

The Best Laid Plans...

Romans 15:23-33

Thought for the Day. We dream our dreams; we set our goals; we make our plans; but we humbly recognize that God may have other plans and confidently rest in the goodness and wisdom of His perfect will.

The Apostle Paul recognized and gladly acknowledged that he was merely an instrument in the hands of God. If anything of eternal significance was accomplished through his ministry, it was by the power of the Holy Spirit and for the glory of God. He did not boast of his own accomplishments, but gladly boasted of what the Lord had accomplished through him. He had been used of God to proclaim the Gospel of Christ throughout much of the Roman empire to the north and east of the Mediterranean Sea and he now sought to go where no other missionary had gone before.

Paul lays out his plans to visit the Christians in Rome on his way to Spain. He humbly asks for their prayers—for protection and effectiveness in ministry. There are many practical lessons in this passage concerning the relationship between a missionary and those who support him/her and of ministering in accordance with the will of God.

To a Mouse by Robert Burns (1785)

In the last two stanzas of his poem, Burns compares the unfortunate and unintentional destruction he has visited upon the poor mouse to the experiences of men who plan and work and yet, due to unforeseen circumstances beyond their control, come to disaster and ruin:

*But Mouse, you are not alone,
In proving foresight may be vain:
The best laid schemes of mice and men
Go often askew,
And leave us nothing but grief and pain,
For promised joy!*

*Still you are blessed, compared with me!
The present only touches you:
But oh! I backward cast my eye,
On prospects dreary!
And forward, though I cannot see,
I guess and fear.*

The mouse has only the concerns of the present moment, but we humans are also tormented by memories of past failures and our fears of what the future will bring. But is that all there is to life? Regret, worry and fear? Happily, for those who know the Lord, the answer is, "No!" We are blessed to know and serve a good God who is in control of our lives. We can confidently put our trust in Him and His Word knowing that He is working all things together for our good.

23 But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to see you, 24 I plan to do so when I go to Spain.

- There were many who still needed to hear the Gospel but everywhere Paul had gone, he had planted churches and had given those churches the responsibility of reaching the people in their area who remained unreached.
- Before the Lord, he believed that he had fulfilled his mission and he now felt at liberty to set his eyes on Rome and the unreached people of Spain beyond.

I hope to visit you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while.

- Paul had no hesitation in asking for assistance and he anticipated that the believers would have no hesitation in helping.
- When you're both on the same team, you gladly do whatever you can do to advance the cause. You recognize that whatever resources you have at your disposal belong to the Lord and when He has need of them, you gladly release them for His use. (Cp. Matt. 21:1-6)

25 Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there. 26 For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem.

- The believers in Jerusalem were suffering from crushing poverty.
- Paul had challenged the Gentile churches in Macedonia and Achaia to take an offering for their impoverished Jewish brethren and he was delighted to report that they were pleased to do so. (1 Corinthians 16:1-7; 2 Corinthians 8:1-15; 9)

27 They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings.

- Those who are blessed spiritually have an obligation to provide for the material needs of those who have ministered to them. (1 Corinthians 9:3-14; 1 Timothy 5:17-18; 2 Timothy 2:4-7; Galatians 6:6; Philippians 2:25-30)
- Many religious charlatans and hucksters have taken advantage of this principle to abuse churches and individuals—and shame on them!

28 So after I have completed this task and have made sure that they have received this fruit, I will go to Spain and visit you on the way. 29 I know that when I come to you, I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ.

- Paul recognized that his plans were ultimately subject to the will of God. (Cp. James 4:13-17; Prov. 3:5-6; 16:9; 19:21; Lam. 3:37-38; Acts 18:21; 1 Cor. 4:19; 16:7; Hebrews 6:3)
- It was Paul's intention that when he came to them that he would be a blessing and encouragement to them. (Cp. Romans 1:11-13; 1 Thess. 3:10; Phil. 1:21-26; Col. 1:28-29)

30 I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me.

- Just as Paul did not hesitate to request material support from the believers in Rome, so he did not hesitate to request spiritual support in the form of prayer.
- Paul believed that prayer changes circumstances; it has a real impact in the real world!

31 Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea and that my service in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints there, 32 so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and together with you be refreshed. 33 The God of peace be with you all. Amen.

- Everywhere Paul had gone, the unbelieving Jews had persecuted him; they beat him, imprisoned him and even stoned him, possibly to death.
- God's will for our lives is not always pleasant and comfortable! The Holy Spirit often does His best work of transforming us into the likeness of Christ through trials and tribulations.
- There were often tensions between the Jewish and Gentile Christians. Paul's request is that the Jewish hearts will be softened by the generosity and sacrifice of their Gentile brethren.