

# Paul's Plans to Visit Rome

📖 Romans 15:20-25

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## Q & A from Previous Weeks

**Q: On resurrection Sunday you said only Jesus was raised. Wasn't Lazarus also raised?**

**A:** I would add into the mix people like Samuel who was brought up in the event where Saul went to the witch at Endor (1 Sam 28), the son of the widow of Zarephath whom Elijah raised up (1 Kgs 17:17-24), Dorcas who died and Peter restored to life (Acts 9:36-43), Eutychus the young man who fell out of the third story of a house and died and Paul restored to life (Acts 20:6-12) and even Moses and Elijah at the Transfiguration (Matt 17:1-9). There are others. How do we classify these cases of people who died and were brought up in some way? There are three words you might use to classify these. The first is an apparition or appearance. These are not resurrections but previews of the resurrection seen in a vision. This is how we would classify Samuel who had died. Saul went to the witch at Endor and requested that she call him up from the dead. When she called him up he appeared and she screamed from fright. Her response indicated that this was not what normally happened when she did her witchcraft. What had happened was God had brought up Samuel by way of an apparition in order to give a message to Saul. I would also classify Moses and Elijah appearing with Jesus at the Transfiguration as an apparition or appearance seen by way of a vision. An apparition is not a physical appearance but a vision and serves to give a preview of the resurrection. The second classification is a resuscitation or bringing back to life in a mortal body. In these cases, the person has died but they are brought back to life in the same body which is subject to death. These are not resurrections but they are signs of the resurrection. This is how we would classify the son of the widow of Zarephath whom Elijah laid on and brought back to life. This is how we would classify Dorcas whom Peter brought back to life. This is how we would classify the young man Eutychus whom Paul brought back to life. This is how we would classify Lazarus whom Jesus brought back to life as well as the little daughter of the synagogue ruler and the slave of the centurion. They were all resuscitated, brought back in physical bodies that were subject to mortality. A resuscitation is a sign of the resurrection. The third classification is resurrection or the bringing back to life of a person in an immortal body. This is what the apparitions previewed and what the resuscitations were signs of but the big difference here is that the resurrection is the

actual change of a mortal body into an immortal body. The person may have already died or the person may be living, as at the rapture, but the big idea is the change that takes place so that the same person is being transformed into a body that is not subject to death. This is the sense in which I said Jesus was the first one resurrected. 1 Cor 15:20, "But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep." First fruits is an analogy from agriculture. The first fruits were the first of a harvest. They were a sign that there was a harvest to follow. Since Jesus' resurrection is the first fruits then it is a sign that there is a resurrection harvest that is coming. I would also point out that there have been a few other people that were resurrected. Matt 27:52 says, "The tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; <sup>53</sup>and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many." The Greek words used to describe these saints being raised is the verb *εγειρω* and the noun used to describe Christ's resurrection is the noun *εγερσις*. These words share the same root and so consistency requires both to refer to physical resurrection. But note that the text is careful to say that these saints who came out of the tombs came out "after His resurrection." This is to safeguard the truth that Christ is the first person ever resurrected from the dead. I take it that these saints were all Jewish saints and were the first fruits of Israel which served as a sign to Israel that God's promises to them will be fulfilled and a full harvest of Jews will be resurrected at Christ's Second Coming (Dan 12:1-2). So, there are your three classifications for looking at the people who died and came back in some way; apparitions, these are visions that preview resurrection, resuscitations, these are signs of the resurrection and resurrection itself. Christ is the first resurrected from the dead, then there was a small group of Jews signifying a great harvest to come.

