

Romans
The Reasons for Romans (Part 4)
Romans 15:14–33
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Well, this morning we continue our study of the final section of Paul's letter to the Romans, “The Conclusion,” as he wraps up all that he wants to share to the Christians there in Rome. The conclusion begins in chapter 15, verse 14, and runs through the end of the book, and specifically, we’re looking at the second half of chapter 15, where Paul lays out for us his reasons for writing this letter. There are two overarching reasons he wrote. The first is, “The Timeless Spiritual Purpose,” and that is to remind all believers, including us, of the gospel that we have believed. That's the message of verses 14 to 16, where he says, “Listen, it's good for you, even though you have heard the gospel, you’ve believed the gospel, perhaps you’ve been in Christ for many years, you can recite the gospel by heart,” he says, “It's good for you to be reminded of these things.”

By the way, that's essentially what Gentle and Lowly is; it's a reminder of the gospel of who Christ is and how He responds to His people because of His work on the cross. It's good for us to think about that, to apply that, to meditate in that.

But there was a second reason Paul wrote this letter and that was, “The Timely Ministry Purpose,” and that was to prepare the Roman believers for the visit that he had planned to make to them. Beginning in verse 17 and running down through the end of chapter 15, this is what we’re discovering. And so far, as he lays out this ministry purpose, as he prepares them for his visit, first of all, we’ve considered, “His Former Ministry Accomplishments.” Before he lays out his plans, he wants them to know what's happened in his life, and so he lays out those

accomplishments as he describes what happened in his ministry from Jerusalem and throughout Eastern Europe.

Last week, we looked at, “His Fixed Mission Strategy.” As he anticipates coming to them, he wanted them to understand the strategy that he had when it came to the gospel, and that was “Pioneer Frontline Missions,” verses 20 and 21. Paul says, “I don't want to preach the gospel where the seed's already been planted, where the foundation's already been laid. I want to go to virgin gospel territory where Christ is not known, in the sense that He's not worshipped, and there I want to proclaim the gospel.

This morning, we come to a third part of this as he lays out his plans, and I've entitled it, “His Future Ministry Plans,” his future ministry plans. It involves Jerusalem, it involves Rome, and it involves Western Europe.

Let's read this paragraph together, Romans, chapter 15, beginning in verse 22, and running down through verse 29; and believe it or not, it is my plan to make it through these verses this morning; it will be a record, I think, for Romans if we do that; so, let's try. Romans, chapter 15, verse 22:

For this reason I have often been prevented from coming to you; but now, with no further place for me in these regions, and since I've had for many years a longing to come to you whenever I go to Spain--for I hope to see you in passing, and 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. Yes, they were pleased to do so, and 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. I know that when I come to you, I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.

Now clearly, even as I read that text, you can see that it is entirely historical. This passage lays out for us Paul's own personal ministry plans that he planned to take in the first century. At the same time, while it is historical, it is incredibly instructive because you and I can learn crucial lessons from Paul's own example about ministry priorities. We can look at Paul's plans laid out in this text, and we can discern from those plans what his great priorities were; we, in turn, can adopt those priorities and can make similar plans when it comes to our life and our ministry. That's what I want us to do this morning.

In the same way that last week we learned from his example about the priority of pioneer frontline missions, we learned that both as a church and as individuals, we have to embrace that mission. Today, we're going to learn to follow Paul's example in a different way. We're going to see that we need to make specific ministry plans that matched Paul's ministry priorities and his ministry plans.

So, what are those priorities? Well, in this passage, we're going to discover five ministry plans that Paul is making here and that should shape and fashion our own. Obviously, they'll have a different expression than Paul's; we don't live in the first century, we're not the Apostle Paul, but the priorities that he embraced and the plans that he laid will help us shape and frame our own. So let's look at it together.

The first ministry plan that Paul made and that you and I need to copy and make as well is this, "Use your spiritual giftedness for believers," use your spiritual giftedness for believers. We keep coming against this in the latter half of Romans, and it's because it was a huge priority for the Apostle Paul.

