

Message #3**Romans 1:8-15**

Many years ago, when in Grand Rapids, Mr. Miles was talking with me and the conversation turned to Kalamazoo. The year was probably 1982. In that conversation we concluded it would be something if at some point I ended up back in Kalamazoo. It would take about another 20 years, but eventually it did happen. As we moved from Grand Rapids to DeMotte, Indiana and then to Pocatello, Idaho, it was always in the back of my mind that someday being in Kalamazoo could happen. Jon Carr was a key reason we are here in Kalamazoo. When Jon Carr called me that final time back in the year 2000 to see about a move, Mr. Miles said you better take a serious look at Texas Corners Bible Church because it is very possible that God wants you in Kalamazoo. The nagging thought about coming to Kalamazoo started many years before it happened and then it finally happened.

It must have been that way for the Apostle Paul and the city of Rome. Paul had a nagging thought that he could not shake. Paul always thought one day, he would like to go to Rome. Now Paul had come to faith in Jesus Christ around AD 35. By the time he writes Romans, he has been a believer for some 22-23 years. But for most of his Christian life, he had a burning passion to go to Rome. As William Barclay said, "All his life Paul had been haunted by the thought of Rome."

Now when most people visit Rome today they are interested in taking tours and going on various excursions. The Tiber River flows through Rome and you can take a river cruise. There are various museums and art galleries. You can visit ancient ruins like the Coliseum, the Catacombs, the Forum, Public Bath houses and a Mamertine prison that supposedly held both Peter and Paul. People who go to Rome today want to see these things.

When Paul wanted to go to Rome, certainly he would have looked at things in the city, just as all typically do. But his nagging passion to go to Rome was not to take a tour or a cruise or an excursion. **Paul wanted to go to Rome to communicate and teach the Grace Gospel of God.**

What we cannot help but see in this text is this:

PAUL'S GREATEST PERSONAL DESIRE AND ASPIRATION AND PRAYER WAS TO PERSONALLY GO TO ROME AND COMMUNICATE GOD'S WORD AND GOD'S GRACE GOSPEL TO THE CHURCH OF ROME.

The Apostle Paul had a great passion and that passion was go to the Church of Rome and teach them the Gospel of God. He wanted to unravel it for God's people. He wanted to be there in person. He wanted to preach and teach because he knew that is what unleashes the power of God.

The Church of Rome was primarily a Gentile church. We know from the list of people in Romans 16 that some of the believers in the church had come to faith in Jesus Christ elsewhere and some had actually come to faith under Paul's ministry. Now that they were in Rome, Paul had a desire to go there and teach them. Paul's great goal and aspiration in life was to proclaim God's word to the people of God.

As Romans opens, there are three personal matters that Paul wants these Roman believers to know:

PERSONAL MATTER #1 – Paul explains what he prays for the Romans. **1:8-10**

There are two prayer subjects of which Paul wanted these Romans to know about:

Prayer Subject #1 - Paul thanked God for the faith of these Romans. **1:8**

The context of this is very moving. Paul is in Corinth writing this and there is a plot to kill him (Acts 20:1-3). In spite of those personal pressures and problems, Paul prayed and was actually thankful in his own prayer life. Now the thing that made him able to be thankful in his own life and for the lives of the Romans was “through Jesus Christ.”

His thankfulness was due to Jesus Christ. It was on account of Christ's work in his life and in the lives of the Romans that made him very thankful.

Now the specific thing that really touched Paul was the Roman's fame and faith in Jesus Christ that had spread worldwide. People all over were talking about those believers in Rome.

That phrase “throughout the whole world” means that everywhere Paul went in the world; the people were talking about the fact that in Rome there was a sizeable group of people who had believed on Jesus Christ.

Now the Greek text translated “throughout the whole world” (en olw tw kosmw) means that the faith of the believers in Rome was being heralded everywhere Paul went in this world. The faith of these people was the talk of the world. By virtue of the fact that there is no article before the adjective “whole,” we conclude that this does not mean in every bar or jungle people talking about the faith of the Romans, but everywhere Paul went in the world, especially among the brethren, he kept hearing talk of the believers in Rome and their faith. For that he thanked God.