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## Today's Lesson

Since we are nearing the end of Romans we need to make sure we understand the flow of this epistle and so we're going to review, review, review until we have this down. What are the theme verses of Romans? Romans 1:16-17. What is the theme? The gospel of righteousness by faith. So this epistle is about the gospel as it relates to the righteousness of God and how His righteousness is accessed by faith. Paul develops this theme in several sections. What's the first section? Romans 1:18-3:20. What are these verses explaining? Condemnation or Sin. This is the bad news. Paul is setting the stage for the good news by explaining the bad news first. The bad news is that God is righteous and all people are sinners. No one measures up, no Jew, no Gentile, we are all under sin and therefore under the righteous condemnation of God. What's the second section? Romans 3:21-5:21. What do these verses explain? Justification or legal righteousness. This is the beginning of the good news. The good news is that God is righteous but His righteousness has been satisfied entirely by Jesus Christ on the cross and we can access this righteousness by faith apart from works. It's always by faith that we access the righteousness of God. At the moment of faith we are justified. This is a legal term that means that we are looked upon or

treated as righteous. It is being saved from the penalty of sin and this happens at a moment in time. What's the third section? Romans 6:1-8:17. What are these verses explaining? Sanctification or practical righteousness. This is a continuation of the good news. The good news in sanctification is that God is righteous and we can access this righteousness in a practical way as we present ourselves to Him by faith. When we live by faith the Spirit of God lives through us and produces a practical righteousness. So as we live by faith we are sanctified. This is a practical term that means we are living a set apart life. It is being saved from the power of sin and this happens over time, it's a process. What's the fourth section? Romans 8:18-39. What are these verses about? Glorification or actual righteousness. This is a continuation of the good news. The good news in glorification is that God is righteous and we will access His righteousness in an actual way when we are resurrected. Then we will be fit to live in His presence continually since we will be like Him. So this is when we actually become righteous and so it is being saved from the presence of sin. This happens at a moment in time when we are resurrected. What's the fifth section? Romans 9-11. What is this section all about? It's an explanation of Israel, God's plan for Israel. Why is this stuck in there? Because chapter 8 ended by saying that nothing could separate us Christians from the love of Christ. But one might argue that God's promise can't be trusted because He made promises to Israel in the Abrahamic Covenant that He broke and so how can we trust that God won't break His promises to us? So Paul explained that in the end God will vindicate Himself by bringing Israel into her covenant promises. That means we can trust God to keep His promises to us. What's the sixth section? Romans 12:1-15:13. What is this portion all about? It's about practical Application or Behavior. What are our lives to look like in the local church, in the community, in the nation? As we present ourselves to Him as a living sacrifice we become the servant of others and servanthood becomes the overarching principle of the Christian life.

Last time we studied Romans 15:13-19. 15:13 is the end of the main body of the epistle. In this verse Paul expresses a prayer-wish that is fulfilled as they are living by faith which enacts the power of the Holy Spirit, resulting in being filled up with joy and peace and abounding in hope of the future resurrection and kingdom to come. You might put a thick black line between verse 13 and 14 to show the break from the main body and Paul's concluding remarks. In 15:14 Paul begins to discuss why he wrote to them and his ministry to Gentiles and what his plans are for the future. In verse 14 he shows great concern for his fellow siblings and states that he is convinced that they are full of goodness since they had been filled with the full scope of Christian doctrine such that they were able to instruct one another. In 15:15 Paul admits that it was quite daring for him to remind them of basic doctrines but they were not applying them consistently and so they needed a reminder. He then states that it came to him to remind them because they were predominately a Gentile church and by the grace of God he had been set apart in 15:16 to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles. Paul then states that he viewed his ministry to them as a priestly service to the end that the Gentiles who responded by faith would be an acceptable offering to God, having been set apart by the Holy Spirit. In 15:17, Paul found reason for boasting in Christ Jesus with reference to the things of God since through Christ the Gentiles he had ministered to came to be in a relationship with God. In 15:18 Paul states that he did not boast in his success in ministering to Gentiles

but only in what Christ had done through him which resulted in Gentiles walking in obedience by the Spirit in both word and deed. In 15:19 the accomplishment of Gentile salvation came by the combination of Paul doing miracles by the power of the Spirit and preaching the gospel so that his ministry now extended from Jerusalem all the way to Illyricum. This is a distance of ~1,400 miles NW of Jerusalem. The main region Paul had completely preached the gospel was to the N and NW of Jerusalem. Having completely covered this region he concluded there was nowhere else for him to go and so we come to verse 20, Paul's future plans.

