



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Romans 15:22-33

Romans

"Travel Plans"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Our text this morning is Romans 15:22-33. We're finishing the chapter. And if you'll remember from last week, Paul, in the previous verses, described his ministry. He had a unique ministry. He did not build on another man's ministry. He went to regions of the world, of the Roman Empire where the gospel had never been preached.

So in light of that, he says in verse 22, "For this reason I have often been prevented from coming to you; but now, 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 – for I hope to see you in passing, and to be helped on my way there by you, when I have first enjoyed your company for a while – but now, I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints. For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. Yes, they were pleased to do so, and they are indebted to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual things, they are indebted to minister to them also in material things. Therefore, when I have finished this, and have put my seal on this fruit of theirs, I will go on by way of you to Spain. I know that when I come to you, I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ. Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me, that I may be rescued from those who are disobedient in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem

may prove acceptable to the saints; so that I may come to you in joy by the will of God and find refreshing rest in your company. Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen.

May the Lord bless this reading of His Word. Let's bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, it's a great privilege to come together on a Sunday morning in fellowship with the saints. We're reminded in our text of what fellowship is. Christian fellowship is essential for Christian growth, and we thank you that we have the opportunity for it now. And it is centered around the Word of God and focusing upon Jesus Christ. We pray that you bless us this morning as we do that.

We thank you for your Word which is inerrant, your Word which is essential for growth and sufficient in and of itself. And so we are blessed to have it in our possession, blessed to have an opportunity such as this to read it and then to spend time considering its meaning. As we do so, we pray that you would guide us in our understanding. You've blessed us not only with your Word, you have given your church men to teach it, but the greatest blessing is that we have the Spirit of God within us to interpret it, to guide us in our thinking. And we pray that His ministry would go unhindered.

May He open our hearts to receive that ministry, and as a result be built up in the faith through it. So bless us spiritually, Father. We pray also for our material needs, and they are many. We are dependent people. We're creatures.

You've made us, and you've made us out of dust. And so we must confess, as Abraham confessed to you, we are dust and ashes. We are weak, we are dependent. We live in an age of prosperity. We have much in this land. We know very little of want.

And that is a great blessing because every good thing, every perfect gift comes down from you, the Father of lights. The problem is, Father – we must confess this – we have so much so routinely because you are so faithful, that we fall into the trap of taking it for granted. And we fail to realize that everything that we have, every

beat of our heart, every breath of life is a gift from you. Every moment of our existence is a gift from you. We live and move and have our existence in you.

Were you to will it, we would cease to be. But we continue on because you will that we exist. And so we thank you, Father, and we confess that we do take things for granted. You've blessed us so abundantly. But every gift we have, everything we have is a gift, and every gift comes from you.

And yet, there are those who experience privation in life. They lose their health, they lose their wealth, they lose so much, and we pray for them. We pray that you bless those who are recovering from surgeries, those who are going through various difficulties of life, perhaps those who don't have employment. We pray that you open doors of opportunity for them. We know you will.

Remind those who are suffering affliction that you are faithful. Remind them of your promises that assure them of that. So we pray that you build up those who are in difficulty. Give those of us who are enjoying health, friends, employment, the wonderful things of life – give us an appreciation for that and a thankfulness for it.

Bless our land. We thank you for this country in which we live, and we pray for our leaders. We pray that you give them wisdom and protection. And we pray for our nation, not only that you bless us in a political and an economic way – those things pass away. We pray for that; we pray that you bless in the material things of life. But we pray most importantly that you bless this land spiritually.

And, Father, you will do that through your people, through your church. And we pray that you would build us up in the faith this morning that we might go forth from this place, throughout the city and wherever we go, with the light of the gospel and the boldness to preach it. So equip us to that end. Bless us to that end now, as we sing our final hymn. And with it, prepare our hearts for a time of ministry together. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

[Message] Robert Burns wrote a poem titled, "To a Mouse," in which he gave us the line, "The best laid schemes of mice and men often go awry." People who travel know how true that is. Bad weather in one city causes flight delays in another, resulting in misconnections or cancelations and the need to make new plans. As a result, our best laid schemes often go wrong. That's why James tells us to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this and that."

