

Romans 15:22-33 | David Baumgartner

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Date: 28 November 2021

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[0:00] We welcome you to the media ministry of Bethel Community Church. Knowing Jesus, making Jesus known. And if you have your Bibles, if you'd please turn with me to Romans chapter 15.

We're going to be looking at verses 22 to 23. On the back of your handout I have the verses, so if you didn't bring your Bible or your iPhone, you can look on the back of your handout. You realize that we're coming to the end of Paul's letter to the believers in Rome. And of course, as is his custom, he ends his letters with some personal remarks.

And so we're reminded here, the last time we met, how Paul saw himself. Do you remember those four ways that he saw himself?

First, he was a minister. Yeah, we would expect that out of the Apostle Paul. Secondly, he referred to himself as a priest, offering up the Gentiles to the Lord.

[1:04] And then third, he was a preacher. Does that surprise anybody? No. He was also, though, a pioneer. Paul loved to go into places where the gospel had never been preached before.

Today was really so much a continuation of last week, but we're going to see Paul's heart. Another way to say this is, what motivated Paul to become, as many people would say, the greatest missionary who ever lived?

What motivated him? Why did he do that? Well, please, let's go ahead and read our text, starting in verse 22. And we'll be going to verse 33.

For this reason, I have often been hindered from coming to you. But now, with no further place for me in these regions, and since I have had for many years a longing to see you whenever I go to Spain, for I hope to see you in passing and to be helped on my way there by you when I have first enjoyed your company for a while.

But now I am going to Jerusalem, serving the saints. For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem.

[2:20] Yes, and they were pleased to do so, for they are indebted to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual things, they are indebted to minister to them also in material things.

Therefore, when I have finished this and have put my seal on this fruit of theirs, I will go on by way of you to Spain.

And I know that when I come to you, I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ. Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me, that I may be delivered from those who are disobedient in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may prove acceptable to the saints, so that I may come to you in joy by the will of God and find refreshing rest in your company.

Now the God of peace be with all of you. Amen. Heavenly Father, we are so grateful to you, Lord, that we can come here today and just to remember, just to learn about these words that were written some 2,000 years ago, and yet they apply to us today, Lord.

We see these travel plans of Paul, and Lord, we know that you were involved in each one of them. We're thankful for this time of year, Lord, where we reflect upon just what things for which we can be thankful, and also just as Christmas and New Year's approaches, Lord, we just give it all to you, Lord, because you are the source of our life, and we're so grateful, Lord, that we are in Christ because of what he did for us.

[4:06] Thank you, Lord. We ask that these words would speak to our hearts today. In Jesus' name, amen. I'd like to begin with a little story here

about a schoolteacher from Scotland, and he became a missionary at the age of 19.

His name is George... I'm sorry. He became a missionary later in life, but at the age of 19, George Stott lost a leg in a farming accident.

One day, Hudson Taylor was looking for help in his missions work in China, and George Stott came forward, and Taylor asked him, Hey, you've only got one leg.

Why do you want to become a missionary? And so Stott said, Well, I don't see anybody coming with two legs. He was immediately accepted to serve in the China Inland Mission, and when Stott arrived in Shanghai, it was on February 6, 1866, Stott quickly relocated to the city of Wenzhou, where Christian teaching had never been heard before.

And as a result, Wenzhou became known as the Jerusalem of China. Ten percent of the population there became believers. That's over 600,000 people.

[5:39] I would say... You know, you think about a testimony like this, a story. Most people would say that George Stott was not a perfect candidate for foreign missions.

Would you say that? Yeah, you'd think so. You know, many people would not approve of a guy who's missing a leg, going overseas, and, you know, dealing with things like that.

But I'll tell you what. George Stott had something. He really did. He had a heart for missions. I want to ask this question here. What does a heart for missions look like?

What does it look like? Well, this morning, we can actually look at the life of the Apostle Paul. And certainly, when we read the accounts of Paul in the book of Acts, we see all the missionary things that he did.

