

**Rom 15 28-33 NKJV 28 Therefore, when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit, I shall go by way of you to Spain. 29 But I know that when I come to you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ. 30 Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me, 31 that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, 32 that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be refreshed together with you. 33 Now the God of peace [be] with you all. Amen.**

Have you ever felt that you chose a path that was not God's path for you? Have you ever had something stuck in your head and you stubbornly stuck to it, even though you had a sinking feeling this was not what God wanted for you? Maybe it was even a ministry. Maybe it even appeared to be a good thing, a thing you could justify. A thing that would be difficult for anyone to prove you wrong. And yet, at the end of the day, as you look back on that thing, you can see that it bore bad fruit. It did not end anything like you intended it to? You have to conclude that you were wrong about this path. And as you sort it out you realized there was self in the plan.

Do you realize that Paul experienced this as well? Now what he intended may have been more noble than what we intend, but there are lessons to be learned and comfort to be found in Paul's story.

Let's look at our text and see what we can learn.

**Verse 28- Therefore, when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit, I shall go by way of you to Spain.**

Paul made plans. We talked about this last week. And he told people what he intended to do. So that is all well and good. It is always good to add, at least in our thinking if not in our speech, "if the Lord wills."

James gives us that instruction. But it is clear that is how Paul made his plans, even if he didn't always include that in his communications.

The word Paul uses for seal is basically to say that he will confirm its delivery. It is an accountability word. Scripture doesn't give us examples of blindly sending money to ministries without some form of accountability. Yet many big name tv preachers would be shut down if people demanded accountability. We always do well to follow the scriptural precedent when supporting ministries. Right now I am receiving emails from a man claiming to be a minister in Pakistan. I would love to send him resources but I have tried through all the channels I know and

cannot verify that his is a legitimate ministry. I think it is, but I have no means of accountability. So I continue to ask God for some means of verification.

So Paul's plan was- go to Jerusalem, deliver the funds, verify that they are used as promised, and go to Rome. Then he was going to have the church in Rome underwrite his trip to Spain.

**29 But I know that when I come to you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.**

How did Paul know that? Well, where did he ever go that he did **not go** in the fullness of the blessing of the Gospel? He could have put that on his business card- travelling in the fullness of the blessing of the Gospel. Everywhere he went he took with him the Gospel message and the blessings that happen as a result of that Gospel. New lives, changed lives, changed behaviors, peace, forgiveness, reconciliation, hope....we can't let out hope.

And what is this gospel? Was it just another religion? Is it some plan whereby we improve ourselves until we are good enough for God to receive us?

No-it is exactly the opposite. First we must be brought to the point where we realize that there is **no way in this world** that we will ever be good enough for God. We will never be able to escape the penalty **for the sins we have done** and the **sinners that we are**. And the penalty for that sin is eternal condemnation. We all start on equal footing. We all start equally damned.

But Christ came to our planet and took upon Himself the punishment for the sins **WE** committed. It was the most unfair thing in history. He was absolutely innocent and took upon himself **all of our guilt**. He died, was buried, and on a day like this He rose from the dead. And by raising from the dead God verified that what Christ did was all true. He was showing that Christ truly did have power to forgive sins and he truly did have power to offer everlasting life. That is what is so great about this day.... About Easter.

So you have this in front of you this morning. God calls every person, you included, to repent. He calls you to turn from your way of dealing with sin and to receive His way of dealing with your sin. He calls you to believe in what **He did for you** and **what He will do IN you**. If you have never done this, I beg you not to let this day go by without taking care of the most important thing in your entire life. Maybe your life is a wreck right now. Maybe it is going smooth. It doesn't matter. You are not prepared to live until you are prepared to die. Surrender your life to Christ today. He is the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Him. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.

Now, for those who already believe, is that what we take with us in our forays into the world? Do people associate us with the Gospel? Are we used to bless people with these things? Is there a refreshing difference about us? Or are we just like everyone else?

Along with that, notice what Paul is saying. Think about Paul's life of blessing. How did those blessings affect Paul? What about his nice mansion with a chauffeured driven limo? What about his jet? What about his lavish vacations and air conditioned dog houses? No. Those aren't blessings of the gospel. And often they are more distractions than they are blessings at all. Blessings **in this life** cannot be measured by how nice they **make this life**. They are measured by how well they prepare us for the next. Paul issued those blessings everywhere he went, even though they may have made the lives of those receiving those blessings much shorter or much more difficult in the short run.

**30 Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me, 31 that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, 32 that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be refreshed together with you.**

Now Paul is asking for prayer. This is interesting. The more people he ministers to, the more people he can ask to pray for him. Which results in more people praying for him, which results in more people he ministers to. It ends up being a wonderful cycle. Of course, at the same time, it gives the minister more people that he feels called to pray for.