Now, this paragraph begins and ends with Paul's desire and his plan to visit the Christians in Rome. Look at verse 22, "For this reason I have often been prevented from coming to you." Paul had planned many times, through the years, to visit Rome, but he'd always been prevented. Why? Well, notice the first few words of verse 22, "For this reason." Now, "For this reason," points not forward but backward; it points back to the previous verses. Because of Paul's mission strategy in verses 20 and 21, to preach Christ where he was not named, and because that mission was not yet complete in the regions from Jerusalem to Eastern Europe, the end of verse 19, "For this reason I have often been prevented from coming to you."

The Greek word 'prevented' means 'to hinder, to thwart, to slow, or to totally block progress.' The combination of Paul's mission strategy to only preach Christ where he had not been named, and his ministry that had not yet been completed in that way in Eastern Europe, those two

realities often had prevented him from visiting the Roman churches. But, in the near future, he planned to visit Rome, verse 23, "...but now." Paul's circumstances had changed, and he now planned to visit them shortly, and Paul gives two reasons why. Verse 23, "...but now, with no further place for me in these regions." Paul is now able to come to Rome because he had completed his mission in Eastern Europe. What was that mission? Go back to verse 19, "...from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ;" that's Eastern Europe.

Now, Paul doesn't mean that he'd preached the gospel there to every person, in every city, in Eastern Europe. No, as we discovered, what he meant was that he had preached the gospel throughout all of these regions; he had planted churches in strategic cities, so that the gospel could then spread throughout the entire region because of the work that he had done. There was no true virgin gospel territory left in Eastern Europe.

Another reason that he planned to visit the believers in Rome is also in verse 23, "...since I have had for many years a longing to come to you." Paul says, "Listen, I have wanted so desperately to come to visit you in Rome." This is how he began his letter; go back to Romans, chapter 1, verse 13, "I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented so far), (We've just learned why he was prevented, because of the fact that his ministry in Eastern Europe had not been completed.) so that I may obtain some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles." Verse 15, "So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome."

Now, go back to Romans 15. In verse 23, at the end of that verse, in light of the two reasons Paul has just given, what do we expect him to say? We expect him to say, “Because of those two reasons, I am coming to Rome.” But Paul doesn't say that. In fact, he never finishes his sentence. This happens to us, doesn't it? We get excited about something in the middle of a sentence and we never finish it because another thought takes us away, and that's what happens to Paul here. In his excitement, instead of saying, “So, I'm coming to Rome,” he first mentions a new ministry opportunity, at the beginning of verse 24, about Spain, and we'll consider that in just a moment.

But go back and look again at verses 22 and 23, don't miss the heart of the Apostle Paul. He desperately wanted to go to Rome. Look down in verse 29, “I know that when I come to you,” this is what he wanted. Verse 32, “so that I may come to you in joy by the will of God and find refreshing rest in your company.” Back in chapter 1, verse 10, he says, “always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you.” Luke even quotes Paul in the book of Acts, chapter 19, verse 21, as saying, “I must (go to) Rome.” Paul desperately wanted to go to Rome.

You know, I have been to Rome on several occasions and I love that city because of its ancient history, because of the food. But Paul didn't want to go to Rome to see the historical sites, although there were plenty, even by that time the civilization that was hundreds of years old at that point. And Paul didn't want to go to Rome in order to eat the fabulous Italian food, to have a great cheese pizza, or pepperoni. No, Paul wanted to visit Rome in order to use his giftedness

for the spiritual benefit of the believers in Rome. Paul was gifted as an apostle, and he desperately wanted to get to Rome to use that giftedness for the benefit of the believers there.

Go back to chapter 1, verse 11:

I long to see you so that (Here's my purpose.) I may impart some spiritual gift to you that you...may be established; that...you... (may be strengthened in your) faith.

Paul says, "I so desperately want to come because I want to use what I've been given to build you up in your faith. I want to use my spiritual giftedness for your benefit." Verse 13 of chapter 1, "I (want to) obtain some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles."