But here, even in Romans, in the reading of this part of this letter, we get to see his heart for missions. And this text, I believe it shows us three things, three aspects about Paul's heart.

[6:45] And I think it ought to inspire us today regarding missions. Not only missions around the world, but also just here, even locally here. What does it look like? Well, first, follow with me on your outline here, is a heart for the unreached people.

Look with me here. Verse 22. Paul begins this section. For this reason, I've often been hindered from coming to you. Now, you just want to stop there for a second.

What reason is he talking about? Well, as we saw last time we looked in Romans, Paul was busy planting churches in this huge area of the world, extending from Rome to Illaricum.

It's back in verse 19. In fact, in Acts 19, it even tells us that all of those who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.

It's amazing. But you'll also recall that Paul saw his work there as being finished. Look with me, verse 23. No further place for me in these regions.

[7:54] So, finally, Paul is going to visit the church in Rome. But he has this long-term plan here. Look with me here in verse 24. Whenever I go to Spain.

Oh, that's interesting. He says, For I hope to see you in passing, and to be helped on my way there by you, when I have first enjoyed your company for a while. This is the first time Spain has ever been mentioned in this letter.

You might want to ask, Why would Paul want to go to Spain? Well, obviously, he wants to run with the bulls. Or he wants to see the Rock of Gibraltar there in the Straits of Spain, right?

No, I don't think so. Paul wants to reach more people with the gospel of Jesus Christ. He's a trailblazer. Yeah, he is.

And his desire is to bring the gospel to places where the name of Jesus has never been heard before. Spain, or Hispania, as it was known at this time, would be the western edge of what's called the civilized world.

[9:02] And so, it came under the Roman Empire about 150 years prior to this. Notice here, though. He says in verse 24, He wants to be helped on my way there by you.

In other words, He wants the believers in Rome to be part of this ministry. What a great invitation. Have you ever received an invitation to be part of a ministry?

I hope you have all the time. Even today, talking about what goes on at Dayspring. You know, all the word goes out to these little kids, even to the parents.

You can be part of that. Even cleaning up, you know, becomes part of that great work. So many things that we can become part of.

So, He says, He says, I want your support for this new ministry. You might want to ask, Well, how can they help? Well, they can help.

[10:06] As we're going to see, they can help financially. They can help in prayer. Also, it's possible that some of them knew some of the customs in Spain. Or maybe they were familiar with some Roman politics.

Rome could serve as a launch pad for this new Spanish mission that Paul has in mind. And I think it's just really good when churches can do that.

Support missionary efforts. You all remember the Great Commission, right? Yeah, to go out into the world. This applies to churches here, corporately. But you know what?

I think it also applies to all of us as individuals. I think today, if you would ask most people about something like this, that say, I'm not Paul.

You know, there's nothing that I can do. Friends, you don't have to be Paul. You don't. There's a great verse. It's on your handout there, if you'd look with me.

[11:05] It's a verse about how we have an opportunity to be co-laborers with somebody like Paul. 1 Corinthians 3, verses 6 to 9.

He says, Did you guys catch that?

What a great way to look at things. But it's God who causes the growth. Now he who plants and he who waters are one. He says the same thing there. But each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor.

For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building. He's talking there specifically about the church in Corinth there. But what an amazing thing to be fellow workers with the Lord. God Almighty. What a privilege we have, friends. That we can be part of a mission field, not only across the world, but also how about here in St. Louis?

[12:10] How about here in Webster? How about maybe with some of your neighbors? Well, Paul has this on his mind, but he also has something else on his mind, which actually leads to the next thing here.

He has a heart for the poor, persecuted Christians. Look with me here in verse 25. He says this, But, in other words, before all this, now I'm going to Jerusalem serving the saints.

He says, Apparently, the apostle Paul, who's in Corinth at this time, is sitting on a pile of money. And, by the way, that word for contribution there, that's the word that we use for fellowship. Have you ever heard the money being used as for fellowship or koinonia?

Yeah, that's where that's from here. This fellowship, this contribution, it must have been pretty sizable. And I say that because it was gathered from a very large geographical area.