**And thus I aspired to preach the gospel, not where Christ was already named, so that I would not build on another man's foundation.** What we are seeing here is Paul's strategy in ministry. Basically Paul was a pioneer in preaching the gospel to unreached peoples. Witmer said, "Paul purposed to be a true pioneer evangelist, opening virgin territory to the good news of God's grace in Jesus Christ."<sup>1</sup> If this is Paul's strategy how did he enact the strategy? He covered a large territory. How did he do that? The first thing Paul had going for him was the vast extent of the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire covered all of Southern Europe, the Levant and Northern Africa. Second, the Roman Empire had great roads. The Roman engineers took road building to a whole new level and they put restrictions on what could travel down certain roads. They had some narrower roads designated for couriers and soldiers and other wider roads for everyone. The roads made traveling quick and easy. Third, citizens could easily move between the district boundaries. Since Paul had citizenship he could easily move through all these districts without a problem. Fourth, the Koine Greek language. Virtually everyone knew Koine Greek. It was the lingua franca and so everyone in the empire, no matter their native language, also spoke Koine Greek. This made it easy for Paul to communicate with anyone of any background. Fifth, the shipping lanes, often along the coastlines but sometimes across the more dangerous open waters of the Mediterranean were well-known and could be navigated during much of the year. All this enabled Paul to spread the gospel quickly according to the strategy of verse 20.

What we want to do now is spend some time tracking Paul's strategy. We do this through his missionary expeditions. If you follow them in the Book of Acts one thing you observe is he's spreading out further and further from Jerusalem on each expedition. All this can be seen on the maps of Paul's missionary journeys in the back of your Bible. In the first one he set out from Antioch. This was his missionary base. They had a sending ministry here and they would send Paul out and he would come back and give a report.



He sails to Cyprus, covers the major cities working east to west, then sails to the mainland of Pamphylia at Perga, goes into southern Galatia and hits the major cities there and then backtracks down to the coast and back to Antioch. So, he didn't go far but you can see His strategy at work. He's going to unreached people in the near vicinity. Now look at the second missionary journey. Again he set out from Antioch. This was his missionary base.



This time he went through his old stomping grounds in Cilicia, through his town of Tarsus and the Taurus Mountain pass into southern Galatia again. What's he doing there again? Reinforcing the troops, strengthening the disciples. Then he passes into Asia and that's where the Spirit said, no, so he is forced up along Mysia to Troas, sails across into Macedonia and Neapolis, Philippi, Amphipolis, Thessalonica, Pella, Berea, down to Achaia where he visits Athens, gives his famous Mars Hill address, then on to Corinth, and sets sail from Cenchreae to Ephesus where he doesn't stay long but he does meet Priscilla and Aquila and he sets them up to scout out the territory. They were plowing the ground and preparing for Paul's future ministry. This was all part of the strategy. Then at the end of the second journey he sails to Jerusalem and then back to Antioch. Note again the strategy. He's a pioneer missionary. This guy goes to unreached people. That's his target ministry. He spreads out further and further from Jerusalem each time he goes out. Now we come to the third missionary journey. Where does he set out from again? Antioch. This was his base, his sending church.



