



water from rock

## Selah: Stop, Look, Listen – October 17, 2023

The Lord be with you.

You must be a person hungry for God. I mean, I don't think he would be listening to the Selah podcast, but that you have a real hunger and thirst for God, you love God and are probably growing in your understanding of God's love for you. And yet as you were growing in your understanding of how wonderful God is, you are growing in your understanding of... Well, of how you fall short, growing in your understanding of where God is noting you to grow growing and your understanding of sin in your life... Am I right? I mean, it might seem that the more you were growing in your faith, the more you were sensing how far you have to go... What's going on here?

I would like to explore this for a few moments by looking at the life of the Apostle Paul and to look at Paul's growth, his progress in faith and how sometimes it might look like in going forward, Paul is going backward. As Paul seems becoming more and more aware of sin in his life. And to do this, I wanna look at three verses from the apostle Paul, three verses that are written over a period of several years. The First verse is Paul writing in 1 Corinthians Chapter 15:9, "For I am the least of the apostles. Unfit to be called an apostle because I persecuted the church of God." Paul at this point has been walking with Christ for a lot of years, serving Him faithfully. Paul was well aware, confident that God has called him to be an apostle, but Paul also is remembering his former life, he was remembering that he had been a ringleader in the stoning of Stephen the first martyr, remembering that he had been a leader in persecuting the first Christians. Yes, Paul knows that he is a new creature in Christ. That old things are passed away, all things are new. But that Paul does remember what he once was, he remembers that from which God has saved him, and so Paul calls himself the least, the least of the apostles, unfit willing to be called an apostle, he says. So we can hear a deep, deep humility in Paul.

In other versus, Paul talks about God's power that is made perfect in Paul's weakness. Paul talks about how he is a clay pot, he is a broken clay pot in order that the power of God might be seen in his life. Paul was writing these words to the Corinthians in the year 56, hold your Bible there, and let's fast forward in time, fast forward five years to the year 61, as Paul is now in prison for spreading the good news of Jesus Christ. And Paul writes in Ephesians Chapter 3, Verse 8, "although I am the very least of all the saints." Now, when Paul says saints, that's Paul's word for a believer in Jesus Christ. So Paul here is meaning Christians, believers, "Although I am the very



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least of all the saints, this grace was given to me. To bring to the gentiles the News of The Boundless riches of Christ." Now, we might not have expected Paul to say something like this. I sort of get it, I sort of get at the Paul calls himself, the least of the apostles, but that He is the very least of all the saints, all believers everywhere? Okay, Paul is struggling to express himself here in these words. So that Paul comes up with what are some very rare Greek words used nowhere else in the New Testament, as literally Paul is saying that he is more least of all the saints or leaster. He's leaster not only of the apostles, but he's leaster even of all Christians. So you see what's going on in Paul's life. It seems that the more that Paul grows and his understanding of who God is, God greatness, God's holiness, God's grace, that Paul is overwhelmed, and he feels like he is more least of all believers before God. I think it must be something like Peter, when Peter saw the miracle working power of Jesus, Peter was overwhelmed and he pleaded with Jesus, depart from me for I am a sinful man. I think it must be something like what Isaiah experienced in Isaiah Chapter 6, when he saw the Lord God high on his throne, lifted up, Isaiah cries out, Woe is me. For my eyes have seen the Lord, the Lord Almighty.

And that's what happens when we begin to see God for who he is, so that we become more and more awareness of our brokenness and sin, so we're looking at versus which Paul is growing and understanding of the greatness of God, so that Paul goes from thinking of himself as the least of the apostles to the more than least of all Christians. One more time. Let's fast forward to the year 65 or 66. We are in one of Paul's last letters, in which he is writing to his young protege in the faith Timothy, passing on to Timothy the torch of the Gospel, reminding Timothy of the power of the Gospel, by reminding Timothy of what God has done in Paul's own life. 1 Timothy Chapter 1:15, Paul says, "The saying is sure and worthy of acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the foremost." I love this verse. I come back to this verse again and again, because it reminds me that God can save anyone, he can save me, he can save you, because He saved Paul, who speaks of himself as the foremost, the worst of sinners.

I heard it said that Christianity is... Well, it's one beggar telling other beggars where you found bread, and you know these Selah podcasts, Well, I'm one beggar telling other beggars where I have found bread, where I have found the love and grace of God in Christ Jesus. And I feel that I'm coming closer and closer to God and loving him more and more, and yet at the same time, and becoming more aware of how far short I fall and how much more I need the grace of God. The closer we get to God, the more we see our need for His grace. I don't think I can yet say that I'm the worst of sinners. But it would be okay if I were, because I know Jesus came to save sinners. Even the worst of sinners like Paul, and I'm so glad to have these few moments to remind you of this... And to remind me.

I am Tim Smith, a fellow traveler. Thanks for listening until next time.