[13:24] He says, Macedonia and Achaia. That would include cities of Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, and probably several other places.

There's many things to note here. First of all, who's this money for? Well, it's earmarked for poor believers in Jerusalem. Why is that?

Actually, in history, it teaches us that there were several famines that occurred in Judea around this time. There was also, if you're familiar with Acts in chapter 11, you may have heard of this guy named Agabus.

Yeah, he had the gift of prophecy, and he talks about how there would be a great famine there. In Acts 11, it tells that each one of them, he's talking about the believers, determined to send a contribution in the relief of the brethren living in Judea.

And as they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul. So this is before Saul became Paul here. That's out of Acts 11, verse 29. But there's another reason for helping these Jewish Christians in Jerusalem.

[14:37] And it's this, because persecution was intensifying. When we read in Acts 12, it says, About this time here, Herod, the king, laid his hands on some who belonged to the church in order to what?

Mistreat them. And he had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. And when he saw that it pleased the Jews, this would be unbelieving Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter.

The story goes on there. You see how there's persecution arising, intensifying in Jerusalem. Not only famine, but also persecution.

So that's to whom the money's for. Who's it from? It's from Gentiles. Paul wrote this. Paul wrote about this in 2 Corinthians.

If you'd look with me there, he says, Brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given to the churches of Macedonia, that in a great ordeal of affliction, their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality.

[15:51] For I testify that according to their ability and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord. In his second letter to Corinth, Paul explains how these believers in the church of Macedonia, how they were so generous to those believers in Jerusalem.

You might want to ask, what's their motivation? Well, back to our text here, notice they were pleased to make a contribution. I think what that means is they did it out of joy.

They didn't have to coerce people or get out your checkbook and maybe promise you some things. No, they did it out of cheerfulness. Friends, this is a work of God in the believer's heart.

You know, and God is generous with us. Isn't he? And so, really, what a wonderful lesson here that you and I can be generous.

I'm preaching to myself, friends. You know, this is a good truth to remember here. Here's another reason, though, that he says in verse 27 that they, he's talking about the Gentiles, are indebted to the Jews.

[17:05] You believe that? Listen to what he says. For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual things, they are indebted to minister to them also in material things.

In other words, God sees these, sees Gentiles as being in debt to the Jews. And that's because they were, they were the recipients of these spiritual blessings that came from the Jews.

I think it kind of reminds us of that promise made to Abraham. Doesn't it? That in you, all the families of the earth will be blessed. Yeah, we might want to ask, well, what spiritual things were derived from the Jews?

Well, several. Jesus, the Savior. He's from, he has a Jewish heritage, right? And by the way, we're going to be celebrating that very soon here, Jesus coming into this world here.

Secondly, that most of the word of God was written by Jews. All except for Luke, you know, in his writings, in his gospel, and the book of Acts.

[18:20] Did you know the first preachers were all Jewish? Including Paul. And through him and others, the gospel was spread to Europe.

The very first convert was this young lady named Lydia. In Europe. And so, our nation, it was founded by people from where? From Europe.

Starting with these pilgrims that came over to our country, seeking religious freedom from King George of England. They wanted to worship God as they believed the scriptures told them.

So, I believe here that all of this evidence does support what Paul says. Gentiles are in debt to the Jews. You agree with that? I hope you do.

I wonder what Paul would have thought about the doctrine of supersessionism. Yeah, you know what I'm talking about. That's the belief that God's finished with the nation of Israel.

[19:21] And the church replaces Israel. If you've been part of our Sunday school for the past three months, you know where I'm going with this. How odd that within just a couple centuries there would be some biblical scholars who would find a way to redirect all the blessings and the promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, redirect them to the church.

Well, I'm preaching, I'm beating a dead horse here. So let me get back to the text. Verse 28.

Therefore, when I have finished this, in other words, this collection of money for the Jews in Jerusalem, and have put my seal on this fruit of theirs, I will go on by way of you to Spain.

So notice here, Paul is giving his seal of approval on the generosity of these Gentile believers.