He passes back through Cilicia checking on the folks there, through the Taurus Mountain Pass into southern Galatia again strengthening those churches and this time he gets to the border of Asia and what happens? He's permitted to enter. So he goes through Laodicea and makes his way to Ephesus. He stops at Ephesus and camps out for 2 ½ years. Why did he do that? This is where he had left Priscilla and Aquila to scout out the area. When he returned he had a good situation and the report in the Book of Acts is that all Asia heard the word of God. So he was located in Ephesus but he was able to infiltrate the entire region of Asia. All seven churches found in the Book of Revelation were founded either directly or indirectly by Paul during this time and more. Then he presses on to Troas again and across to Macedonia visits all the churches he established in Philippi, Amphipolis, Apollonia, Pella, and Berea. We gather from Acts 20, somewhere in here he took off NW along the Egnatian Way as far as Illyricum. That road and area is not on the map but it is mentioned in Acts and Romans, then he comes down to Achaia by ship this time because he had to escape some Jews. Then he goes to Athens and over to Corinth to strengthen them. Now right here, on this visit to Corinth is where he wrote Romans. It was AD57 and

in Romans 15 you are reading his plans for the future ministry. And he's saying, with nowhere left to go I want to come to you on my way to Spain. Now, it's just a personal observation but I also notice there are some other regions that Paul did not penetrate; north Galatia and Bithynia and Pontus, some regions in Thrace. I don't know why Paul didn't want to go into those areas. I can only venture it's because the Spirit didn't permit him to enter those regions or as the end of verse 20 suggests, other men had laid foundations in those cities and so Paul wasn't interested. In any case, he sends the epistle to the Romans to Rome from Corinth, backtracks through Macedonia, sails across to Asia, stays along the coast of Asia, stopping briefly at Miletus to give one of the most profound expositions of ministry. At this point it sounds like he is not going to get to go to Rome in the way he planned. The Spirit kept warning him of what was coming but he wanted to take this financial gift to the believers at Jerusalem. Then he sails along the coast, this is a doubtful course, ultimately to Jerusalem and sure enough, he runs into troubles for his ministry to Gentiles; he is almost killed, rescued by Roman soldiers, arrested, imprisoned, makes his appeal to Caesar and finally his trip to Rome. It wasn't exactly the trip he had planned in our text but he did go to Rome. I walked you through that to show that Paul's ministry was as a pioneer evangelist. He kept going out further and further from Jerusalem and now he had gone all the way to Illyricum and the reason he was looking to Spain was because verse 20 states, **so that I would not build on another man's foundation.**

Paul was a man who laid foundations. He did not want to build upon another man's foundation. So what does it mean laying a foundation? Turn to 1 Cor 3:10. In this passage Paul is talking about his ministry at Corinth and how his ministry differed from Apollos. He says in verse 10, "According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it." Paul had laid the foundation. Apollos was building upon it. In verse 11 you see what that foundation is. "For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." When Paul went to Corinth he preached the gospel. As people believed the gospel the foundation of Jesus Christ was laid in their lives. Some of you saw this on Wednesday night in Matt 16:18, that famous verse that says, "I also say to you that you are Peter and upon this rock I will build My church." We said, who or what is the rock? Some say Peter, others say Peter's confession. Did Paul go around preaching Peter? No, Peter's no foundation upon which to build the Church. There is one foundation upon which the Church is built and that is Jesus Christ. Paul says so. Scripture teaches it. Paul went from city to city preaching Jesus Christ. Christ is the foundation that can never fall. That is why verse 15 says that after a man has built upon the foundation of Jesus Christ, maybe some of what was built was built with perishable materials and other with imperishable but even if it is all burned up "but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire." So that man will still be saved. Why will that man be saved? Because that man has Jesus Christ as the foundation and He is imperishable, immovable foundation. You can't lose your salvation. That is why Paul went in and laid foundations from city to city. Behind him came men like Apollos who were not foundation layers but builders, men who built on the foundation laid by Paul, which is Jesus Christ. You see then Paul's unique role in the expansion of the church to unreached peoples.



