

Key:

Purple – Introduction, Conclusion, Main Points, and Sermon Thread

Blue – Explanation/Exposition

Red – Application

Green – Illustration

Brown – Quotation

Yellow – Sermon Notes

## Dealing with Detours

Romans 15:22-33

**Introduction:** Amen, let's take our Bibles together and turn to Romans 15:22-33. Today's message is entitled "Dealing with Detours." And you probably noticed in that passage that Maurice just read, that Paul dealt with some detours in his life and in his ministry. He made plans to go to Rome but was hindered. He wanted to go to Rome after traveling to Jerusalem, but we know from the Book of Acts that Paul's eventual trip to Rome wasn't like how he planned it. And it took a lot longer than he thought it would to get there.

**So what do we do when life doesn't go according to plan? Can that happen in this life? Yes it can! How do we deal with detours and roadblocks in life? How did the Apostle Paul deal with it?**

So last week I told you about my call to ministry in the late 1990s in a city called Longview, Texas. Well a few years after that I was newly married. And Sanja and I had committed to move from Texas to Chicago to attend seminary and prepare for vocational ministry. So we loaded up everything we owned into this U-Haul, and we started making our way up to Illinois.

And as we were coming up here, I was driving this big diesel U-Haul, and Sanja was driving our little Toyota Camry that was filled to the brim with as much as we could get into it. And as we were driving together through Arkansas, I stopped at this gas station to fill up our U-Haul with diesel, and Sanja went somewhere else to get something to eat. So I put the gas nozzle into the U-Haul tank to begin filling up, but when I tried to pump diesel into the truck the pump wasn't working. So I went into the station and asked them to turn the pump on, and they told me that it wasn't working. So, alright no problem, I had to go to a different pump. So I got back into the truck and moved it to another pump to fill up. But when I got out of the truck, I looked back towards the pump I was previously at, and there was a "geyser of diesel fuel" shooting up in the air. It looked like "Old Faithful." But this wasn't Yellowstone. This was a gas station in Arkansas.

Well come to find out I had left the nozzle in the U-Haul, and when I had driven away I had pulled, not just the nozzle, but the entire fuel pump out of the ground and dragged it with me, hence the "geyser of diesel fuel" shooting up into the air. So I ran inside to tell the gas station attendant. And when I tried to explain myself, he just said, "Yes, I know, the cops are on the way."

So Sanja shows up a few minutes later and finds me in the gas station absolutely despondent. And she asks, "What happened?" And I told her what happened. And I told her the cops are on the way. She was terrified. I was terrified. We had planned to move to Illinois, but I was afraid we were going to get stuck in jail in Arkansas on the way.

Well we got out of that situation somehow. And we got back on the road again. [But just for the record, I try to avoid driving through Arkansas whenever I can.] And the next day, we were finally in Illinois. So we pulled into a gas station in Kankakee, Illinois, just a few hours from our destination in Chicago. And Sanja was feeling really sick at this point. She was looking green. So we pulled into this gas station, so Sanja could rest a little bit. And I noticed that behind this gas station was a field of grass a good distance from the gas station and the smelly gas fumes. And being the conscientious husband that I was, I told Sanja, "Just go and park over at that field and we'll take our time. No hurry." So she drove our Toyota over towards the field, and I drove the U-Haul that direction as well. And I was feeling pretty good about myself at this point. The worst is now behind us.

But as I was pulling around the Toyota with the U-Haul, I grossly misjudged the distance between Sanja's car and my truck, and as I went around the car, I sideswiped the back of Sanja's car with the side of the U-Haul. And I scraped the entire passenger side of the Toyota while at the same time damaging the driver side of the U-Haul. You can't make this stuff up!

And after assessing the damage to both the U-Haul and the car which I figured would cost us at least a couple thousand dollars, I walked out to the middle of the grass field. And I just wanted to cry. I remember thinking to myself, “Lord, what are we doing? What is this? I thought you were leading us to Illinois. I thought we were doing the right thing. What in the world is going on?” It’s as if God had put us in a situation that only he could get us out of. More on that later!

---

So what do we do when life doesn’t go the way that we expect? When we hit roadblocks? When we encounter detours? Do we just abandon our faith or pretend like God doesn’t exist? I think that’s very popular right now—deconversion! It’s the latest trend. Life isn’t going the way that you want, so you should probably just abandon your faith. Well let me offer you a better alternative to that. Let me offer you two commitments to make when dealing with detours in your life that the Apostle Paul models for us in Romans 15.