Evidently, Paul wants this kindness to serve as a token of the Gentiles' love and gratitude to the Jews.

Notice here, he calls it fruit. And that's because the money is proof of the transforming power of the gospel. By the way, it seems also that when Paul would go back with the money, that he also took

representatives with him from various churches.

That was a very interesting thing to learn here. If you look with me on your handout, 1 Corinthians 16, 1-4, notice what Paul says. Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also.

[21:07] On the first day of every week, let each one of you put aside and save as he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come. When I arrive, whomever you approve, I shall send them with letters to carry your gift to Jerusalem.

And get this, and if it is fitting for me to go also, they will go with me. I'd like you to just picture in your mind, if you will, Paul showing up in Jerusalem with this huge Santa Claus bag of money, and he's got all these Gentiles with him.

Boy, what did that look like? What an interesting time here to see that. So, there are his plans. And in verse 29, he says, And I know when I come to you, I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.

Yeah. Let's hold that thought here, because Paul has one last request. Verse 30, And now I urge you, brethren, by the Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me.

Here's the third thing that I see. There's a heart for missions despite danger and opposition. Paul here, he's laid out his plans, but he knows that these plans, these endeavors, they could be dangerous for him.

[22:34] And so, in verse 30, notice here, Paul appeals to his fellow believers in Rome to pray for his mission. Notice here, this is not just some casual request that, you know, just pray for me.

No, he strengthens his request here by adding, by the Lord Jesus Christ and also, and the love of the Spirit. There's two great motivations there.

He says, strive together with me in your prayers. That word, strive together in the Greek, that means, that's just one word in the Greek. It means to agonize. It means to exert a tremendous amount of energy toward a common effort.

So, here we see Paul asking for prayer and it just kind of reminds me, you're never too important to ask for prayer. You agree with that?

No. It's a good thing here. What are Paul's prayer requests? Well, notice in verse 31, he says, that I may be delivered from those who are disobedient in Judea.

[23:39] He's talking here about unbelieving Jews, okay? And that word, delivered, it means to be rescued from a dangerous situation. You read the book of Acts and I would say it's not uncommon for Paul to face danger.

You could go through that book and you'll see various accounts of all this antagonism from the unbelieving Jews against Paul. I was going to go through all of that, but it's Acts 9, 13, 14, 17, 18, 19, 20.

Paul sums it up, though, in his first letter to the Corinthians. He says this, to this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, poorly clothed and treated roughly and are homeless and we toil working with our own hands.

And then he goes on in his second letter, he says, I don't want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction that it came to us in Asia. Listen to this, that we were burdened excessively beyond our strength so that we even despaired of life itself.

Wow. That's never been said about me. And I don't know too many people that can say that. Why did the other Jews hate Paul so much?

[24:58] It's because he renounced Judaism. We must remember at one time, Paul was their hero. He was going around arresting Christians Christians.

And now, he's the ultimate traitor. He's a turncoat. Benedict Arnold. So he prays. He says, pray for my safety.

Secondly, notice in verse 31, he says, that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints. Acceptable to the saints.

Why would that be a problem? It's simply this, friends, because the money was from Gentiles. Jewish Christians might refuse the offering because it was tainted by what's thought of as unclean

hands of the Gentiles.

That's why Paul spills so much ink teaching about how Jesus tore down that separating wall, that wall between believing Jews and believing Gentiles.

[26:04] And he's hoping here that his ministry to the Gentiles might move to jealousy my fellow countrymen and save some of them.

Do you remember that from Romans 11? That's because the more Gentiles get saved, perhaps the more jealous the unbelieving Jews might become.

So two good reasons to have prayer for safety and also that this offering would be acceptable here. And so Paul finishes this letter on a positive note.

Verse 32, so that I may come to you in joy by the will of God and find refreshing rest in your company. Now may the God of peace be with you all.

Amen. Friends, it's really unknown if Paul ever made it to Spain. If you study the end of the book of Acts, you discover something really strange.

[27:01] God did eventually take Paul somewhere. He took him to Rome, but just not the way that Paul thought. Let me just briefly go through this. Bear with me here.