Look how Paul approaches them. He does not command them, although it is possible he could have. But he doesn't. He begs them. Actually the word is a word that has come up a lot lately. Para'kaleo. It is the "come alongside" word. It is the same root used in the word for Holy Spirit.

It is like Paul is saying I am coming up next to you in an effort to get you to sympathize with me. I want you to join with me in this. And I make this strong relational appeal based on the things we have in common. Those things are the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of the Spirit. We are in this together. We are united in the things that matter most. So I come alongside to ask you this.

**that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me**

This "strive together" implies an intense struggle. It is doing spiritual battle. And he is basically saying, "do intense spiritual battle for me in prayer as I do the same." I am not prepared at this point to do a study on the spiritual battle of

prayer. Unfortunately I do not know as much about this experientially as I should. It is an area that I need to grow in. And I figure I am not alone in that. We can clearly see that Paul knew about that kind of warfare. And it is likely that the Roman church did also. He doesn't go into much depth here.

But he does get very specific about what he wants prayer for.

There are three specific requests here.

- 1- That I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe
- 2- That my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints
- 3- That I may come to you, with joy by the will of God, and be refreshed together with you.

Let's start with the first request.

- 1- That I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe

Paul knows that Jerusalem is a dangerous place. And he knows that he has a lot of enemies. Paul, being the apostle to the **gentiles**, represents everything that the Jewish people hate about Christianity. Paul is the person who is, in their minds, cheapening true spirituality, cheapening their religion, polluting their worship, by bringing these unclean Gentiles into the fold just as they are. He is not requiring them to do anything Jewish at all. They can dress the same as they always did, eat the same, drink the same, wash the same. He isn't making them change anything on the outside. The men don't even have to be circumcised, for goodness sakes. What an outrage they felt. And Paul was declaring these Gentiles ok with God, even though they did nothing to earn it.

So Paul understood the risks.

At the same time Paul must have held an idealistic view about his fellow countrymen. Think about it. Who would have known better how they thought and felt than he did? Paul must have felt that he could get through to them if he just had a chance. Surely he could and **should** have a ministry to his countrymen. Surely God would not mind if Paul went back to Jerusalem and gave it one more crack. He didn't know what God already knew. Many of Paul's countrymen were hardened in their unbelief. And no amount of truth was going to set them free from it. They were committed to their position.

So Paul is praying that he will be protected from these people.

That was a very valid prayer.

So was he? Was he protected from them?

Yes and no. Paul was warned, I think it was after this letter, of what would happen to Paul when he went to Jerusalem. So God's will was made known to

Paul that he would not be completely sheltered from the hatred of these people. He would not be killed by them. But they would do him harm.

So it didn't matter how hard the people in Rome prayed that Paul would not be arrested as a result of these evil men. Paul was **going to be** arrested. God let Paul know that this would be a consequence of him going to that city. We can learn something here. Praying, no matter how well and often it is done, will not change God's will. This emphasizes even more that the best praying is the prayer that is based on whatever God has promised to us. The warfare done in prayer to keep Paul out of jail would have been a misplaced effort. But to keep him safe from physical harm from these people would have been well placed and it was answered by God.

So that was the first thing he asked for.

The second was this:

That my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints.

Think about how Paul might have felt going to Jerusalem. Here were Christians who were somehow peacefully coexisting, at least to some degree, with their Jewish neighbors. They may have been trying to minister to them. They probably didn't have the Gentile obstacle thrown up in their face all that often since it was primarily a Jewish town. But then Paul would show up and immediately there were fireworks. Immediately there were fighting words. Why? Paul was being used to reconcile Gentiles to God. Everything Jewish is now being attacked. And think about how even the believing Jews would feel about all this. How would you feel if some outspoken Christian makes your life harder for you because he emphasizes truths that get people outraged? That is the dynamic that Paul represents. So the believers have to have a degree of ambivalence when they see Paul coming. Paul is praying that his service for Jerusalem in gathering these funds for their help will be seen positively. He wants them to look at the gift and be glad for what Paul has done for them. This is the same word he used in verse 16 describing how God would receive the offering by Paul of the gentile believers. So we get an idea that God would approve of them and be glad for them and receive them to Himself gladly. And that is how Paul wanted to be received by his fellow Jewish believers. He didn't want to be received as a trouble maker. He didn't want to be received as somebody always putting his brothers in a tough spot. He wanted his service to be received as it was intended.

How was it received?