What a testimony this church had. People knew those people at that church are believers in Jesus Christ and they loved the word of God. They had a tremendous faith in the midst of hatred and hostility. They were living in a bizarre world morally and religiously. Yet they were rock solid in their faith.

Also carefully notice that Paul thanks God for their faith. He does not thank God for their health, or their numbers, or their talents, or their money, or their works; he thanks God for their faith.

Paul will say later in this very book that faith comes and is developed by hearing the word of God (Rom. 10:17). Paul was thankful that in Rome there were these believers who were known for their faith. These believers were solid in their faith and Paul thanked God for them. No wonder Paul wanted to go there to teach.

Prayer Subject #2 - Paul asked God to be able to visit them in Rome. **1:9-10**

In close proximity to the faith reputation of these believers, Paul says I am continually praying for you and one of the things I am specifically praying is that God will permit me to come to you so I can teach you.

Paul says I am praying that God will permit me to come to Rome and one reason is that my job is to unlock the Gospel of God and the doctrines connected to it and I desire to come to you and do just that in person.

When a faithful man like Paul hears of a group of faithful people in a city he has longed to visit, naturally he would pray that God would send him there. Paul wanted to go there, but he knew God determined whether or not he would go. So he prayed about it.

Actually it will be two to three more years before Paul will actually get to Rome. To get there via answered prayer he will go through a shipwreck; he will be bitten by a deadly snake and he will be chained to guards. That is how God will eventually answer this prayer.

But we need to learn a great lesson here. Just because God does not immediately answer our prayers, does not mean He will not eventually answer our prayers. If we are faithful people and pray, in God's time and in God's way, He will answer.

PERSONAL MATTER #2 – Paul explains reasons why he wants to visit the Romans. **1:11-14**

There are five specific stated reasons in this context as to why he wanted to go to Rome. What isn't in this list of reasons is to go to increase numbers, to increase dollars or to see exciting new things. Paul says I will tell you why I want to come to Rome:

Reason #1 - Paul wanted to go Rome to impart a spiritual gift. **1:11a**

The verb "impart" means to give or share something with someone (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 286). Paul was a gifted Apostle and he wanted to go to Rome and share that gift with the believers who were there. His gift enabled him to preach and teach the word of God and unlock the doctrine of the Gospel in a way that made it come to life for the people. He wanted to preach and teach God's word to the Romans because God had given him a gift to do it.

This really gets at the heart of a true ministry. A true minister is one who does not have a passion for promotions, administration, counseling or entertainment. A true gifted minister has a passion to preach and teach God's word. If that passion is not there, he shouldn't be there.

Reason #2 - Paul wanted to go to Rome to establish them in the faith. **1:11b**

The word "that" in Greek introduces us to the result of Paul sharing his spiritual gift of teaching and preaching God's word, the Romans would be established in the faith.

The word "establish" means to set something firmly in place or to fix something firmly, fastly and finally (*Ibid.*, p. 418).

Paul wanted to go to Rome to use his gift to preach and teach the word of God so that the people would be firmly cemented in their faith. He wanted to carefully teach the Gospel of God and all the doctrines connected to it so that they would be totally grounded.

This is a very important point to see. **Just because one believes in Jesus Christ does not mean there is an automatic grasp of God's word and truth.** Paul is actually praying that God lets him go to Rome so he can teach them so they will be grounded.

This is so critical. We become strong in faith by being carefully and accurately taught the word of God. This does not happen by osmosis or by a seminar or even by reading a devotion every day. What is needed is a gifted man like Paul going to a place and accurately teaching and preaching God's word. That is what establishes people in the faith.

Reason #3 - Paul wanted to go to Rome to encourage each other. **1:12**

This is important to see. When believers gather together to be taught God's word, in the context of the church, there is a true God wrought encouragement that takes place. There is great mutual encouragement that comes to the learner and to the teacher. As people hear the word, they are stabilized in their faith and, as that happens, all are encouraged.

The Apostle Paul is the greatest theologian to ever live and yet he needed encouragement. He got that encouragement as he taught and as people grew. When you are using your spiritual gift to minister to others, you will find the greatest encouragement in your life. When you see people who are discouraged all the time, you can know that they are not regularly associating with faithful people who are serious about hearing and learning God's word and they really aren't doing much to minister to others. If they were, they would find great encouragement.