Here’s your outline this morning.

**Two commitments when dealing with detours:**

Two points from the text, and then we’ll take communion together. Write this down as #1. When you are dealing with detours in your life, stay committed to...

1) **Fellowship** with the Saints (15:22-29)

And by the way, when I use that word “fellowship,” I’m going to use that word very broadly to incorporate a lot of different things.<sup>1</sup> I’ll show you this in the text.

Paul says this in **verse 22**,

<sup>22</sup> *This is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you.*

What’s the reason, Paul? Well it’s what we talked about last week. Paul had this insatiable desire to preach the gospel to Gentiles who had never heard. And he hasn’t been able to get to Rome yet, because he’s too busy planting churches in other places.

Paul said way back in **Romans 1:13**: “I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented).”<sup>2</sup> Sometimes Paul was prevented by Satan from going certain places.<sup>3</sup> Sometimes Paul was prevented by God to go to this place versus that place. I think that’s what Paul is saying here.<sup>4</sup> Paul is saying in both **chapter 1** and **chapter 15** of **Romans**, “**I wanted to come visit you church in Rome, but God had other plans for me, and God is sovereign.**”<sup>5</sup>

So what were those other plans? Well God wanted him to preach the gospel to Gentiles from Jerusalem to Illyricum and all the surrounding areas (**15:19**). And that took him through all of these regions where there was no church and there was no gospel witness: Malta and Miletus; Athens and Attalia; Tyre and Troas; Corinth, Philippi, Ephesus, Thessalonica, etc. All of these places with no church and with no gospel witness, and Paul took it there. He hasn’t had time to go to Rome and encourage the church there (as much as he wants to), because he’s too busy blazing gospel trails in other parts of the Roman Empire.

<sup>23</sup> *But now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions, and since I have longed for many years to come to you, <sup>24</sup> I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain,*

Now this is curious. Because Paul says now I’ve got time to come to you. My work in this region is done, so I’m going to come to you. But I’m not really going to come to you. In other words, I’m really going to Spain and “I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain.”<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> For a short, helpful explanation of the biblical concept of “fellowship” and its link to the Greek *κοινωνία*, see Douglas Magnum, “Koinonia” in *Bible Study Magazine*, O3-16-17: <https://www.biblestudymagazine.com/bible-study-magazine-blog/2017/3/13/koinonia>

<sup>2</sup> CHRYSOSTOM: “At the end of his epistle [Paul] returns to what he said at the beginning.” Quoted in Gerald Bray, ed., *Romans (Revised)*, ACCS (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 350.

<sup>3</sup> See 1 Thess 2:18 for an example of Paul being hindered by Satan. There is no direct mention of Satan here, though, and it is better to see hindered here (Greek: imperfect, passive, indicative, first person, singular of ἐγκόπτω) as a divine passive. ORIGEN: “Paul was not hindered by Satan, as some think, but by the fact that he was too busy planting churches in places where nobody had ever preached the gospel before.” Quoted in Bray, ed., *Romans (Revised)*, ACCS, 350. See also Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Second Edition, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker: 2018), 747.

<sup>4</sup> F. F. Bruce, *Romans: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 6, TNTC (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 82: “One obstacle [to Paul visiting Rome] could have been the imperial edict of AD 49 expelling Jews from Rome.”

<sup>5</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 898 calls this a semi-apology for not coming sooner. Grant Osborne, *Romans: Verse By Verse* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2017), 482 states, “If we peruse Acts 13-19, which covers [Paul’s] three journeys, it is difficult to find a time when he could have pulled up stakes and sailed to Rome.”

<sup>6</sup> Christopher Ash, *Teaching Romans: Unlocking Romans 9–16 for the Bible Teacher*, ed. David Jackman and Robin Sydeserff, vol. 2, Teach the Bible (London: Christian Focus Publications, 2009), 246 is right to conclude, “This is not especially flattering to the church in the greatest city on earth, who may think of themselves as placed in a uniquely ‘strategic’ location.” But surely the church could still see itself as strategic in Paul’s plan—strategic in the sense that he will use their gifts to help the new work in Spain.