**[Act 21:17-31 NKJV] 17 And when we had come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. 18 On the following [day] Paul went in with us to James, and**

**all the elders were present. 19 When he had greeted them, he told in detail those things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. 20 And when they heard [it], they glorified the Lord.**

Well, that looks pretty good. It is almost a shame that it doesn't end there. But that is not how real life goes. The elders were glad in theory for how God was dealing with the Gentiles through Paul. But it seems to me they allowed their concern for the local dangers to cause them to try to placate a force that could not be placated. We have got to understand that the problem with Christians and the world is not primarily one of misunderstanding. It is not one solved by talking or more facts. It is primarily one of spiritual enmity. It is primarily an issue of which side one is loyal to and united with. The devil is the prince and power of the air. He has authority over all those who God has not called into His Kingdom. No amount of word or reason can overcome that barrier. And what happened to Paul in Jerusalem was the perfect example of that.

So Paul's service was received as acceptable I think. But Paul's overall ministry needed a little good public relations, according to the elders, in order to make him socially palatable. There is a wealth of things to learn here. Often our strategies of making Christians look good to the world on the world's terms will fail. Because what the world hates is not what Christians **are** but **who they serve**. And no amount of PR will remove that obstacle.

So let's look at the rest of the story. Let's see what happens to a person who chooses a plan that is more idealistic than obedient.

**And they said to him, "You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law; 21 "but they have been informed about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise [their] children nor to walk according to the customs. 22 "What then? The assembly must certainly meet, for they will hear that you have come. 23 "Therefore do what we tell you:**

How would you have felt if you were Paul? These guys are essentially saying, Paul, you are making our lives hard. Just you being here is going to cause an uproar. This slander, and it truly was slander, is going to cause problems. So in order to overcome this slander, let's put on a good public relations campaign. Do this:

At that point I'll bet something in Paul is saying, this is not a good idea. This is not going to work. This is not addressing the real problem. At the same time he is probably thinking, I really need to show a sign of good faith. After all, this is the leadership of the church. Surely there is wisdom here.

So Paul agrees to do what he is told.

**We have four men who have taken a vow. 24 "Take them and be purified with them, and pay their expenses so that they may shave [their] heads, and that all may know that those things of which they were informed concerning you are nothing, but [that] you yourself also walk orderly and keep the law.**

The elders are telling Paul- go prove that you are a good Jew Paul. Go show the opposition that there is nothing in the slander they are hearing about you. What the elders did not understand is that people believe what they want to believe. And no amount of facts will ever change that. Blind people cannot see, no matter how much light is shown in their face. You cannot overcome blindness with light. A miracle must first occur and then any amount of light will be sufficient. The smallest truth will change their mind.

**25 "But concerning the Gentiles who believe, we have written [and] decided that they should observe no such thing, except that they should keep themselves from [things] offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality."**

These leaders were telling Paul, essentially, that they agreed with him. These gentiles clearly were believers. And they did not need to become Jews in order to become right with God. They believed there were some things that still applied to them from the law that might not be readily apparent. So they list them. This would have been an encouragement to Paul. He would feel, at this point, that his ministry to the Gentiles has been respected and accepted. That would have been a good thing to Paul. And again, it is too bad it couldn't have ended here.

**26 Then Paul took the men, and the next day, having been purified with them, entered the temple to announce the expiration of the days of purification, at which time an offering should be made for each one of them. 27 Now when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him, 28 crying out, "Men of Israel, help! This is the man who teaches all [men] everywhere against the people, the law, and this place; and furthermore he also brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place." 29 (For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.) 30 And all the city was disturbed; and the people ran together, seized Paul, and dragged him out of the temple; and immediately the doors**

**were shut. 31 Now as they were seeking to kill him, news came to the commander of the garrison that all Jerusalem was in an uproar.**

Do you see what happens? Keep this in your minds. Because this is not at all unusual. Slander wins in the devil's children. People believe what they want to believe. Look at the accusation that does Paul in.

**This is the man who teaches all [men] everywhere against the people, the law, and this place; and furthermore he also brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place."**

There is no truth to this at all. He has never been against the Jewish people. In fact he is in Jerusalem because he loves them in a way that he probably shouldn't. He has never hated the law. In fact he applies it accurately within the church. But he does know that when God ripped the temple curtain from top to bottom that the temple was no longer where spiritual business was transacted.

Do you see what happens when you fight spiritual battles with worldly tools? It never works. David said that some people trust in that stuff. Some people trust in horses and chariots. Some people trust in the tools that accomplish worldly ends by worldly means. But not David. He only trusted in God Himself. He trusted only in the Lord.

