one that led you to the Lord. Make sure you thank them for what they did for you. You're on your way to heaven now because somebody took the time to tell you about the Lord and His salvation. Make sure they know that you're thankful.

Now you too are a messenger, like Phoebe and Onesimus. You also can now have the joy of passing on that same message to others. I can tell you from a lifetime of evangelism and personal work that the benefits are incredible if you stick with it. There's nothing like it in the world. There's no investment you can make that is greater than giving out the Good News of Christ. (1 Thess 12:19) "You are our treasure and joy"

### **In conclusion.**

Today you may be a seasoned Christian, who is highly valued by your church and a leader in your youth group. You might be one who is a strong believer and knows how to serve and is

profitable in the work of the Lord. We're glad to have you on board, you'll be a great influence to others. But I also, I want to remind those of you that are young Christians or maybe growing in your faith and remind you that you too are valuable in the work of the Lord. And you have the same Gospel to share.

I'd like to give one last illustration here. When I was in junior high. I went to a camp the Navigators had, and I got to know my counselor pretty well. After camp was over, he arranged for me to have Bible study with him on a weekly basis.

We got together every Wednesday night at the castle at Glen Eyrie, which is the headquarters of the Navigators. My dad, who was also a young Christian at the time would drop me off at the gatehouse and the go to the kitchen in the castle and have Bible study with the chief cook.

At the gatehouse I met with my Counselor, Bruce Das, who was a security guard at the gate. During that time, it was my privilege to study and pray with Bruce and hear great stories that he told me about what it meant to walk with the Lord. I was being disciplined.

I will never forget those wonderful times. Recently I thought that it would be really good and to thank Bruce for the times that we had together. We had lost contact through the years, and I thought it might be an encouragement for him to know that I was still walking with the Lord.

I wrote him an e-mail which finally got to him. He wrote back to me that he was very encouraged and thanked me for the note. I still warmly remember our times together. He has been serving with the Navigators for the last 60 years.

You never know what can happen when you invest in somebody else by studying the Word with them, praying for them and encouraging them.

I hope this little story will encourage you to be sure to thank the one who shared the gospel with you. And get ready to have the joy of leading others to Christ this summer...

May God bless you!