Now, you and I are not the Apostle Paul; we don't have the gifting of an apostle, but this should be our heart as well. Like Paul, you should have a passion for, and you should develop a plan to use the giftedness that God has given you, whatever it is, for the spiritual benefit of the believers in this church, in your church if you're visiting with us. That should be your passion. Do you see that here in this passage as Paul talks about his future plans, this was what drove him, this motivated him, he desperately wanted to visit Rome because he wanted to use the gifting he had been given for the benefit of the church.

Is that your heart? I mean, honestly, as you sit here this morning, is that the passion of your heart to say, "God has gifted me to serve His church, and I want to use that gifting for the benefit of others." That's what we should be doing.

You remember even back in chapter 12, verses 3 through 8, we encountered that as Paul begins to talk about the practical application of the gospel. The very first thing he says in chapter 12, is your body doesn't belong to you to be a living sacrifice. Then he says, your mind doesn't belong to you; it should be renewed with the mind of Christ and the Word of God, and the very next thing he says is, "So use the spiritual gifting you've received to serve the body of Christ." You can see that wasn't just what Paul taught, that's what he did; this was his passion, this was his plan; and like Paul, it should be our ministry plan as well. Is that truly what compels you to use the gifting you've been given for the benefit of the body of Christ where you are?

There's a second ministry plan that, like Paul, we should have, and that is share the gospel with unbelievers, share the gospel with unbelievers. Verse 24, "whenever I go to Spain." Although Paul didn't explicitly say that he was coming to Rome, he said that he hoped to see them when, or as soon as "I go to Spain." Now, Spain or Hispania, as the Romans called it in the ancient world, included the entire Iberian Peninsula. It was the equivalent of what would today be modern Spain, Portugal, and even part of southern France.

Now, this place goes back a long time in history and in the Scripture. In fact, all the way back in 1 Kings, chapter 10, verse 22, we see that the sailors from Tyre and Sidon, modern Lebanon, would travel all the way across the Mediterranean to interact with and to trade with, and primarily the ships came the other way, the ships of Tarshish, as they're called, would come with goods for the land of the Middle East, for the lands of Israel and beyond. In fact, what's interesting is in that text, we're told that the "ships of Tarshish brought gold, silver, ivory, apes, as well as peacocks."

Well, this area, the Iberian Peninsula, had been occupied by Rome as early as 200 B.C.; but by the time you come to Caesar Augustus, into the Biblical Era, the whole Iberian Peninsula had been organized into three Roman provinces with many colonies. And as Paul thought about that, he saw wonderful opportunities for the gospel, and he had a passion to reach them with the gospel. Verse 24, “whenever I go to Spain--for I hope to see you in passing.” Paul says, “Listen, my destination is Spain through Rome.” He kind of says it politely here, but he says, “You know, I'm going to visit with you, but it's only going to be for a short time; it's going to be in passing.” In other words, Rome was going to be like a layover on his trip to Spain. He wanted to see the believers in Rome, he wanted to enjoy their company, but Paul also had another purpose for visiting Rome.

Verse 24, “...I hope...to be helped on my way there (That is to Spain.) by you,” helped on my way there by you. Now in English, that sounds pretty vague, but the Greek word that's used here and translated “helped on my way,” is a technical term for missionary support, a technical term for missionary support. It literally means ‘to accompany or to escort.’ It came to mean ‘to help someone on his journey with food, with money, by arranging for companions, arranging the means of travel,’ and so forth. In other words, it's an all-encompassing word that says, “I'm going to support you on your journey,” and it came to be used of supporting missionaries in all of those ways in the New Testament. In fact, one great example is in Acts 15, verse 3, where Antioch was supporting Paul and Barnabas. Paul wanted Rome to support him; he wanted Rome to become a base of operations for his new ministry.

Now you'll remember that for the last twenty-five years of Paul's ministry, from the time of his conversion in the early 30's A.D., till the mid-50's A.D., for those twenty-five years, Paul's ministry had primarily been in Eastern Europe, Asia minor, Macedonia, and Greece; Turkey, Macedonia, and Greece. But he felt he had exhausted the potential for new territories where Christ had not been known in that region, and that had always been his goal. And so, he had decided that his next mission, his next ministry, would be in Spain and in Western Europe.