Reason #4 - Paul wanted to go to Rome to bear fruit. **1:13**

Paul did not just want to go to Rome to see things; he wanted to go to bear fruit. Jesus Christ Himself taught on the subject of bearing fruit (John 15:1-11). Jesus brought out several positive things that would result for a fruit-bearing believer:

- 1) God would fine tune a fruit bearer so he can bear more fruit. **15:2**
- 2) God would permit one close to Jesus Christ to bear much fruit. **15:7**
- 3) God would grant fruit bearers answer to their prayers. **15:7**
- 4) A fruit bearer is one who glorifies God. **15:8**
- 5) A fruit bearer has full joy. **15:11**

No wonder Paul wanted to go to Rome to bear fruit. Bearing fruit is the mark of one close to Jesus Christ. What would Paul actually do to bear fruit? He mentions it in **verse 15**, he would preach and teach.

Reason #5 - Paul wanted to go to Rome to fulfill his apostolic obligation. **1:14**

Paul had been given a tremendous gift of God and he knew he had an obligation to use it. Paul was the Apostle assigned by God to unlock the Gospel. He felt the weight and responsibility he had to use his gift to preach and teach it.

There were more Greeks and barbarians and wise people and foolish people and sinful people in Rome than in any other city in the world. There were politicians, religious ministers, soldiers, business people, and every type of sinful person imaginable in Rome and Paul felt obligated to go there to preach.

PERSONAL MATTER #3 – Paul explains why he hasn't visited the Romans. **1:13-15**

There are two reasons why Paul had not visited Rome to this point:

Reason #1 - Because to this point he had been prevented. **1:13**

Some people wrongly think the life of an Apostle was a life of ease and glamour. The truth is it was hard, tough and lonely.

Paul totally believed in the sovereignty of God and permitting or preventing him from ministering in certain places (I Cor. 16:7). Satan was in the business of trying to prevent Paul from ministering, but God was always sovereign in every circumstance and situation of Paul's life.

Paul said I have wanted to come to you many times, but to this point I have been prevented from doing so.

Reason #2 - Because to this point he had other obligations. **1:14**

As an apostle, Paul actually owed people God's truth. He actually had a responsibility to preach and teach the truth. No one on this earth had a better grasp and understanding of the Gospel of the Grace of God at Paul's level. We learn that there were religious leaders who were jealous of Paul's grasp of truth (Philippians 1:15). But that did not slow him down or stop him.

- 1) Paul was obligated to the Greeks - those of Greek ancestry and culture, who spoke Greek.
- 2) Paul was obligated to the Barbarians - foreigners who were not Greek; did not speak Greek.
- 3) Paul was obligated to the wise - those who were educated and cultured.
- 4) Paul was obligated to the unwise - those uneducated, uncultured, and crude.

Paul says I have an obligation to preach and teach God's word all over to all people, which is why I haven't been to Rome just yet. This same Paul, who took this Gospel to Rome, wrote it for us. He will take us on the same journey and give us the same teaching.

Parting Lessons:

- 1) Paul had a passion to preach and teach the gospel to people who were already believers.**

This is fascinating. When we think of presenting the Gospel, we typically think of presenting it to lost people. Not Paul. He knew God's saved people needed it. Just because one is saved, does not automatically mean he knows and understands the word.

- 2) When we understand the truth of God's word and doctrines, we are obligated to share it.**

Share it with those saved and unsaved.

- 3) God sovereignly determines where we are permitted to minister and where we are not.**

Now the Grace Gospel says this - it does not matter what your education; it does not matter what your culture; it does not matter what your color; it does not matter what your business; it does not matter whether you are a success or failure; a rich man or poor man; a religious person or a heathen person, we are all sinners and we all need to be saved from our sins and there is only one Person who can do that and that one Person is Jesus Christ.

To be saved we need the righteousness of God and our problem is we don't have it. Our works will not save us; our religion will not save us; our legalism will not save us; man's rules and traditions will not save us; there is only one who can save us: Jesus Christ.

Believe on Him and you will be saved. That is the message Paul took all over the world and that is the message we give to you.