Why in the world would Paul want to go to Spain?<sup>7</sup> And why would Paul stop in Rome on his way there? Why not just go straight to Spain by way of the Mediterranean Sea? Well Paul wants to go to Spain, because there's no gospel witness there. That's why? He's a gospel trailblazer. He said in **verse 20**, "I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation."<sup>8</sup> So Paul wants to go to this distant outpost, where there are no churches and no gospel witness and where they actually speak a different language: Latin instead of Greek.<sup>9</sup>

I said last week that Illyricum was 1,400 miles from Jerusalem.<sup>10</sup> Paul has travelled that far already. Well Spain is approximately 2,300 miles from Jerusalem as the crow flies and much farther than that by land route.<sup>11</sup> So this is a huge undertaking by Paul. But Paul is absolutely compelled to reach lost people. He's addicted to seeing new converts to Christ Jesus, and he can't get enough of it.

So why stop in Rome? Here's why. Look at **verse 24**.

<sup>24</sup> *I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while.*

So two things: **1)** I want to be "helped on my journey." And **2)** I want to enjoy "your company for a while." Notice which one of those he mentions first. I want to be "helped" on my journey—in other words, Paul is saying, I want you to help me finance my missionary journey to Spain.<sup>12</sup>

Look here's the thing about fellowship. It's not just all about hanging out. It's also about mission.<sup>13</sup> It's about pooling our collective resources for the sake of the gospel. That's not something that was invented in modern day America. Missions has always been part of the church program. And it's a beautiful way for us to experience fellowship.

**I think this should hit home for us as a church because our church was planted by another church. And now we have the opportunity to help other churches get planted. That's part of fellowship. That's why we are part of an organization called GCC that can help us facilitate that.**

So just to be clear, we've got **1)** financial giving as an aspect of fellowship. And we've also got **2)** hanging out as an aspect of fellowship: "once I have enjoyed your company for a while." Let me show you another expression of fellowship. Look at **verse 25**.

<sup>25</sup> *At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints.*

Now Paul most likely wrote this letter from the city of Corinth. And if Paul wants to go to Spain via Rome, that's the opposite direction from Jerusalem. Spain, by the way, is the western most region of the Roman Empire.<sup>14</sup> And Jerusalem is on the eastern most fringe of the Empire. **[Those of you who are geographically inclined can look this up later on a map.]** Rome is in the middle, and Corinth is just a little east of Rome and a long ways from Jerusalem. So if Paul wanted to go westward from Corinth to Rome and then Spain, why in

---

<sup>7</sup> Robert H. Mounce, *Romans*, vol. 27, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 269n17: "Spain (or 'Iberia,' as the Greeks called it) then was part of the Roman Empire... Kraeling holds that it was the large number of enslaved Greeks who had been sent to Spain that attracted Paul to the area (*HDB*, 932). Whether Paul ever went to Spain (following a first imprisonment in Rome) is still being debated. References to such a trip, found in Clement of Rome (*1 Clem.* 5.7) and the Muratorian Canon, are strong evidence but fall short of proving beyond doubt that Paul actually set foot in Spain." Also Moo, *Romans*, NICNT, 900: "Parts of Spain (which in the ancient world included all the Iberian peninsula) had been occupied by Rome since about 200 B.C.; but it was only in Paul's lifetime that the Romans had fully organized the entire area."

<sup>8</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Romans: Righteousness from Heaven*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1991), 293: "Do we have a dream—a Spain? If not, let us ask God for one."

<sup>9</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT, 748 speculates, "Perhaps [Paul] desired some Roman Christians to go with him, since they knew Latin and the Roman administrative system."

<sup>10</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1996), 564.

<sup>11</sup> John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans: God's Good News for the World*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 384 assumes Paul wrote the book of Romans from Corinth and calculates Paul's potential travels by sea at 800 miles from Corinth to Jerusalem, 1,500 miles from Jerusalem to Rome, and 700 miles from Rome to Spain, for a grand total of 3,000 miles! This total would be even larger if he travelled by land! "When one reflects on the uncertainties and hazards of ancient travel, the almost nonchalant way in which Paul announces his intention to undertake these three voyages is quite extraordinary."

<sup>12</sup> Craig S. Keener, *IVPBCNT* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), Ro 15:24: "[Helped] implies that they would cover his expenses for the trip. This would be a great expression of hospitality, but one which the Roman church would probably consider an honor if they could afford it." Stott, *The Message of Romans*, 385: "The verb translated *assist* (*propempō*) seems already to have become almost a technical Christian term for helping missionaries on their way. It undoubtedly meant more than good wishes and a valedictory prayer. In most cases it also involved supplying them with provisions and money, and sometimes providing them as well with an escort to accompany them at least part of the way."

<sup>13</sup> Osborne, *Romans: Verse By Verse*, 486: "Fellowship is more than just social and spiritual togetherness. It means sharing in every area of life, including finances and quality of life."

