



**“Together for Jesus’ Mission”<sup>1</sup>**

## **Romans 15:22-29**

After I preached last week’s sermon, a question came in my mind: How is Paul’s wording different from that of a cult leader? In other words, Paul was saying things like, “I’m the fulfillment of prophecy. I’ve written to you boldly, but it’s because Jesus has called me to this work.” And I thought to myself that in some ways, his words aren’t different. Yet, in other ways, he’s completely different. He speaks of being a servant to the people – and in his actions, he sacrifices everything for others. You will often find in history, cult leaders who will call their followers to die for them. Yet, Paul clearly is willing to die for Jesus and for the people. Cult leaders can end up taking people’s money for themselves; whereas Paul refuses to receive full compensation for his work – and he has a job to help him along the way. Paul is shipwrecked, beaten, imprisoned. What makes Paul different from cult leaders is that Paul was speaking the truth! We can hear it in his words and see it in his actions.

And, as we have studied the book of Romans, we’ve seen the patience and love of Paul. Even last week, in the words Paul wrote, we saw his tenderness as he sought to explain *why* he spoke boldly. He genuinely loves this church in Rome – even though he’s never met them before. He’s taken time to build them up in their knowledge of the Lord. And then, since chapter 12, he also exhorts them to greater obedience. Then we get to the verses we’ll be looking at today. In 15:22-29, you might be tempted to gloss over this portion because Paul is simply writing out details of his travels, but in these verses, the rubber meets the road.

Think of it this way. Imagine you’re 16 and your parents buy you a car, but then they say, “You can never drive this car!” What good is the car? Sure, you can sit in it. You can imagine driving. You can know all the details about the car. But if you can’t drive it, you can’t apply anything you know about driving, nor reap the benefits of going more quickly from one place to the other.

Think about the book of Romans. What good is it if you know all the information and even know the exhortations to obedience, but you don’t apply it? The Bible tells us that faith is to work through love, and love is action. The apostle James says that faith must result in works. And I think we see this in these verses in Romans. Paul has said all he needs to say in terms of exhortation and now he says, “I can’t wait to see you and for you to help alongside of me in ministry.”

Wait. What?! I thought Paul was just writing a letter. I thought he just wanted to encourage. Yes, he did want to encourage. And encouragement comes when we actually take the keys of the Word and put them in the ignition of our faith and we *drive* with obedience. So, I think the big idea of the verses we’re studying today is that **Paul desires Jesus’ disciples to share in Jesus’ mission.**

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<sup>1</sup> This manuscript is still in the rough draft phase. I recommend you utilize these notes in conjunction to the sermon to gain greater insight and clarity.

So, let's pray together and then read from Romans 15:21-29 [Lorraine Palmer, FBC of Holland/Ben Marx, Jill Henry].

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*<sup>22</sup> This is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you. <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, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while. <sup>25</sup> At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints. <sup>26</sup> For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. <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>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.<sup>2</sup>*

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Like last week's text, we could all say, "What do we have to learn from this?" But the more we ponder the preciseness of Paul's words here, I think we can get a better idea of Paul's passion and heart for Jesus and spreading the gospel – as well as his heart for calling other believers to jump in and obey Jesus' commission to make disciples as well. In other words, Paul is giving disciples of Jesus the opportunity to implement the command to be disciple-making disciples.

In this paragraph, Paul shares three basic ideas that fit under his call for followers of Jesus to share in the mission of Jesus. He shows us that disciples of Jesus should join in the global mission of evangelism. Second, disciples of Jesus, both Jews and Gentiles, should unite together in caring for one another. Third, disciples of Jesus should expect greater joy in God as they fellowship with one another. These points all fall under Paul calling them to share with him in Jesus' mission. Live out the calling of Christ!