Well, the apostle Paul knew that from experience. He was a world traveler who more than once made travel plans that had to be canceled. On his second missionary journey, he had planned to go west into the province of Asia and then on to the great city of Ephesus, when he and his friends found that they were forbidden from doing so. The Holy Spirit had other plans, and they went to Europe instead. He had a similar experience with his plans to visit Rome.

As the apostle to the gentiles, it only made sense that he would travel to the capital of the gentile empire and preach. But as he told the Romans in chapter 1, he had often made plans to do that but had been prevented. The explanation for that is given in our passage in verse 22. "For this reason," he said, meaning because of what he has just said, because of the ministry that he was given of preaching where the gospel had never been heard, he had been prevented from coming to them. So because his ministry in the east continued to open up and he had new opportunities to preach the gospel there, he had to reschedule his trip west, which was good.

In fact, whenever Paul had to make an unexpected change in his travel plans it was for a good reason and of God. God always knows best. His plans are always better than ours. So while we get frustrated when delays occur and change our schedules, we really shouldn't be because nothing happens by chance. God guides the Christian's life and His guidance is always perfect.

Now, that doesn't mean that we shouldn't make plans. We should. Paul was a man who planned things very carefully. He had a strategy for evangelizing the gentile world and he followed that

strategy. He had learned to be flexible in his planning, but he continued to plan his life and travels.

And Paul's plans were good. They were always consistent with God's will but not always consistent with God's timing. And so in spite of delays, Paul continued to make his plans. He never gave up on the idea of going to Rome. And in verses 23 to 33, he tells the Christians there of his intention to visit them.

The work in the eastern area of the Mediterranean that had prevented him from coming was now finished, he writes in verse 23, "with no further place for me in these regions, and since I have for many years a longing to come to you – " He doesn't finish the sentence. But the complete idea as we go through the passage is now that his mission is accomplished there in the eastern part of the Mediterranean. Now that the gospel had been preached and churches had been established in the east, he was looking west. He was planning to travel to Rome and fulfill his long-held desire of visiting the capital city.

But Rome was not the ultimate destination. It was a stepping stone to Spain. He states that in verse 24. "Whenever I go to Spain I hope to see you." His travel to the far end of the Empire was consistent with his determination not to build on another man's foundation.

Whether or not he made it that far west is not known. Paul was arrested in Jerusalem, before he was able to begin his fourth missionary journey, and sent to Rome where he died. But there is a very old tradition that he did visit Spain and some support for that from the pastoral epistles. In 2 Timothy, he writes of being rescued at his first trial. So it is thought that there may have been two imprisonments, that Paul was released after his first trial, traveled to Spain, and on his return to Rome was arrested again and martyred.

Now, that's not known for certain. But going to Spain was consistent with his strategy to evangelize the unevangelized to the end of the Empire. That at least was his plan. And en route, he would

stop in Rome. He hoped to see them, he said, and hoped "to be helped" on his way by them.

Now, Paul doesn't say what kind of help that he hoped to receive. Certainly, it was their encouragement and it was their prayers that he wanted, and perhaps some fellow workers from the church to accompany him on his journey west. But before that, Paul wanted to enjoy their company for a while. He wanted to meet them personally. And remember, Paul had never visited Rome.

He'd never met these people in the church. He knew some that were there. In chapter 16, he sends greetings to them. But for the most part, he did not know the people of the church of Rome. And so he was looking forward to meeting them personally and having real Christian fellowship with them.

Teach them and learn from them, that's what he desired. In fact, he said that back in chapter 1 where he originally expressed his interest in coming. He said, "that I may be encouraged together with you while among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine." That's Christian fellowship. It is being encouraged by one another's faith. That's what Paul enjoyed.