<sup>14</sup> Keener, *IVPBCNT*, Ro 15:24: "At the farthest western end of the Mediterranean, Spain was counted by geographers such as Strabo as at the end of the earth (with India on the opposite, eastern side of the world)." Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT, 749 also evaluates a connection between Spain and the "Tarshish" of the OT (see especially Isa 66:19ff.). Did Paul see Spain (Tarshish?) as the great end of the missionary venture to Gentiles? Schreiner doesn't think so because, "Paul would have known about the regions of Parthia, India, Germany, and Britain, and thus one should seriously question whether he believed that the work of proclaiming the gospel to all peoples would necessarily be finished after his mission to Spain."

the world would he go east first to Jerusalem? That's a detour.<sup>15</sup> That's hundreds of miles in the wrong direction. Why would he do that?

Here's why. Here's the reason. He's bringing aid to the saints in Jerusalem. Everyone see that in **verse 25**? The word used here for “bringing aid” in Greek is the verb διακονέω meaning “to serve” or “to minister.” The word διάκονος or “deacon” is related to this word. So Paul is going to play the part of a deacon and bring benevolence to the church in Jerusalem, because there had been a famine in this region of the world, and the believers in Jerusalem were suffering greatly (cf. **Acts 11:27-28**).<sup>16</sup> So get this—Paul took up an offering from predominantly Gentile churches to take with him and bless the predominately Jewish church in Jerusalem. Isn't that great? Does that blow your mind?

If that doesn't blow your mind, check this out. Look at **verse 26**.

<sup>26</sup> For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased<sup>17</sup> to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem.

Macedonia and Achaia are regions of the Roman Empire where Paul has planted churches: Philippi, Berea, Thessalonica, Corinth, etc. Paul took up an offering there in those Gentile churches to help the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem! And here's what'll blow your mind. The word for “contribution” here in **verse 26** in the ESV (also the NIV)—do you know what word that is in Greek? It's the word κοινωνία. That's the word that we often associate in English with the concept of “fellowship.” Paul says that these Gentile churches have made a κοινωνία contribution for the poor Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. So when we talk about fellowship among the saints, we've got **1**) missionary giving, **2**) hanging out, and also we've got **3**) contributions for the poor (i.e. benevolence).<sup>18</sup> All three of those are aspects of fellowship or κοινωνία.

<sup>27</sup> For they were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings.<sup>19</sup>

Now I think there's something sneaky that Paul is doing here. I don't think this is just a random missionary report. **“I got to go take some benevolence to the Jews in Jerusalem.”** Paul is telling the church in Rome this for a reason. What's the reason? Well if you remember, this church had some conflict going on between Jews and Gentiles. They were arguing over diet and days. And the strong Christians (mostly Gentiles) were not being sensitive to the weak Christians (mostly Jews) who were still clinging to some aspects of the Jewish Law. And I think Paul is trying to say something subtle here about Christian love and fellowship.<sup>20</sup> He's saying these Gentile churches are showing love to their Jewish brothers by giving a κοινωνία contribution.<sup>21</sup> If they can do that, then you guys can make a better effort to love each other and get along in your church body.<sup>22</sup>

**Everybody see what Paul is doing there?**

<sup>28</sup> When therefore I have completed this and have delivered to them what has been collected, I will leave for Spain by way of you. <sup>29</sup> I know that when I come to you I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.

In terms of fellowship, we've got shared missionary activity. We've got enjoying each other's company. And we've got shared benevolence between churches—a κοινωνία contribution. We've got in **verse 29** the fullness of the blessing of Christ. You know things have not always gone great for the Apostle Paul. He's been

---

<sup>15</sup> Ash, *Teaching Romans*, 248: “After the barrier-breaking gospel ambition of verses 20–24 we expect him to be hurrying towards Rome, just as fast as ‘Virgin Mediterranean’ can carry him, with his sights on Spain. Instead, we find him going in exactly the opposite direction, towards Jerusalem, and not for missionary work at all! He is not going for gospel proclamation. And he is going to a place where Christ has already been named.”

<sup>16</sup> Osborne, *Romans: Verse By Verse*, 485 states: “Poverty was an ongoing problem for Palestinian Christians. There were several factors like famines (it is estimated that there were ten famines from 100 BC to AD 100), the general poverty of Judea, and the persecution of Christians (Acts 8:1-3; Jas 2:5-8).”