Now, during those first twenty-five years while he was in Eastern Europe, his supporting, sending church was the church in Antioch in modern Syria. They were the ones where he came from. You remember in the book of Acts, he actually served there for about a year before he was sent out, he and Barnabas on their first missionary journey, and that church had become his home church, his sending church. But, if you can picture, and I should have a map up here for you, but if you could picture the Mediterranean, you can picture where Syria is, and you can picture the Iberian Peninsula where Spain is, Antioch was much too far from Western Europe where he intended to minister next, too far from Spain. So, Paul wanted the Roman churches to become his new base, his new sending churches, his new supporting churches, as he ministered in Western Europe.

But here's the problem, Paul didn't start the churches in Rome. In fact, he'd never even visited them. If they were going to be his new sending churches, the Romans needed to know who he is; they needed to understand the gospel he preached so that they could embrace him, his ministry, and his new mission in Spain.

You understand that that's why you have this wonderful book called Romans in the Scripture? I mean, why would Paul write such a long theological treatise? It's the most theologically oriented treatise in all of his letters. Why? Because he wanted them to support him on his new mission in Spain and Western Europe, and they needed to understand the gospel he preached so they could do so with eager enthusiasm. And because of that, you and I, brothers and sisters, have the book of Romans.

Leon Morris writes:

He clearly regarded it as important that the Roman church support him on his Spanish mission. If they were to support him, it was not unreasonable that they should know what he preached. Accordingly, he sets forth a clear but profound statement of the essential message of Christianity as he proclaimed it. This will show the Romans where he stands. The result is one of the most important Christian documents ever written.

But come back to the text we're looking at. The point I want you to see, in verse 24, is that Paul made deliberate plans to share the gospel with those who did not know Jesus Christ. In his case of course, he was an apostle, appointed as a frontline missionary, to take the gospel, but he made specific plans to do so. And while again, we're not apostles, and we aren't all called to do pioneer frontline missions, we too must make the same deliberate plans to share the gospel. We need to do so as a church corporately.

Paul wanted the Roman churches to support him financially and with their prayers as other churches had done before. You remember the church in Philippi had done so; read the 4th

chapter of Philippians. In the same way, you and I need to support those who go out to share the gospel; corporately as a church, we need to make sure they're well-cared for, we need to pray for them, we need to send them, we need to receive them when they come back and give us their report, we need to meet their needs; we need to be just as enthusiastic at supporting those who go out from us in the 21st century as Paul wanted the Roman churches to be toward him in the 1st century.

But at the same time, there is a more personal, individual application here. Paul was an individual who was making plans deliberately to share the gospel with others; and in the same way, you and I should personally share the gospel.

Now, every time I or anyone else begins to talk about the subject of evangelism or sharing the gospel, we all wince a bit because none of us can say, "We do all that we should in that category;" none of us, but it needs to be a priority in the life of all of us. So, my question to you is, "Paul created a plan; have you? Have you ever created a plan of how you're going to share the gospel with your family, with your coworkers, with your neighbors?"

Here's a plan, okay, let me just give you some practical steps. First of all, make sure you know how to share the gospel. Do you understand the basic content of the gospel? Do you understand, first of all, that God is a Righteous Creator? That God made all things; that He made all things to worship Him, to know Him, and to obey Him, and that He provides everything we need and demands our obedience, rightfully so. He owns everything, He made everyone, and He has a right to expect our obedience.

Secondly, do you understand that man is a rebellious sinner, that we are made in the image of God, that we receive all things from God, and yet we live our lives as though God didn't exist? We live as rebels against Him; we ignore His laws; we sin against our conscience; we do countless things against Him and against others that the Bible calls sin. And because of that, we deserve His justice; we deserve what we earn by our sins and the Bible calls that hell, eternal hell. That is God's just punishment against our rebellion.