So, let's jump right in, and we see in verses 22-24, Paul's plans to go to Spain (which then was the entire Iberian peninsula), yet as he communicates these words, he calls for people in the church to come alongside of him. That's why I say the first point is:

### **1. Disciples of Jesus should join in the global mission of evangelism (vv. 22-24).**

For the sake of clarity, I want to ensure that everyone here realizes that Paul is talking to people here who are genuine disciples of Jesus. Meaning, he's speaking to people who have recognized their sinfulness before God. These people have confessed that their only hope in life and death is Jesus and what Jesus has done on their behalf. In Jesus leaving the glories of heaven and coming to this world, he became human and suffered the death that humans deserved to die because of their sins. Meaning, the cross wasn't the ultimate punishment. On the cross, Paul wrote in Romans 3, that Jesus satisfied God's just punishment towards sin for all who would realize they can't save themselves and thus they turn to Jesus for forgiveness and reconciliation with God. If you're here today and you think there's some type of action or thought or deed that's going to make you right with God, the Bible says that's impossible. You are needy for Jesus. He's done it all. Will you turn from your self-salvation effort? Will you turn to

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<sup>2</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 15:22–29.

Jesus for forgiveness? Disciples of Jesus then have trusted him for salvation, and salvation also includes God's promise to grow us in obedience. Thus the term "disciple." Disciple means follower.

A lot of education throughout history is memorization to gain head knowledge, and that's good – especially at young ages. But at some point in time, memorization has to lead to application, which then leads to living it out. A disciple is someone with the knowledge, application and then the obedience by following Jesus. As we say it here, we are pursuing Jesus together. This is what Paul has encouraged the Roman church to do. And then here, he's asking that they might pursue Jesus with him, too.

What?! Paul, the apostle! The one who was called by God to do a work that was unique to him is asking for help from others? He's giving the opportunity and privilege to join him? Yes! Let's read verses 22-24 again: <sup>22</sup>This is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you. <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, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while. <sup>3</sup>

Verse 22 starts with "This is the reason why. . . ." What is he talking about? Well, last week we learned that Paul's mission was to go to non-Jewish people (i.e. – Gentiles) who had never heard the gospel. Since the people in Rome somehow heard the gospel, he knew he was not called to Rome because there were other areas who had not heard. So, he continued on in the mission God had given to him. Place after place needed to know the gospel. Why do they need to know? Well, if you look at verse 21, Paul's desire is that people see and understand the truth of Christ. In other words, every person is born blind to God. We're made to know him and love him. Yet, without him, we are lost. And not only lost, we're blind to the reality that we're storing up wrath for ourselves (as Paul puts it in Romans 2). Paul yearns for people to be rescued through Jesus and to know the glory of God! Rome already knew. So, he went to these other places.

But Paul now says that there's no room for him in these regions any longer. That doesn't mean that Paul has gone to *every* city, but what we gather about Paul's ministry, from Acts and the letters he's written, is that Paul prioritized urban ministry. He generally went to larger areas, preached the gospel, trained people up – and then he also trained men to pastor and lead in those cities or in other places. Think of Timothy, where he says that the things he taught Timothy, he commends him to teach to faithful men who will teach others also. Or, to Titus, Paul trains him and then calls Titus to set up elders in other areas in Crete. Paul did not do *all* the witnessing, evangelizing and discipleship in eastern Europe. But he trained people up and the areas have faithful disciples of Jesus who are evangelizing and discipling in the region. So, Paul doesn't need to stay there.

As a result, he says that he hopes to now visit Rome because he's longed for many years to see them. In addition, this fits with his mission because he plans to go to Spain. God is allowing him the opportunity to fulfil the mission of reaching those who have never heard and also to grant Paul's desire to meet Christians in the center of the known world, Rome.

Now, what does all of this have to do with joining with Paul in Jesus' global mission? It all relates to the phrase, ". . .to be helped on my journey there by you. . ."<sup>4</sup> Paul asks for help with his journey to Spain. What does that mean? At first glance, some could think that Paul is saying, "I can't wait to see you so

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<sup>3</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 15:22–24.