So Paul ends up being arrested by the Roman government. He had a chance and made an appeal to the Jewish people. Paul laid out his heart and put it all on the line. He was preaching and pleading to his countrymen, probably with the belief that if they just heard the truth the way he saw it, it would strike them in the heart. It would do **to them** what it did **to him**. How could they turn away from Christ when they know the truth? How could they reject Him? Surely they will respond to this appeal.

But their response was with the anger of hell. Because they were children of hell. What a gut wrenching and sad realization by Paul. This idealistic and well intended ministry to his countrymen was worse than a waste of time. It was to prove to be a major distraction.

So there sits Paul, the workhorse apostle, the minister to the gentiles, the lovers of his countrymen. And where is he? In prison. How absolutely heartbroken he had to be. He had ignored the counsel of prophets. He had charted a course for himself with knowledge that it was suspect at best. He had imagined an outcome that was glorious but was faced with an outcome that was disastrous.

Have you ever had that happen to you?



How will God respond? Will God say, well you got what you deserved. You would do well to pay better attention. Your life is now a waste. You have removed yourself from anything important from now on.

Oh Praise God No. That is not what happened to Paul and that is not what He normally does to us.

Let's look at God's grace.

**[Act 23:11 NKJV] 11 But the following night the Lord stood by him and said, "Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome."**

First off, if Christ says, "Be of good cheer", it could only be because Paul was anything but that. He was probably teetering on the edge of despondency. What a grave situation this would have been for him. But there in the midst of his despair Christ meets him. Oh praise Jesus that this is just like Him.

Then Christ lets Paul know that whether or not he should have, he has done an excellent job of testifying about Christ in Jerusalem. And now he is going to have the chance to do the same thing at Rome. Now Paul knows that he is indestructible until he reaches Rome. He will not die. He has an appointment set by Christ. And it is an important one.

And look at that. He is going to visit the very place where he wrote the letter promising the same thing. Isn't God amazing. And the Roman government was going to spring for the ticket. God's plans are amazing.

There is something for us to learn here. We can make mistakes. We can even make hard headed mistakes like Paul. But if what we desire is His glory, God will turn it for our good. He will not reject us even when we suspect that we are doing things for the wrong reason, even when we are choosing what looks like a good path but we suspect it is the wrong path. We have a very forgiving God. And we very much need a forgiving God.

So, what about Paul's third prayer request?

- 1- That I may come to you, with joy by the will of God, and be refreshed together with you.

That is exactly what is going to happen. It will be amazing. It will not be anything like he expected. It will be under completely different circumstances than what he expected. But it will happen. It will be an answered prayer.

Let's look at what Acts tells us:

**[Act 28:14-31 NKJV] 14 where we found brethren, and were invited to stay with them seven days. And so we went toward Rome. 15 And from there, when the brethren heard about us, they came to meet us as far as Appii Forum and Three**

Inns. When Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage. 16 Now when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard; but Paul was permitted to dwell by himself with the soldier who guarded him. 17 And it came to pass after three days that Paul called the leaders of the Jews together. So when they had come together, he said to them: "Men [and] brethren, though I have done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans, 18 "who, when they had examined me, wanted to let [me] go, because there was no cause for putting me to death. 19 "But when the Jews spoke against [it], I was compelled to appeal to Caesar, not that I had anything of which to accuse my nation. 20 "For this reason therefore I have called for you, to see [you] and speak with [you], because for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain." 21 Then they said to him, "We neither received letters from Judea concerning you, nor have any of the brethren who came reported or spoken any evil of you. 22 "But we desire to hear from you what you think; for concerning this sect, we know that it is spoken against everywhere." 23 So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at [his] lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening. 24 And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved. 25 So when they did not agree among themselves, they departed after Paul had said one word: "The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers, 26 "saying, 'Go to this people and say: "Hearing you will hear, and shall not understand; And seeing you will see, and not perceive; 27 For the hearts of this people have grown dull. [Their] ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with [their] eyes and hear with [their] ears, Lest they should understand with [their] hearts and turn, So that I should heal them." ' 28 "Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!" 29 And when he had said these words, the Jews departed and had a great dispute among themselves. 30 Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, 31 preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.

Isn't it good to know that we are not big enough to mess up God's plans? We don't have to be afraid of our own mistakes in discerning God's will. He will direct our paths and he will re-direct them. We should fear our rebellion against God's

will. Rebellion could prove that we really aren't a child of His after all. But we should never fear that we, in our own strength and wisdom, will fail God. Of course we will. But He has already promised His love is big enough to cover that. Nothing will ever separate us from the love of God if we are truly his children.