Thirdly, do you understand that Jesus is the sinless Savior; that God's eternal Son took upon Himself full and complete humanity; that He became everything you are except for sin; that He came into this world; He lived a perfect life of obedience to God; He did everything you were supposed to do, and then He died, not for His own sins, but He died under the justice of God, suffering God's just anger and wrath against every single sin of His people, everyone who would ever believe in Him. And then God raised Him from the dead; and eventually, forty days later, took Him back into heaven, and someday He will return to this earth again, not as a suffering servant, but as a conquering King.

Do you understand, fourthly, that you have to respond to that gospel? How do you respond? Jesus said in Mark 1:15, "...repent and believe the gospel." You have to turn from your sin, everything you know that's sin in your life; you have to be willing to turn from that and turn to God; humble yourself before Him and commit yourself to love and follow and obey His Son. Believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Do you understand that? You need to understand the gospel; you need to make sure you know how to share it, so take the evangelism class here that's

about to start. Read, What is the Gospel, by Greg Gilbert. Read Tell the Truth, by Will Metzger. Learn the gospel! That's the first step in the plan.

Secondly, create a plan for sharing the gospel with the people in your life. Start with your family. You say, "How do I share the gospel with my family?" You know, one of the best places to start is just to write out your testimony and send it to a family member and say, "I just, you know these things are hard to describe, they're so deep and profound; they've affected me so profoundly but, I just want you to know what's happened in my life ." Share the gospel with them in the form of your testimony. Invite coworkers or friends over or out for a meal with the goal of turning the conversation to spiritual things. Invite unbelievers in your life to church, to the many events during the year when they'll hear the gospel. Give them a book you've read or send them a sermon you've listened to that has ministered to you and then you could say, "Listen, this has been a great encouragement to me. I want you to listen to this," one that includes the gospel. So, create a plan to share the gospel with the people in your life.

I would also encourage you to create a plan for sharing the gospel with those the Lord providentially brings into your life every day. How do you do that? How can you prepare for somebody you don't know your going to meet? Well, start by memorizing the key verses and points of the gospel. Have those in your mind. If you don't know them, you can't share them. Come up with several questions; memorize several questions that you can use and feel comfortable using to turn the conversation to spiritual things. You don't have to be confrontive, combative questions; they shouldn't be. Start with a simple question about their life and how they're processing that problem in their life and what they think about spiritual things. Get them

to talk and to tell you so that you then have an opportunity to share the gospel with them. Come up with some gospel tracts that you are comfortable with, that you can give to people you interact with. Keep copies of the gospel of John in your car or in your home, little paperback copies of the gospel of John; and when you have a chance to talk with someone, give them that that gospel of John, and say, “I encourage you to read this.” Plan, plan! Like Paul, if we’re going to have the same ministry priorities, then we need to plan to share the gospel with unbelievers.

Thirdly, develop and deepen your relationship with believers. Develop, that is get into them and deepen your relationships with believers. Verse 24, Paul says, “whenever I go to Spain--for I hope to see you in passing, and be helped on my way there by you, when I have first enjoyed your company for a while.” Paul says, “Listen, I’m coming and I’m not going to be able to stay long; I got to move on to Spain, and I want you to support me; but while I’m there, I’m really looking forward to enjoying your company.” Oh, by the way, this wasn’t just Paul being nice; Paul wasn’t saying, “Listen, I’m really coming for your money so you’ll support me, but this sounds good so I’m going to say, ‘Hey, I’m looking forward to spending time with you too.’” No, this is Paul’s heart; read his letters, you see this everywhere. In fact, the Greek word that’s here translated ‘enjoyed your company,’ actually means to fill or to satisfy. The idea is so that I can be satisfied in you; that is, I can truly enjoy you.

Go back to Romans, chapter 1; Romans, chapter, verse 11, Paul says, “...I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established (That you may be strengthened.)” Paul wanted to serve them; he wanted to minister to them. But as soon as he

dictated verse 11, I think Paul may have realized that it could communicate something that wasn't true. That is that he was coming to Rome solely for their benefit. As one author puts it, "As though he has everything to give and nothing to receive." And so Paul quickly adds in verse 12, "that is, that I may be encouraged together with you while among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine." Paul falls all over himself here to say, "Listen, I don't mean that you're going to get something from me, but I'm getting nothing from you." He says, "No, I'm looking forward to being with you." Paul emphasizes the mutual benefit he anticipates they will receive from one another. The Greek word translated 'encouraged together,' there in verse 12, speaks of God strengthening their hearts through their mutual fellowship. Paul fully expected to be encouraged by the faith of the Roman Christians. Doesn't that just show Paul's heart? You see that again everywhere in his letters.