This is what verse 20 says he aspired to, to preach the gospel so that Jesus Christ would be the foundation in their life. Of course, we need to be clear on the gospel that Paul preached because it says in verse 20 **I aspired to preach the gospel**. What did Paul say in Galatians 1:8 about the gospel? There's nothing more critical. "But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!" Now I don't know what it does for you to hear him repeat basically the same thing in those verses but if I'm not mistaken repetition is to emphasize. If someone comes along, it could be another man or even an angel from heaven; and even if Gabriel showed up at your bedside and preached a gospel contrary to the gospel that Paul preached to the Galatians then that angel is to be anathema. You don't listen to them. I don't care if it's Franklin Graham, Jimmy Swaggart, James Dobson, Charles Stanley, John MacArthur, Adrian Rogers or Jeremy Thomas. If any of them preach a false gospel, and some of them do it consistently, they are to be anathema. So what gospel did Paul preach to the Galatians? Did you know that we have this gospel spelled out for us in the Book of Acts?

Turn to Acts 13. This is Paul's first missionary journey and we traced some of this earlier. You see in verse 14 that they had already come to the mainland at Perga "but going on from Perga, they arrived at Pisidian Antioch" and you can see that Pisidian Antioch is located in southern Galatia. So what follows is the gospel that Paul preached to the Galatians. This happened in the synagogue on Sabbath and you see Paul in verse 16 standing up. And he gives a great historical review, this was a typical way of teaching among the Jews, it gives the context, it builds the audience's confidence in Paul's ability to handle the Scriptures accurately. And so after he goes through all this history of God's work among Israel he comes in verse 22 to a very important man. Who is that? David. See, David was given the Davidic covenant. According to this covenant the Messiah had to come from the line of David. This is the same thing as Romans 1:1-5. And then verse 23 we read, "From the descendants of this man (David), according to promise, God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus." He goes on to describe the forerunner of Jesus, John the Baptizer and then we come to verse 28, the nation Israel's rejection of Jesus. "And though they found no ground for putting Him to death, they asked Pilate that He be executed." So what do you see there? Do you see the death of Jesus? Absolutely. You think that is a part of the gospel? Absolutely. Verse 29, "When they had carried out all that as written concerning Him, they took Him down from the cross and laid Him in a tomb." The burial was the historical evidence that He died. And then very quickly what do you see in verse 30, "But God raised Him from the dead." There's the resurrection. Is that part of the gospel? You bet. Verse 31, and for many days He appeared to those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem. The appearance is the historical evidence that He rose. Then we see in verse 32 that this is indeed the gospel. "And we preach to you the good news (or gospel) of the promise made to the fathers," see, the gospel is tied back to the promises God made Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Now watch the emphasis in verse 33, is it the death or the resurrection that gets the attention? "that God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is written in the second Psalm, 'You are My Son; today I have begotten You.' As for the fact that He raised Him up from the dead,