<sup>17</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT, 751: “By indicating their delight [ESV – ‘pleased’; Greek: εὐδοκέω] in giving, Paul underlines the truth that genuine giving in never merely a duty; it is also a delight and a joy... we should not conclude that ‘duty’ and ‘joy’ are mutually exclusive.” Cf. 2 Cor 8:1-5; 9:7. Timothy Keller, *Romans 8-16 For You* (The Good Book Company, 2015), 173: “Paul shows that this ‘duty’ of giving is to be something that Christians will be ‘pleased to do’ (v 27). It is to be something that wells up out of our hearts and gives us joy and fulfillment as we do it. In other words, our help to the needy, while a requirement, must not simply be a response to a requirement. It must be the overflow of a full heart.”

<sup>18</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT, 751: “Paul often used these terms [κοινωνία and κοινωνέω] to designate financial generosity (e.g., Rom. 12:13; 2 Cor. 8:4; 9:13; Gal. 6:6; Phil. 4:15). The gift for the Jerusalem saints is not only a ministry, for the term ‘fellowship’ indicates solidarity and partnership... By giving to those who were in need in Jerusalem, the gentiles demonstrated their partnership with them in the gospel.”

<sup>19</sup> Keller, *Romans 8-16 For You*, 174 makes clear that this giving is a matter ultimately of grace not race. “We must be careful not to confuse this with some kind of ‘racial compensation.’ Paul is not saying that all Gentiles owe all Jews on the basis of race. However, Paul says, the Gentiles have received ‘spiritual blessings’ through the gospel, and this should make us generous to those in need.”

<sup>20</sup> Keener, *IVPBCNT*, Ro 15:25–26: “[H]ere the Gentile Christian offering for Jerusalem expresses solidarity between Gentile and Jewish Christianity. This is a practical example of humble racial reconciliation, important to Paul's case in Romans.”

<sup>21</sup> Mounce, *Romans*, NAC, 269: “The contribution made by the Gentile church expressed in tangible form the bond of Christian unity that surpasses the artificial barriers of race.” TILEMANN HESSHUS: “Therefore it would be most wicked if those who receive spiritual and eternal goods were to refuse to repay their teachers in physical goods.” Quoted in Philip D. W. Krey et al., eds., *Romans 9–16: New Testament*, vol. VIII, RCS (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2016), 236.

<sup>22</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT, 750: “The giving of their substance signified gentile inclusion into the people of God. The acceptance of the gift by Jewish Christians was of tremendous significance, since it symbolized the solidarity of Jews and gentiles in the people of God, and the unity of Jews and gentiles is one of the major themes of Romans.”



through some tough stuff as an apostle. He's had some plans altered and changed over the years and he's encountered some detours and some obstacles. You know what Paul never gave up on? The church. You know what Paul kept fighting for? The church! You know what Paul relied on throughout all of life and for the fulfillment of his calling? The church!

That dates back to his sending church in Antioch, when Paul was a valuable member of that church with Barnabas. And through prayer and fasting, that church decided to send Paul out as a missionary to preach the gospel and plant churches (**Acts 16:1-3**). The reality is that we, as Christians, need the church. We need fellowship. It is absolutely essential to the accomplishment of our mission.

**So back to Sanja and I when we moved to Chicago after those two debacles with the U-Haul. You know back then I wasn't Pastor Tony. I was just a newly married seminary student trying to figure out life and what God had for me. And I remember when I told my pastor in Texas (the one who married Sanja and me) that we were moving to Chicago for seminary, he told me, "find a church and get plugged in ASAP." You know, that's the best advice that I got. Because that's exactly what Sanja and I did in Chicago. We limped into town with a damaged U-Haul full of our possessions and a damaged Toyota Camry to boot. But we found a church right away and got plugged in.**

**And I remember being in seminary, and meeting people who would treat seminary like it was their church. And that was so silly to me. How can a parachurch organization be your church? Parachurch organizations can't do that! Other organizations can't do that! They are not designed for that, and they don't have the promise of Jesus that "I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt 16:18).**

**Listen, Harvest Decatur, we need the church. We need the fellowship of the saints! We need it for mission. We need it for benevolence. We need it for relationships. We need it for κοινωνία and all of its various expressions. This is the body of Christ. This is the bride of Christ, the church. We need the church. And when life gets hard, and when you hit roadblocks and detours in life, that's when you need the church all the more.**

What's ironic about Paul's statement here is that he actually did make it to Rome after the writing of this letter. In **verse 29** he says,

<sup>29</sup> *I know that when I come to you I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.*

Paul did come to them in Rome, but he didn't come to them like he thought. He came to them in chains as a Roman prisoner waiting for trial before the Emperor. More on that in a second.