In Acts chapter 21, while he's in the temple in Jerusalem, Paul's taken captive because he's preaching against who they thought Moses. And he would have been killed, except some Roman soldiers intervened and rescued him.

chapter 22, Paul was giving his testimony to a crowd. And when he mentions his ministry to the Gentiles, at that point, it's like he pushed a button and they said, okay, we've heard enough.

Away with this guy. Let's kill him. In chapter 23, he addresses the Sanhedrin. But there's a plot of 40 men who dedicated their lives to kill him.

And the plot was discovered. Paul's taken 60 miles to Caesarea under the protection of 200 soldiers and 70 horsemen. Chapter 25, he's kept in prison for two years.

[28:11] Yeah. Finally, Paul appeals to Rome to be heard by the emperor, who at that time is most likely Nero. Chapter 26, he's interviewed by Roman governor Felix.

And again, by Festus, King Agrippa, I'm sorry, King Herod Agrippa, and then Bernice. Chapter 27, finally, he's escorted to Rome. And he arrives there as a prisoner.

But did you know that even as a prisoner, Paul is able to share the gospel? Not like he thought, but he's able to share it with the Roman soldiers.

Remember when he said in verse 29, I know that when I come to you, I will come with the fullness of blessing? That was true. But it seems like God's strategy changed in how God would use Paul. Instead of planting churches, instead of going to Spain, Paul ended up in this prison here. And he writes his prison epistles, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians.

[29:19] He writes to Philemon. And he's also able to share Christ with, guess who? Roman soldiers. And these soldiers would be dispatched to all the different regions of the Roman Empire.

And what would they do? They would establish churches and convert others. Look with me in Philippians 1, verses 12. It's in your handout there. I want you to know, brothers and sisters, he's writing to a church, and this is one of his prison epistles.

I want you to know, brothers and sisters, what has happened to me has actually served to advance my gospel. He's talking about his imprisonment. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ.

And get this, and because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.

What a way that God used the apostle Paul, isn't it? What a miraculous thing here. When you think about this, and what kind of things can we take away from this account in Paul here?

[30:33] I think the first thing is this. Number one, all missionary efforts are dependent upon God's work of grace in our lives. Would you agree with that?

It all starts with grace. grace. What is grace? Unmerited favor that we would receive from our Lord. The second thing, that the task is a priestly privilege.

We're presenting God to others who don't know him. You think about just how wonderful that is. What does a priest do? A priest brings God to the people and brings people to God. God. And that's the only thing, friends, because there's salvation under no one else except Jesus Christ. When Jesus Christ came into this world as a little baby, he taught us things about the Lord. He did some miracles proving his identity. But the most important thing he did was to go to a cross and die for our sins. And so by faith, we receive what Jesus did for us.

[31:45] And you think about just, there's no other way. And so there's an urgency about that, isn't there? Think about all the people that we know who, if they died today, would face a Christless eternity.

The third thing I see is about mutual partnerships. Not all of us are called to go to foreign places like Paul. But we can still have a part, can't we?

Number four is, I think, just these balanced in priorities. Notice that Paul had this urgency about introducing others to Jesus Christ, particularly in Spain.

But he's also got this money. And he's got these people in Jerusalem that are suffering from persecution and famine. No doubt, Paul had the, he went to the Lord with that decision.

Do I go to Spain? Do I go to Jerusalem? I believe that God has no trouble placing or guiding his people in places where he wants us.

[32:50] I open this story with George Stott. When you talk about how the Lord may use us, George Stott's testimony was actually very interesting.

None of you have asked, how did he have just one leg? It was a farming accident when he was 19. He bumped his leg and it became an infection.

And then by the age of 19, he was laying in bed for almost a year, not able to move, and he was cursing God. But the love of God reached down to him.

And he went from being a careless, indifferent person to someone who saw his need for a savior. God can use all of our circumstances for his good pleasure, for his purposes in the world.

What a great God we have. How generous he is with us. What a privilege we have to be his people. Amen.