<sup>4</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 15:24.

that you can help me out!” And you could then think, “Thanks, Paul. I love you, too. You just want to use us for what you want to do?” But that’s not what Paul’s saying. First, remember Paul’s words after this phrase. He says that he looks forward to enjoying their company for a while. This word “company” and also “enjoyment” reveals that Paul really *wants* to be with them, and there’s a unity they share in Christ that he looks forward to experiencing with them. Second, this phrase for being helped on his journey is used in various parts of the New Testament, emphasizing various ways people can participate in supporting the work of the gospel. Acts 15:3, Acts 20:38, 1 Corinthians 16:6, 2 Corinthians 1:16, and other places, all use this phraseology. So, as one commentator wrote, **“Paul wanted the Roman church to support his mission to Spain financially, in prayer, and possibly also with personnel”** (Schreiner, p. 774).

Paul is giving them the opportunity to join him in Christ’s mission! And, when I say “opportunity,” I mean it. Think of it this way. The Ruler of the Cosmos came to save rebels – and has given those rebels who turn to him everything they could ever need or want in Christ – and now the Ruler says to go into the world and see more come to faith in Jesus! And he says he’s going to win. This is the mission – to tell the world of the glory of God in Jesus. And Paul, who had a unique role in this mission is calling the Roman church to help him in this God-given task. Is this a privilege? Yes!

For anyone here who thinks this doesn’t sound exciting, let me ask you this, “Is there anything that you will give your time and money and service to?” Maybe it’s a rescue mission, helping at a local school, volunteering time at LPC. Why do you do this? You might say, “It makes me feel good about myself.” Or, “I like helping others.” Whatever your reason, is there any greater reason and motivation and privilege than serving the King of kings and sharing what all humanity needs most? Paul invites them in this mission.

As we think about this, I think the call for us is to continue this mission today. Last week, I mentioned that there could be people here who really need to consider global missions. Others of you don’t really participate in giving towards global mission *or* even knowing our church’s missionaries which we support. Did you know that more people are persecuted for their faith *today* than in any other century before? Did you know that there are thousands of languages who have never even heard the name of Jesus? And, we are some of the wealthiest people in the world! Not only that, we have knowledge and information.

Can you imagine if I was like Paul and I simply said to you all, “Ok, now we’ve read Romans, **what are you going to do to spread the gospel to the people who have never heard?**” Oh wait. That’s what I’m going to do right now. I’m giving you a couple of moments right now. Think. “What are you going to do to spread the gospel to the people who have never heard the gospel?” By the way, I encourage you to come back tonight to watch a 10-minute video of missionaries and an organization that is doing just that. Romans must be applied by compelling our desire to spread the gospel. Continue Paul’s work, which is ultimately Jesus’ work!

Now, Paul moves into a second point. While he yearns to visit with them, he has something else to do. This shows us that:

- 2. Disciples of Jesus, both Jews and Gentiles, should unite together in caring for one another (vv. 25-27).**

Let's read verses 25-27 together: <sup>25</sup> At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints. <sup>26</sup> For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. <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>5</sup>

Paul plans to go to Spain. He's going to stop in Rome for a while and hopefully receive help from the church as well as mutual encouragement, but there is still one more thing he has to do before going to Rome. He's on his way to Jerusalem to give aid to the poor Christians there. There are layers of things to comment on here. First, Paul has spoken of this gift in other places in the New Testament. In first and second Corinthians, he comments on the need of the people, as well as the Macedonians gift – while encouraging the Corinthians to give as well. We don't know the precise cause of the need, but we do know from history that a famine struck the area around 46-48 AD, and some sort of financial crunch seemed to continue for the Jewish Christians.

You can see here that the financial issue was so concerning to Paul that he's willing to delay his mission to Spain to help his Christian (and Jewish) brothers and sisters in Jerusalem. What's also interesting, though, is that he calls Gentile Christians to help in the aid of the Jewish Christians. Why? Well, hasn't Paul been talking about this within the Roman church? There was a divide between Jewish and Gentile Christians in the Roman church, and he calls them to love and serve each other. But why? Because God has united Jews and Gentiles together as his people, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Paul took a lengthy portion of the book of Romans to detail how God has kept his promises to Jews, even while calling Gentiles to himself. But he also showed that Gentiles have been blessed because of God's promise to Abraham to bring blessing to the world through Abraham's seed. Paul again brings up this argument. In verse 27, Paul writes, "For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings." You might be able to see more layers to Paul's statement here. First, Gentiles have received what God promised would come to them through the seed of Abraham. In addition, Paul is saying that Gentiles and Jews are now one family as well. As a result, they should care for one another.