-----  
**Go ahead and write this down as #2 in your notes. Here's a second commitment when dealing with detours. You need fellowship with the saints and also you need...**

## **2) Prayer** with the Saints (15:30-33)

Part of Paul's MO in his writing is to solicit prayers from his readers. And Paul is very specific with his prayer requests here.<sup>23</sup> These are real life events that he is asking prayer for. Paul didn't write in a vacuum and he didn't solicit prayers in a vacuum. **But here's the enduring principle for us as Paul's readers 2,000 years later since the historical events Paul is asking prayer for in Romans have long past.**<sup>24</sup> **The enduring principle is that prayer with the saints is important. It's a way of life for Christians. And soliciting prayers from others should be part of our MO. So I'm going to unpack and explain what Paul asks for in the realm of prayer in this passage. But the application for us is this—we should be asking for prayer in our own lives in particular ways, just like Paul does here. I want to make that applicational transition before we are done.**

Paul asked for prayer for three specific things.<sup>25</sup> Look at **verse 30**.

<sup>30</sup> *I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf,*

Notice the Trinitarian reference in that sentence.

---

<sup>23</sup> Stott, *The Message of Romans*, 388: "Towards the beginning of his letter Paul assured the Roman Christians that he was constantly praying for them (1:9f.). So it is entirely appropriate that he should now ask them to pray for him."

<sup>24</sup> I.e. The Spain and Jerusalem of today are not the Spain and Jerusalem of the first century... not even close.

<sup>25</sup> AMBROSIASTER: "Paul asks for their prayers ... not because he deserves them but because he is following the principle that the church ought to pray for its pastor." Quoted in Bray, ed., *Romans (Revised)*, ACCS, 353. Ambrosiaster's sentiment is correct, although it's best to not consider Paul the "pastor" of the church in Rome. Missionary, apostle, church-planter, mentor, etc., yes, but not pastor.

<sup>30</sup> I appeal to you, brothers, by our **Lord Jesus Christ** and by the love of the **Spirit**, to strive together with me in your prayers to **God** on my behalf,

**Everyone see that? The Trinity is all over the Bible, church. Take a note of these things and share them with the JW's the next time they come to your house and try to dismiss Trinitarian doctrine.**

Anyways, let's keep going.

<sup>30</sup> I appeal to you, brothers...to strive together with me in your prayers ...

Number 1:

<sup>31</sup> that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea,

Number 2:

and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints,

Number 3:

<sup>32</sup> so that by God's will<sup>26</sup> I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company. <sup>33</sup> May the God of peace<sup>27</sup> be with you all. Amen.

So three prayer requests here.<sup>28</sup> **1)** That I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea. You know with the benefit of hindsight and other Scriptures, we can actually say whether or not this prayer was answered. Paul was delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, but he wasn't delivered unscathed.<sup>29</sup> When Paul got to Jerusalem, he went to the Temple and he was harassed, assaulted, and arrested there (cf. **Acts 21:17-23:11**). And he almost got killed. In fact he almost got killed twice. After he was arrested, there was a group of forty men who took an oath that they wouldn't eat or drink anything until Paul was dead (**Acts 23:12-35**). But their plot was foiled when a relative of Paul found out what was happening.

I can't help but think that the prayers of the Romans and other churches were instrumental in sparing Paul's life. You know reading the last half of the **Book of Acts** is like reading a book about how one man repeatedly defies death over and over again. **It's like reading a biography of George Washington. He almost died here. He almost died there. He should have died here. He should have died there. George Washington cheated death multiple times in his life, and so did the Apostle Paul.** God spared Paul's life for a reason. And he answered this prayer request of his.

The second prayer request was **2)** that God would allow the service for Jerusalem to be acceptable to the saints. In other words, Paul desired that the Jewish church in Jerusalem would accept the benevolence of the Gentile churches. Paul wanted prayer for this, because he didn't want the Jews to bow up and reject the offering because they thought they were too good to accept a *κοινωνία* contribution from Gentiles. And my assumption based upon the reading of **Acts** is that this was accepted.<sup>30</sup> Another prayer answered!

The third prayer request was **3)** that Paul, in accordance with God's will, would come to Rome with joy and be refreshed in their company. Let me ask you, Harvest Decatur. We've got some savvy Bible students here. Was this prayer answered? Was it? Yeah, kind of. It was answered, but it wasn't answered the way that Paul thought it would be answered.

