

ROMANS – LIVING BY FAITH
LOVING GOD AND LIVING GODLY – Chapters 12-14

LESSON 53 – DREAMING OF ROME – Romans 15:22-33

In our goal oriented society, people often think they fail if they don't achieve those personal goals. But God is far more interested in the process of our Christian life than the visible results. Prayer is the key to ensuring that our vision stays flexible enough to reach God's goals instead of our own.

In the last chapter of Romans, Paul mentions 27 different people in the church. We can imagine Paul's excitement and anticipation at the thought of visiting Rome. It was his dream to go to Rome and from there, continue spreading the Gospel to those who hadn't heard about Jesus. Paul eventually ended up getting to Rome...but not the way he planned.

Paul's Delay in Visiting Rome

Paul's delay in being able to get to Rome brings up an important theological and practical question... How can someone be hindered in doing the will of God? We've touched on these already in our study, but let's look at three reasons why this can happen.

Hindered Because of An Unfinished Obligation – Sometimes we move too quickly, leaving something unfinished that God has given us to do. Paul wanted to go to Rome, but God obviously had more for Paul to do in other parts of the world. There was nothing wrong with going to Rome...and he did get there...but God had additional things for him to do first.

Hindered Because of An Unprincipled Opponent – It is possible for the true enemy of the church...satan himself...to hinder our work. Paul told the Thessalonians that he had wanted to visit them many times but satan prevented him from doing so. The devil doesn't want the work of God to progress so he will do all he can to hinder it.

Hindered Because of An Unparalleled Opportunity – Sometimes we are hindered in a work because God has something different...better...He wants us to do. Once Paul was stopped by the Holy Spirit from going into Asia. That closed door resulted in a vision of a man from Macedonia asking Paul to come and help. That opened a whole new opportunity for sharing the Gospel.

When we're doing the will of God, there will always be friction and often hindrances. Satan doesn't easily give up territory. The best way to never have any friction or any hindrances in your spiritual life is to do nothing. Stand still...sit on the sidelines and you'll be left alone. A life of mediocrity will face very little opposition and will accomplish even less.

Paul's Dream of Visiting Rome

In verse 23, Paul makes an interesting statement. "Now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions..." Now, he didn't mean that every single person had been witnessed to, but that his strategy had been completed. Paul would go into a large city and evangelize the people. He would then send workers into the area to continue evangelizing. He is saying that he had been to all the major areas and now it was time for him to head to Rome. He stayed with the calling God had given him and completed it.

Paul's Determination to Visit Rome

Paul had a plan but he knew the timing of it was in God's hands. The order of Paul's visit would be Rome and then Spain. Unfortunately, there is no Biblical or historical evidence that tells us Paul ever made it to Spain. It wasn't as important that Paul get to Spain as it was for him to have his eyes of faith set on taking the Gospel beyond where it has been.

Paul's objective in going to Rome was to come in the fullness of God's blessing so he could be a blessing to them. Little did he know that he would not get to Rome that way. Instead of going there as a preacher, he went as a prisoner.

In spite of his arrest and imprisonment, the Gospel was spread. He was able to preach the Gospel at the highest levels of the Roman Empire. He ended up being a blessing in Rome even though it was in a different way than he anticipated.

Paul's Desire for the Romans to Pray

Paul asked the church in Rome to pray for him. This was not an unusual request by Paul. He made the same request from the Corinthians, the Ephesians and the Thessalonians. Sometimes we think Paul was such an extraordinary, godly person that he would be beyond the need for prayer, but Paul never viewed himself that way. He saw himself always in the need of prayer.

The reality is that we all need prayer for health, finances and family matters; but far more than that, we need prayer to stand firm in our ministry. We need prayer to be strong in the face of opposition to the Gospel and to persevere through times of trouble.

Paul would never have requested prayers similar to how many people pray today... "Lord, please bless all the missionaries." He was headed into hostile territory in Jerusalem and he knew he might be persecuted. He was requesting prayers for spiritual and physical safety as he headed to Jerusalem.

In verse 30 he asks them to join him in his struggle by praying. He was asking the church to agonize with him in prayer. True prayer is a spiritual battle ground...an intense action that requires energy and perseverance. Prayer in the Holy Spirit is prayer against the will of the devil. True prayer will be resisted by our enemy. There is a direct correlation between how hard prayer is and how important it is.

Notice also that Paul asks the church to pray specifically for him in certain areas. He asked that they pray for his safety in Judea. He asked that they pray for his service for Jerusalem. Then he asked them to pray for his success in coming to Rome.

Paul's Dedication of the Roman Christians

Verse 33 is the fourth title for God that Paul uses in chapter 15. In verse 5, we find God of patience and God of comfort. In verse 13, we see the God of hope and here the God of peace. It is significant to note that Paul, headed into a potentially dangerous situation in Jerusalem, is trusting in the God of peace.

Prayer can make all the difference. It did in Paul's life as the Rome church prayed for him and it can in our lives as well. Don't ever say, "All I can do is pray" as a negative thing!!! There is no more important work you can do that will produce eternal, spiritual fruit.