Although Paul was an apostle, although he'd been a Christian by the time he wrote this letter, for thirty years, an apostle, a Christian for thirty years, he knew he would personally benefit from fellowship with the Roman Christians. Like Paul, regardless of our spiritual maturity or regardless of how long we've been in Christ, we too benefit from Christian fellowship, even from those who are younger or younger in Christ.

I will tell you, "I'm sure the Lord would sustain me if I couldn't have any Christian fellowship, if that were necessary. But, it's hard for me to imagine that because I am encouraged, I am strengthened, I am built up through my fellowship with you. God uses all of you in my life constantly. And maybe you haven't yet come to fully realize that, but let me tell you, the same thing is absolutely true of you. We weren't made to be an island.

You know, there are some people who have this idea, “Look, you know, I'm not needy, I just don't really need other people, I don't need relationships.” Do you understand what you're saying when you say that? That is actually blasphemy because you were made in the image of God to have relationship. Why? Because God has eternally enjoyed relationship within the members of the Trinity, and you were made in God's image to enjoy the same. We need Christian fellowship; we depend on Christian fellowship.

If you really want to study the priority of Christian relationships, let me encourage you to listen again to the series I did on Romans 1; I've referred to it several times in this message. Back in Romans 1, verses 8 to 15, I think it's airing now on KCBI. It's entitled, “Committing to Christian Relationships.” Go to the “Word Unleashed,” or go to KCBI and listen to it; because in that passage, the Apostle Paul explains how, how to invest at a deeper level in our relationships with one another.

My question for you is, “What are you doing about this?” You know, you may be tempted to say to me, “Tom, look I get it. I know I need Christian relationships, I need Christian fellowship, but let me just be honest with you, Tom, that's not really happening for me here at Countryside.” Well, I'm obviously sorry about that, but I don't mean this in any way as harsh because I know it takes time to do that, but let me ask you a question, “What are you doing to change that, what are you doing to change that?” You see, you can't consistently, I can't, you can't, consistently develop or deepen relationships with fellow Christians unless you have a

plan; it doesn't happen by accident. Paul's ministry example is a wonderful one to follow; make plans to develop and deepen your relationship with believers.

A fourth ministry plan that Paul had and that we should have, number four, is invest your time and resources for the physical help of believers; invest your time and resources for the physical help of believers, verses 25 to 27. When Paul wrote these words, his current ministry priority was to visit Jerusalem to deliver a financial gift from the churches in Greece, verse 25. "...But now, I am going to Jerusalem serving (the Greek word is the word for 'deacon,' menial service toward) the saints (in Jerusalem)."

You see, before Paul could go to Rome, there was one last obligation that he needed to fulfill to the believers in Jerusalem. Paul was writing this letter from Greece, probably from Corinth, and he planned to travel immediately to Jerusalem and then shortly thereafter to Rome. In fact, look at verse 25, the present tense there, "...I am going to Jerusalem," even implies that as he wrote this letter, he was making preparations to leave, to leave for Jerusalem. Verse 26, "(Because) For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution (I love that word; it means 'a contribution, a financial contribution,' but the actual Greek word is *koinonia*, 'the word for 'fellowship.' Giving for the support of other believers is a kind of fellowship.) for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem."

Paul had to go to Jerusalem in order to share, with the Jewish Christians there, the money that he had collected from the Gentile churches that he founded and served across Eastern Europe. Macedonia, by the way, is the name for the region that today includes northern Greece,

Macedonia, and southern Albania. Achaia refers to the region that makes up most of modern Greece. You're familiar with the churches in those areas; the churches are in cities such as Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Corinth. And Paul says all those churches, notice what he says, "were pleased." They took delight, they resolved, they determined; his point is they didn't give under duress, they gave of their own free will. Paul had urged them to do it, but he had urged them to do it freely. You remember even in 2 Corinthians, chapter 9, verse 7, he says, "Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." That's how he wanted them to give.