In the English translation, we don't see the emphasis of Paul very well. But, if you mark in your Bible, you might want to underline the words, "bringing aid" or "to minister." Then, in verse 26, you have the word, "contribution." This word is actually the word "fellowship," but in this context, we see it as a financial gift given because of the fellowship in Christ. Then in verse 27, we have the words "share" and "service." The Jews and Gentiles are one in Christ – and the Gentiles have the privilege to bless the Jewish people from whom they share spiritual blessings in Christ. In a few verses later, in the sermon that will be preached next week, Paul asks for prayer that the Jews will receive this. Why? Because Paul's yearning is that Jews and Gentiles who follow Christ will see themselves as united by Jesus. As well, this is fulfillment of God's prophecy! In small scale, this lives out Isaiah 45:14, which says, "Thus says the Lord: "The wealth of Egypt and the merchandise of Cush, and the Sabeans, men of stature, shall come over to you and be yours. . . ."<sup>6</sup> Money from Gentiles is going to Jerusalem. This money serves as a sign of fellowship, as a ministry, as a help, in order to serve them in their neediness.

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<sup>5</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 15:25–27.

<sup>6</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Is 45:14.

Just as Paul taught the Romans to be concerned about the unity of Jews and Gentiles within the church, he's revealing that concern should be the same on a broader scale. And, I believe that concern should be the same to this day. Jewish and Gentile Christians should be unified. And, Paul presses the point by saying that the Gentiles owe it to the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. Why? Are they paying them back for something they gave them? Did they sign a contract? No.

Now, please don't misread these verses. Paul's not saying there's a governmental requirement on money needing to go to certain people because of ethnicity. Paul's making a theological argument. The union with Christ and God's promises through Abraham. That's the argument. Therefore, the Gentiles have a duty. But, do you notice that Paul says it was their pleasure to do this? In our culture, and maybe even in your own minds, you can think that duty and delight cannot go together. If God commands something, then the enjoyment is zapped. If that's the case for you, you don't know that God's commands are glorious and not burdensome. God brings duty and delight together! We should never look at a command of God and think, "I guess if I *have* to, I will." We should pray for hearts that unite with his commands and take joy in his ways. God has summoned us to be a part of Jesus' mission in this world. And, part of the mission is not only spreading the gospel to those who have never heard, but to also provide for the physical needs of our fellow family members in Christ!

Think about this a little further with me. In our culture, we are often driven by emotional giving. I remember in a previous church I was at, and a pastor essentially said, "People will give if they *feel* it." But, on the reverse, they won't give if their emotions aren't as engaged. Do you find that to be true of you? If you watch a video of people in need and the music is just right and the video is done in good quality are you drawn to it? Or, if you hear a story of *why* you should give and it's more compelling, will you give?

Think of what Paul does here? He says, "They're in need. The Gentiles have a duty to do this. And, it was their pleasure to do so." And, according to Corinthians, their pleasure was found in giving themselves to the Lord. They simply took delight because it was a delight to God himself! So, think about your giving. If you hear of an offering and it doesn't have all the explanations you want, do you give less? Or, do you see how it's a part of God's mission and it's a glorious thing to give to his mission?