Because what happened? Paul got arrested in Jerusalem. He got transferred to Caesarea where he waited in prison for two years. And then he finally got shipped to Rome in chains because he had appealed to Caesar. So was that the end of his journey? Not even close. Because on the way to Rome, by boat, he got shipwrecked on the island of Malta (cf. **Acts 27:1-28:16**). You can't make this stuff up! And then he got bitten by a poisonous snake on Malta. And then, he had to winter for a few months on that island.

When you get to the end of the book of **Acts**, you start asking yourself, **"Is Paul ever going to make it to Rome?"** Sure enough, he did. He made it as a prisoner in chains. Was he able to come to them with joy and be refreshed in their company? Yeah, but by the time he got to Rome, he needed their help as much as they

<sup>26</sup> Everett F. Harrison and Donald A. Hagner, "Romans," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Romans-Galatians (Revised Edition)*, ed. Tremper Longman III & Garland, David E., vol. 11 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 224: "Yet he knew that all of this, as with everything, was conditional and depended on 'God's will'" (cf. 1:10). As it turned out, this meant that he would reach Rome, but not as a free man."

<sup>27</sup> THEODORET OF CYR: "Paul called God the 'God of peace' here for a reason, because he was concerned about those at Rome who were battling one another or at least who were suspicious of one another. He wanted them to be at peace with each other because of the controversy which they were having over the observance of the law." Quoted in Bray, ed., *Romans (Revised)*, ACCS, 354.

<sup>28</sup> Ash, *Teaching Romans*, 251.

<sup>29</sup> Mounce, *Romans*, NAC, 270: "Paul's final meeting with the Ephesian elders reveals his sense of uncertainty about what could happen to him when he returned to Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit had continually warned him of the perils that lay ahead (Acts 20:22-23). Paul urged the believers in Rome to enter into his conflict by joining him in prayer."

<sup>30</sup> Osborne, *Romans: Verse By Verse*, 491: "This prayer was granted as well, for in Acts 21:17, 20, Luke tells us that Paul and his team were 'received...warmly,' and the Jerusalem elders 'praised God' at the report of the Gentile mission."

needed his (cf. **Acts 28:17-31**). And there was no stopping in Rome before he got to Spain. Paul spent two years in Rome, and then the **Book of Acts** just abruptly ends without telling us what ever happened to him.

Church history suggests that he actually did make it to Spain, but we can't say for sure.<sup>31</sup> Did God allow Paul to go to Spain and preach the gospel there? I don't know.<sup>32</sup> I don't know if God answered that prayer and that desire of Paul's heart. It's possible.<sup>33</sup> **But sometimes God doesn't answer our prayers. That's his prerogative. He's God.**<sup>34</sup> **And sometimes God doesn't answer our prayers the way we expect that he would answer our prayers (i.e. Paul traveling to Rome in chains several years after he planned to). The bottom line is that we trust God, and we pray to God, even when detours and roadblocks come our way.**<sup>35</sup> **We never stop praying. Don't ever stop praying, Harvest Decatur.**<sup>36</sup>

And by the way, does this mean that Paul was wrong to make plans to go to Spain. What if he never got to Spain? Was he wrong to make that plan? Was he wrong to dream that big dream? I don't think so. God is not just honored when we accomplish great things, God is also honored in the attempt to accomplish great things.<sup>37</sup> Yeah, we should make plans. Yeah, we should dream big dreams. **Just write those down in pencil.** And don't be surprised if they change along the way.

You know I often laugh with Sanja about our escapades coming to Illinois. I laugh at how foolish I was back then. But you know I also miss the reckless and adventuresome idealism of those days. I miss the big dreams and the attempting great things for God.

I just wrote this down on Friday on my iPhone. Here's what I wrote. "In my 20s I struggled with idealism. In my 30s I struggled with pragmatism. In my 40s, I struggle with pessimism." And you know what, I miss the days of my earlier idealism. I want to attempt great things for God. I do. And when detours come, as they inevitably do, I'm going to cling to the fellowship of the saints and I'm going to cling to prayer.

-----  
So anyways back to that gas station in Kankakee. There I was with a busted U-Haul and a busted Toyota Camry. I probably had an arrest warrant as well in the state of Arkansas, I don't know. Sanja was sick and about to throw up. I was bewildered and frustrated and crying out to the Lord, "God I thought you had called me to do this. I thought you wanted me to do this. Should we just move back to Texas?" That was a low point in my life.