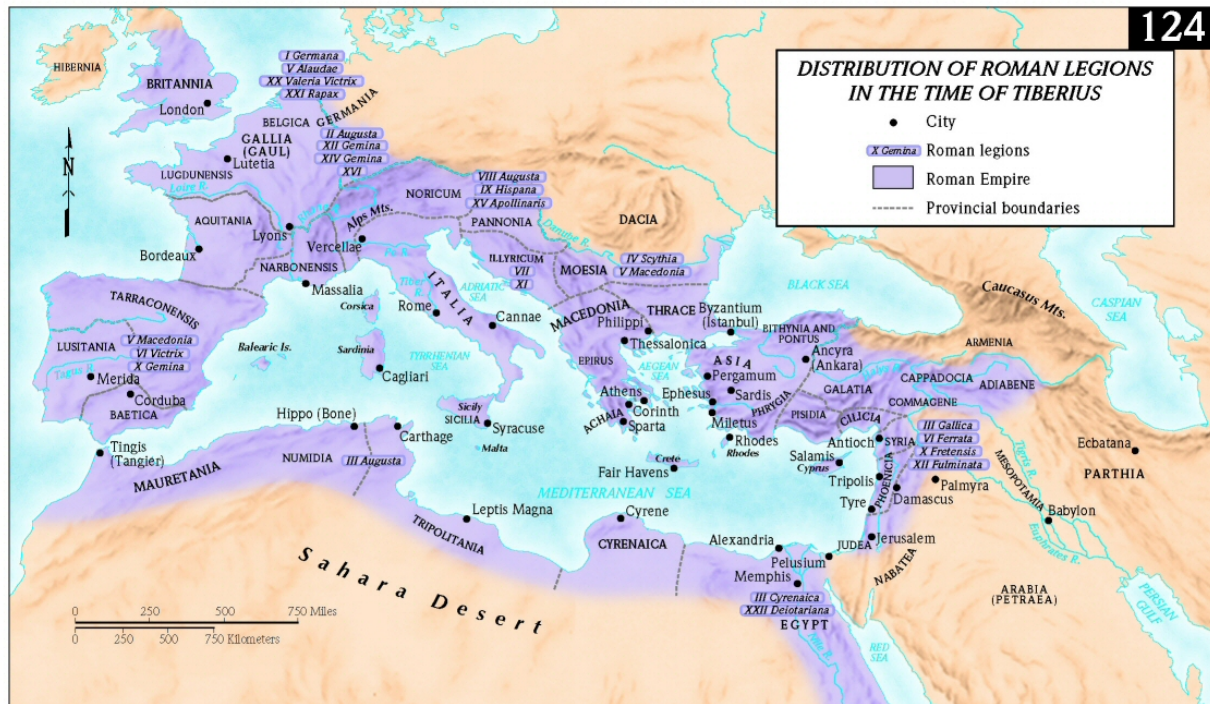
no longer to return to decay, He has spoken in this way; I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.' Therefore, He also says in another Psalm, 'You will not allow your Holy One to undergo decay.' He goes on to say in verse 36 that David went to decay but in verse 37, "He whom God raised did not undergo decay." What's the emphasis? Is it the death or the resurrection? It's the resurrection. All this was predicted by the OT prophets and it came to pass just as it was written. So the gospel is the death and the resurrection but the emphasis is on He is risen. Therefore, verse 38, let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and through Him everyone who believes is justified (the Greek word is justified) from all things, from which you could not be justified through the Law of Moses." That, therefore, is the gospel that Paul preached at Galatia, and Paul is saying in Gal 1:8-9 that if anyone comes along and distorts that gospel, it could be Michael the archangel, if he changes that gospel, adds to that gospel, takes away from that gospel, he is to be anathema. And yet, I will be honest with you, it is hard for me to find people who are preaching that gospel. They will talk about Jesus and how we ought to follow Jesus' example of being sincere about our beliefs and about fixing social problems but friend, that is not the gospel! That is reformation of life, that is morality, that is do-goodism. That is not the gospel. The gospel is the death and resurrection of Christ that a man must believe. Believe, that's it, not repent of your sins, turn from your sins, get water baptized, commit your life to Jesus, say a prayer or any of those things which draw attention away from Christ. All those things muddle the human condition for salvation beyond recognition for any thinking person. Paul didn't preach that and he condemned anyone who did. Paul was on a mission and that mission was plain and simple, to run the race and to never corrupt grace, the most precious thing this side of eternity. And we know we are susceptible to corrupting grace because Peter corrupted grace in Gal 2, Paul kept praying that he would finish the race and not be disqualified from the prize and this shows that he knew he could be deceived into corrupting grace and you can too, we all can. But he was running the race hard.

