**Lesson 41: Missionaries Need Our Support**

Text: Romans 15:14-33

**Introduction**

In this closing section of Paul’s letter to the Roman believers, he returned to the topic of his upcoming travel plans (Romans 1:1-15). Paul was constantly on the move for the sake of the gospel. He earnestly desired to proclaim the gospel where it had not yet been proclaimed. The Roman believers played a very strategic part in that effort. Paul wrote to communicate his itinerary with them and how they might be able to help. As we study this unit, consider how it applies to our lives as believers concerned about the movement of the gospel into new territories. We will see that missionaries need our support.

1. **Paul explained to the Roman believers why he had not yet been able to come to Rome. (15:14-22)** 
   1. He acknowledged their spiritual growth and maturity. (v. 14-15) He had heard reports of their godly character, biblical understanding, and kindness to others. Nonetheless, he knew that they had room for spiritual growth.
   2. As the apostle sent to the Gentiles, Paul’s desire was to so impact their lives that they might be pleasing to the Lord. (v. 16; Colossians 1:28) He understood that ultimately it was the Holy Spirit who sanctified the Gentile believers. The Holy Spirit took the unclean and made them clean (1 Corinthians 6:11; 1Thessalonians 4:8). Paul was just an instrument the Spirit used to bring the Gentiles to faith in Christ.
   3. The obedience of the Gentiles to the faith is the result of Christ’s work through Paul in word and deed. (v. 17-19a) The power of the Spirit was evident upon Paul in the signs and wonders used to authenticate the gospel preached.
   4. The result of God’s grace in Paul’s life was the evangelism and church planting that took place from Jerusalem to Illyricum. (v. 19b)
      1. While Paul was sent from the church in Antioch, he entered the gospel ministry in Jerusalem. Thus, Jerusalem marked the eastern boundary of his ministry.
      2. Illyricum represented the western extent of his evangelistic endeavor at the time of his writing. This area referred to the region north and west of Macedonia. Since Illyricum is mentioned only in Romans 15:19, we cannot determine when Paul made his journey into this region. The point is that the Lord had him busy traveling “round about” for the sake of the gospel. A brief survey of a map representing Paul’s three missionary journeys verifies that he was constantly on the move for the sake of the gospel.
      3. Paul’s reference to “fully” preaching the gospel does not mean that he preached in every city and village in this region. It meant that had fulfilled what he believed to be God’s plan for his part in this location. The churches planted in these regions made it possible for others to hear the gospel after Paul was gone. Evangelism that results in church planting is the only biblical means to fulfill the Great Commission.
   5. God gave Paul a pioneering approach to the gospel ministry (v. 20-21). While there is a need for pastors who will serve in churches that have been established, there is also a need for those who will take the gospel where it has never been. Paul viewed this approach to evangelism as the fulfillment of Isaiah 52:15. (v. 21) He had a new territory in mind as he wrote to the Roman believers: Spain.
   6. Paul would have come to Rome sooner, but the Lord had him busy in the region between Jerusalem and Illyricum. (v. 22)
2. **Paul communicated with the Roman believers regarding his upcoming travel plans and his need for their support. (15:23-29)**
   1. Since he believed his ministry was finished in the region mentioned above, he was eager to come by Rome on his way to Spain. (v. 23-24) His layover in Rome had a two-fold purpose: First, he wanted to fellowship with them; second, he hoped to raise financial support for the missions trip into Spain. The phrase, “to be brought on my way thitherward by you,” is defined by Friberg as “furnishing things necessary for someone's travel, help on one's journey, send on one's way.”
   2. Before he came to Rome, Paul had to stop in Jerusalem to deliver a special love offering. (v. 25-28) During Paul’s third missionary journey, he collected a love offering to give to the believers in Jerusalem due to their financial need. (v. 25-26; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2; 2 Corinthians 8-9) It was a blessing for the Gentile believers to be able to give to the need of the Jewish believers in Jerusalem (v. 27). Paul referred to the Gentile believers as “debtors” because they were recipients of the spiritual blessings that came their way as a result of God’s work among the Jews. It was through the Jews that they had the Scriptures, the Messiah and the opportunity to be saved. It was the least they could do to give to the material needs of their Jewish brothers and sisters in Christ.
   3. Paul planned to personally accompany those delivering the offering because he wanted to ensure that it was understood and received. (v. 28-29) He would then make his journey to Rome and anticipated God’s blessing in doing so.
3. **Paul asked the Roman believers to pray for his upcoming travel plans into Jerusalem. (v. 30-33)** 
   1. He asked them to take the role of praying seriously due to the situation at hand. (v. 30) The verb “strive together” means to “help someone with great effort, join in a struggle, fight along with” (Friberg). Paul knew that he was facing a spiritual battle as he went to Jerusalem and that he needed other believers to join him in the battle through prayer.
   2. He asked them to fervently pray for his personal safety. (v. 31a)
   3. He asked them to fervently pray that the Jewish believers might be willing to accept the offering from the Gentiles (v. 31b). There were believing Jews in Jerusalem who were suspicious of Paul’s ministry to the Gentiles (Acts 21:20-21). He knew there was a possibility that they might reject the offering simply because it came from predominately Gentile churches.
   4. He also asked them to fervently pray that he might be able to make his journey to Rome. (v. 32)
4. **Central Idea: Paul asked for the support of the believers in Rome because the work of the gospel must advance into new regions of the world.**
5. **Application: We should support the work of missionaries today because the work of the gospel must advance into new regions.** 
   1. Research the unreached people groups who live in our world. We need to have the same missionary spirit that Paul manifested in this passage if they are going to hear the gospel.
   2. Missionaries need support in the form of fellowship, financial support, and prayer support. Consider what you can do to support missionaries in these three key areas.

**Conclusion**

The work of the gospel depends on the support of those who have received the gospel. If you have been blessed to receive the gospel, you ought to be involved in the effort to help others hear the gospel. Missionaries need our support. What a blessing to partner with those who take the gospel into new regions for Christ!