But we eventually did make it to Chicago. And we were able to stay with my good friend, Lee Wilkinson, for a few months before we got our feet under us. I went to seminary. I finished seminary. I had some prayers answered and unanswered in many of those experiences. Eventually I got an email from a man named Mike Holder, who asked me to consider moving to a town called Arthur, Illinois. And I literally said in my email back to him, "Where is Arthur, Illinois?" And when he told me about it, I was like what! Amish people in Illinois? What in the world?

So we moved to Arthur in 2008. And we merged the church in Arthur with a church in Decatur in 2010. And there were many other developments like that, which I could never have anticipated. And Many other detours along the way too. **But all along the way, I have been committed to fellowship with**

---

<sup>31</sup> For a possible timeline that includes a trip to Spain for Paul, see Osborne, *Romans: Verse By Verse*, 483-4. Osborne sees this as unlikely, since a trip to Spain would necessitate Paul's death after the reign of Emperor Nero.

<sup>32</sup> PELAGIUS: "It is not certain whether Paul ever got to Spain." Quoted in Bray, ed., *Romans (Revised)*, ACCS, 351. HEINRICH BULLINGER: "But if anyone seeks whether Paul truly went to Spain, or did not go, nothing sure can be answered from sacred Scripture. Nor does the Christian religion's hinge turn on this matter. For if he landed in Spain, it adds nothing to our religion; but if he did not land, it takes nothing away from true piety." Quoted in Krey et al., eds., *Romans 9-16*, RCS, 234. Martin Luther, *Commentary on Romans*, translated by J. Theodore Mueller (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1954), 220 believes that Paul never made it to Spain.

<sup>33</sup> Hughes, *Romans*, 291: "I personally think it does not matter, and here is why: First, God knew Spain was in Paul's heart, just as much as it was in David's heart to build the Temple, though that king never saw a stone of it laid. Secondly, the value of a dream is not whether we achieve it or not, but in setting out to achieve it. This has been a great lesson for me personally. God is not so much interested in whether we reach our destination as in how we try to get there."

<sup>34</sup> Stott, *The Message of Romans*, 390: "prayer is an essential Christian activity, and it is good to ask people to pray for us and with us, as Paul did. But there is nothing automatic about prayer. Praying is not like using a coin-operated machine or a cash dispenser. The struggle involved in prayer lies in the process of coming to discern God's will and to desire it above everything else. Then God will work things out providentially according to his will, for which we have prayed."

<sup>35</sup> Hughes, *Romans*, 293: "A missionary heart is a heart that prays passionately. Today it is not 'in' to be passionate about anything except our favorite professional sports team. But in God's Kingdom the great heart passionately strives in prayer."

<sup>36</sup> Keller, *Romans 8-16 For You*, 175: "Christians can always help a struggling brother or sister by praying. Christians can always come alongside those whom they have never met, by praying for them. We can give up our time for those who are giving up their lives, in prayer. We may not be on the mission field, but we are always to be on mission by being on our knees." Also Osborne, *Romans: Verse By Verse*, 493 encourages the modern day reader of Romans to "ask yourself, 'how would I react if everything went wrong in my life like it did for Paul?' We have here one of the truly great models for reacting to trying times."

<sup>37</sup> I'm thankful for Dave Harvey and some comments he made to this effect that helped me to see this.

**the saints and also to prayer. Fellowship and Prayer. Fellowship with the saints and Prayer with the saints, Harvest Decatur. Stay committed to those things. Pray with me.**

---

I didn't mention this earlier, but another aspect of κοινωνία fellowship is the Lord's Supper. That word in Greek is pretty flexible and incorporates a lot of different things. And one of the things that κοινωνία is used to describe is communion. And we are going to enter into a time of communion now.

So before we do, just a few things. Communion is a celebration of what Christ has done for us on the cross. The bread that we are going to consume symbolizes Jesus's body broken for us on the cross. Likewise the cup represents the blood of Jesus shed for our sin. So I want to be clear, this κοινωνία communion that we are going to share right now is meant for believers and believers only—those who, by faith, have repented of their sins and believed on Christ for the salvation of their souls. So if you are believer, I want to welcome you now to participate in this time of remembrance. You don't need to be a member of Harvest Decatur to take communion with us, but you do need to be a saved follower of Jesus. Parents, I'll look to you to discern the readiness of your children to take communion.

And as an act of unity, we want to partake of these elements together. So if you would, please come forward a row at a time and take the communion elements back to your seat. And then in just a few minutes I'll lead you through the taking of the bread and the cup.