That is what you see Paul doing in verse 21, **as it is written**, meaning I'm coming from the OT Scriptures here. **"THEY WHO HAD NO NEWS OF HIM SHALL SEE, AND THEY WHO HAVE NOT HEARD SHALL UNDERSTAND."** Who are those who had no news? Who are those who had not heard? Gentiles! And this is a quote from where in the OT? Isa 52:15. What is Isaiah talking about there? He is talking about God's servant, the Messiah. And guess what it says in that passage about the Messiah? Nothing more than the core of the gospel. He will be crucified and His appearance will be marred more than any man and yet He will be resurrected, high and lifted up and greatly exalted. Now that is our Messiah. High and lifted up. Greatly exalted. And Paul says this will be an astonishing thing and the Gentiles who had not been told will see and what they had not heard they will now understand. And that is what Paul saw himself a part of as he went out to the Gentiles and proclaimed the gospel. He was seeing this being fulfilled right in front of his eyeballs.

In 15:22 we read **For this reason I have often been prevented from coming to you.** In other words, Paul had been a little busy. The literal Greek says "these many things hindered" me **from coming to you.** Paul was busy laying the foundation of Christ in the lives of people that had never heard of Jesus Christ. Sure, they had creation

and creation is sufficient to condemn, but it is not sufficient to save. You must hear of the death and resurrection of Christ and believe it in order to be saved.

So now, verse 23, **with no further place for me in these regions, and since I have had for many years a longing to come to you whenever I go to Spain**—Spain was the next frontier for Paul. If you look at this map you see that Spain was a part of the Roman Empire. It was a long way but Paul wanted to go to what to him was the end of the world.



There were people out there. People who had not heard the gospel and people who have not heard the gospel can't believe and be saved. If people could be saved without hearing the gospel, then why was Paul going to Spain with the gospel? What would be the point of the entire missionary enterprise? And yet we have so many today saying that God will save people out there who have never heard because they are sincere in their religious beliefs. It is too bad they are saying that because God is not going to save them. God only saves those who believe the gospel. We need to pray that the God of the harvest will send out workers into His harvest. Isn't that what Jesus said? Didn't Paul say, "How blessed are the feet of those who carry the good news of Jesus Christ." Or was that Isaiah? It was both of them. So Paul was going because they had not seen, they had not heard and understood. From the map we can imagine his planned route, He's planning to hit the island of Sardinia, Corsica, and the mainland at Massalia, work his way inland some, and on to what we know as Spain proper, Corduba, Merida and so forth and so on. This man had a tremendous mission in mind. He was a strategist. And you need to think of your life strategically.

Once, when I was in seminary I was at a conference and there was a bible teacher there, Wayne House, and several of us were standing around talking, we'd taken some seminary courses, I was 26 years old. He said, what are doing in seminary? What are you planning on doing? We all stood around like a bunch of idiots. Oh, I just want to do what the Lord wants me to do. Whatever He wants. I'm here to serve the Lord, all the Sunday School answers. I'm here to tell you that is such a cop out. He went on to tell us that 100 years ago the men who went to seminary already knew Latin and Greek by the age of 18 and were starting on their Hebrew, and that no matter what we did we would never accomplish anything close to what those men accomplished because we were simply too far behind. And he went on to say you need to plan out your life in five year segments and what you want to accomplish in those segments. I'm here to tell you that is so true. Where are you now and where do you want to be in five years? If you don't plan it out you won't be there in five years. So the first thing I did was get a plan. I am still working on that plan. I am going somewhere. I have a strategy. The only thing I need is the Lord to carry me all the way to the end. And if He wants to change the plan, well, we'll talk about that next week, that's the subject of the following verses. But look, the big idea is Paul had a strategy and he was gradually chopping away at that strategy. Spain was up next. What is your plan? What are you doing with your life? Where are you going? How are you involved in the great commission of making disciples of all nations? You need to think about that real hard because one day you're going to wake up and you're going to say, what happened to my life? Where did it all go? What did I do? Now I'm an old man or an old woman. What happened to all my opportunities? And it will be all over because you fiddled around and didn't have a plan.

Alright, that's a good note to end on. We'll pick up in verses 24-25 next week.

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<sup>1</sup> John A. Witmer, "Romans," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 497.