As Christians should care for one another. And this principle then trickles down in various ways. As Christians, no matter what the type of divide, we should be concerned about the needs of one another – both within our local church and around the globe. Finally, Paul

### **3. Disciples of Jesus should expect greater joy in God as they fellowship with one another (vv. 28-29).**

Look back at 28-29 now: <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. <sup>7</sup>

Paul turns back to his desire to meet the Roman Christians for the first time. After he's given the gift to Jerusalem, he will make his trek to Spain, through Rome. Real quick, I want to comment on his words "completed and "delivered to them." The word "completed" is fairly straightforward. However, "delivered to them" is the ESV translators way of trying to translate a phrase that is somewhat unknown

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<sup>7</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 15:28–29.

as to its meaning. Some translations may say, something like, “Therefore, after completing this and after sealing to them this fruit, I will come via you to Spain. . .” How do we get “delivering to them” from “sealing to them this fruit?”

The fruit is clearly referring to the gift of money. Please take note that God works through his children’s generosity. As I mentioned earlier, we are the wealthiest society on the globe, and yet, from my understanding, percentage-wise, we give the least. And, the wealthier someone becomes, they generally give less and keep more for themselves (percentage-wise). Yet Jesus says to his disciples that where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Jesus tells us that we can’t serve God and money. Instead, our money should be subservient to God and his plans, and therefore, we are to steward all we have for God’s glory.

It’s no wonder Paul calls this gift a fruit of the people’s godliness. They have given out of their hearts. The money doesn’t matter. God’s glory and his children’s good matters to them. This is part of the mission of God! So, what does it mean to “seal” this gift. Well, while we’re not totally sure, it could go back to the practice of farmers sealing sacks of grain to affirm the genuineness of the contents. In other words, Paul can speak to the Jerusalem Christians stating where the money has come from. He can affirm this to them. He felt it necessary he go and that they rightly understand the intention of the gift.

He wants them to know the fellowship they have with the Gentiles. And then Paul turns to the fellowship he has with the Christians in Rome. Keep in mind, Paul himself is a converted Jew. And so, he’s coming to a primarily Gentile church, to reach Gentiles in Spain. And part of God’s glorious gospel is that Jesus has brought salvation to all. And Paul, as an apostle to the Gentiles, wants to meet these disciples of Jesus and grow in encouragement with them.

Paul has prayed for this meeting. In Romans 1:12, he prayed that they would “be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith, both yours and mine.”<sup>8</sup> Isn’t that phenomenal? Paul doesn’t simply say, “That you would be encouraged by me. After all, I’m an apostle.” But he says that we would be mutually encouraged. No matter who you are. No matter how strong you are in the faith, you always *need* the body of believers. If you never share your weaknesses or if you only think you’re here to ensure others are encouraged, but you don’t expect others to encourage you, you are working towards stifling the Holy Spirit’s work. Paul wasn’t prideful. He humbly and rejoicingly anticipated the Roman Christian’s encouraging him – even as he expected the Spirit would work through him to encourage them.

He says, “when I come to you I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.”<sup>9</sup> The fullness doesn’t mean that he’s going to receive everything he’s ever supposed to receive from Jesus, but that the depth and richness of relationship with other believers will be experienced. Paul admits here that a lone Christian simply misses out. When Christians gather together, there’s something greater to experience and greater to enjoy. And, this is part of God’s mission as well.

As we are a people pursuing Jesus together, seeking to exalt God and evangelize the world, Paul shows us in these verses the vital importance of our fellowship in edifying/building up the church. As the local churches gather together and minister within their church to each other and even outside of their churches to Christians around the globe, there’s a fullness of Christ that’s experienced. Why? Because

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<sup>8</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 1:12.

<sup>9</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 15:29.

the church is the body of Christ. The Spirit strengthens us more and more as we live in unity and service towards each other.

If you are a Christian here today, but you don't have relationships with other Christians, you're missing out. If you're a Christian, but you don't gather with believers regularly, you're missing out. **Paul shows us the prize in these verses: the fullness of Christ. And, when we gather with fellow believers, we are reminded that someday, we will finally attain to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Meaning, we will be finally made perfect. Until then, Paul has exhorted us to be disciple-making disciples, pursuing Jesus together in order to exalt God, edify the church and evangelize the world. Will you apply the book of Romans? By God's grace, what are you going to do (or continue to grow in) in order to edify the church and evangelize the world?**

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