The contribution, you'll notice, was, "for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem." Now, at Jerusalem, at this point in the 1st century, there was a great deal of poverty. A lot of the Jewish people had been scattered for a number of reasons and they had left Jerusalem. They're part of what was called the Diaspora, they were all over the world, and those Jewish people would send money back to their poor relatives in Jerusalem. But of course, the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem had been alienated from their Jewish families; they had been marginalized because of their faith. And so, the Christian Jewish people in Jerusalem were the poorest of the poor. A collection for them had been a great priority for the Apostle Paul on his third missionary journey. He collected money everywhere he went; you can read about it in 1 Corinthians 16, verses 1 to 4, where he says this is what I'm doing in every church. You can read about it in 2 Corinthians, chapters 8 and 9; and the Gentiles responded, they were eager, they were pleased, and Paul goes on to explain why in verse 27, "Yes, they were pleased to do so, and they are indebted (That is, morally obligated.) to them. (Why?) For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual things, they are indebted to minister to them also in material things."

The key word here is ‘shared.’ It’s the verb form again of *‘koinonia,’* fellowship. Gentile Christians “have shared in their (the Jewish peoples) spiritual things, (the Jewish Christians)” What were their spiritual things? Christ and the gospel! As we learned so powerfully in Chapter 11, as Gentiles, we only enjoy salvation because of a Jewish Messiah and because of the promises made to Israel by God. So, Christ and the gospel are their spiritual things. And Paul says in verse 27, “...if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual things, they are indebted to minister to them (That is, their Jewish Christian brothers.) also in material things.” Literally, fleshly things, meaning the things that have to do with life here in the body and in the world.

Now folks, do you realize how passionate Paul was about this? Again, I wish I had put a map up, but you understand what the Mediterranean looks like. On one side you have the Middle East, and on the west side you have the Iberian Peninsula, you have Spain. Paul is in the middle; he’s in Greece when he writes this letter. But he felt so strongly about making sure that the Jewish Christians were cared for, he didn’t do what made sense. If Paul wanted to go to Rome from where he was, what would he do? He would travel west. And then if he wanted to go to Spain, he would travel farther west to Spain. But Paul didn’t go west; instead Paul went exactly the opposite direction, east to Jerusalem. In fact, Paul traveled, are you ready for this, at least two thousand extra miles to present this offering to the Jewish Christians personally. Paul saw this gift as an expression of Christian love, and he also saw it as a symbol of the unity between believers, Jews and Gentiles.

But beloved, this duty didn't stop in the 1st century; this duty didn't stop with the obligation of Gentiles to Jews. As believers, we are called to invest our time and resources for the physical health of all of our fellow Christians. Galatians, chapter 6, verse 10, "...while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of faith."

Now, let me just say, I'm not saying this because this is a weakness. In fact, this is a huge strength in this church. I'm always encouraged when I hear about how you truly and practically love one another. So many of you in this church go out of your way to care for each other; you give to meet the material needs of people, you pray for people, you visit the sick, you help those who have had illness or death in their families, you even have people who are displaced stay in your homes, and on and on the list could go. I'm not saying this isn't a great strength of our church, it is; and if this is your heart, if this is your habit, then be encouraged because Christ knows, and He'll never forget. I love the way Hebrews puts it; I often put this in thank you notes I write, Hebrews, chapter 6, verse 10, "...God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints." God's not going to forget!

In fact, it's interesting in Matthew 25, when Jesus describes the judgment that happens at the end of the Tribulation with those who survive, and He's separating those who are truly saved from those who aren't. Of course, they're saved by grace; he makes that clear in the passage. But, the reality of their salvation is evaluated by how they treat other believers; and He says, He says to these Christians, He says, "Listen, I was hungry and you fed me; I was thirsty and you gave

me something to drink; I was sick and you visited me.” And the Christians are like, “Lord, when, when did we ever see you and do any of those things?” And Jesus says, “When you did it to one of these my brethren (My brothers, My sisters.) you did it to Me.” Listen, if this is your heart and practice, you need to understand, Christ knows, and He will never forget.

But maybe, maybe you're in this church, and you've never truly personally shouldered the Christian duty to help care for the physical needs of your fellow Christians. You need to plan to do this. How do you plan to do this? Well, certainly you need to plan to give regularly to the benevolence fund that the elders oversee and use to help people in our church and beyond that have physical needs. But you need to own this personally; you need to always be thinking of and planning for practical ways you can serve your fellow Christians who are in the middle of trials. Do you know what should happen? The first moment you hear about a fellow Christian who's in the middle of a trouble or trial, your first question should be, “I need to plan a way to help them, I need to think of a way I can serve them, I can minister to them.” You say, “Well, Tom, you know, I work, and you know, life is busy.” Yes, just remember the Apostle Paul traveled two thousand extra miles by boat in the 1st century to serve the Jewish Christians. We can serve one another. Like Paul, we should invest our time and resources for the help of believers.

Very quickly, there's a fifth ministry plan you and I should copy, and that is, serve Christ with His blessing; serve Christ with His blessing. Paul now returns to the main point of the paragraph which is his visit to Spain through Rome. Verse 28, “Therefore, when I have finished this, (that is, the trip to Jerusalem with his financial gift), and have put my seal on this fruit of

theirs.” That’s an interesting expression. In fact, to put a seal on, that word was used in the 1st century of putting a seal on sacks of grain to guarantee the correctness of the contents. In other words, the seal guaranteed that the contents were everything that had been promised. Paul’s saying, “Listen, I intend to accompany this money to Jerusalem to certify that the poor saints in Jerusalem receive everything that was collected from the churches. Paul wanted to confirm the integrity of the gift; he also wanted to confirm the heart of those Gentile brothers who had given it; he wanted to make sure the Jewish Christians understood their heart. He says, “Once that's completed,” verse 28, “...I will go on by way of you to Spain.” Once the financial gift had been delivered, Paul would return to Rome, fifteen hundred miles, where he intended to stay there for a short time and then he would travel on to Spain, another seven hundred miles. Together, when you look at his journeys in this passage, three thousand miles, mostly by ship!

Then he adds, verse 29, “I know that when I come to you, I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.” In his heart, Paul desired and expected Christ’s blessing on his ministry in Rome. He was confident that whenever he finally made it there, Christ would bless his ministry to them, and Christ would grant both Paul and the Roman Christians a mutual blessing from their fellowship together.

Folks, you and I can serve our Lord with the same confidence of His blessing if we are pursuing the other four priorities. If those other four priorities are yours, then you can serve with the blessing of Jesus Christ. My question for you today is very simple; these were Paul's great priorities; as he planned his future, he made sure all of these were included in his plans. My question for you is, “Are these your ministry priorities, and are these included in your plans?”

Let's pray together. Father, thank you for the example of the Apostle Paul. Lord, we don't exalt him; he was a sinful, fallen man, saved by grace just as we are. He was nothing apart from your grace just as we are not. And yet, Father, you did give him the gifting you gave him, and you used him the way you used him as an instruction even to us. Thank you that we can see, from the pattern of his life, the priorities he had and planned for, and we can adopt similar priorities and plan for them in our lives as well. Lord, help us to do so. May these be the passion of our heart even as they were the passion of the Apostle Paul.

And, Lord, I pray for those here this morning who are not able to share the gospel because they've never even believed the gospel. Lord, they've heard it this morning; they've sung it in the music we sang earlier; they've heard it simply presented in this message. Lord, I pray that you would do what only your Spirit can do, that you would take that simple gospel message, and you would use it to bring life where there's death, that you would grant them true repentance and faith to believe in your Son; and in so doing, that you would grant them forgiveness of sins and justification, that you would declare them righteous with the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Lord, I pray that you would do that this morning. We pray in Jesus's name, Amen.