He wasn't going to Rome to visit the theater or the Circus Maximus, places and the things that drew people to the capital. His joy was Christian fellowship. Is that true of you? Now, there's nothing wrong with sports and entertainment. Well, there are some things wrong, I suppose, with them. But in principal, there's nothing wrong with enjoying sports and being entertained.

But more than that, do you like to be with other Christians and talk about the things of God? Do you meet with other Christians to stimulate each other, to love and good deeds, and encourage one another and build one another up in the faith through the Word of God, through the things of God? That's fellowship. That's what we are to do, and that's what we are to want to do. Paul enjoyed that.

Paul, in fact, needed that. So it was very important to him to visit Rome in order to be helped by them and encouraged by them as

he continued on in his ministry to the west. That was his plan. But before he could do that, he had one more responsibility to perform. Delivering a contribution to the poor saints in Jerusalem, the Jewish community there.

He speaks of it as a service to the saints in verse 25, and it was an act of great service and sacrifice on his part. Instead of sailing west from Corinth, where the book of Romans was written, and going direct to Rome and on to Spain, he went east. He went in the opposite direction. So he traveled to Rome through Jerusalem, which added some 2000 miles to his trip. And travel in the ancient world wasn't easy. It was demanding and it was dangerous.

So this was an act of service, an act of sacrifice. But it was a needed act of service for a few reasons. First of all, there was an obvious practical need. There were many poor Christians in Jerusalem. Some have tried to explain their poverty as being a consequence of Christians selling their possessions in the early days of the church and holding all things in common.

We read about that at the end of Acts chapter 2. From the very early days of the church, these people were bound together to one another in great love, and they sold their possessions, they held all things in common. And the suggestion is that as a result when hard times came – and not many years later, famine came upon the world and the people there suffered. But when those hard times came, they had no reserves of wealth to fall back on. They had sold everything, shared it among themselves, and as a result they were left destitute.

A lot of commentators take that seriously. I find nothing in the book of Acts to support it. Luke says that those early saints sold their possessions and shared with those who had need. They saw a need and they met the need in the right way. That was Christian charity. It was grace.

It was an act of kindness. It was a great witness to the unbelieving community of Jerusalem, and it was a work of the Spirit. They did not fall on hard times because they were being generous,

because they were being gracious, because they were following of the leading of the Spirit. The reality is God's elect are often poor people. "Consider your calling, brethren, there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble."

God's elect are often poor people, and that was particularly true of the believers in Jerusalem because it was not a wealthy city. It was an important city, but it was not a wealthy city. And Jews of the Diaspora would often send money to the city to relieve the poverty of their fellow countrymen. But Jewish Christians would have been excluded from the distribution of those gifts, so that they would have been the poorest of the poor. That was the situation.

Poverty was a chronic condition of the Jerusalem saints and a problem that Paul was very sensitive to. He tells us of a journey that he took to Jerusalem in Galatians chapter 2. And he wrote that while he was there, James and Peter and John met with him and they recognized his apostleship, and they recognized his ministry among the gentiles. They extended to him the right hand of fellowship, and they asked him to do some things. Among them was "to remember the poor."

And Paul said that "that was the very thing I was eager to do." Taking care of the needs of poor Christians is a Christian duty, a duty though that Paul was very eager to engage in. And not only Paul; others were eager to do it as well. Paul took up this collection of which he's referring to here for Jerusalem from the churches of "Macedonia and Achaia," meaning the churches of northern and southern Greece, gentile churches. And he says that "they were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem."

That was particularly true for the Christians of Macedonia, which is especially noteworthy because they themselves were very poor. Paul writes of this and cites them as something of an example in 2 Corinthians chapter 8, where he states that "In a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in

the wealth of their liberality. These Christians were suffering hard times themselves. They had very little to give. But they gave out of their poverty, and Paul says beyond their ability.

Not because they were cajoled or coerced in any way to contribute. They weren't pressured to give. Just the opposite was the fact. They gave of their own account, Paul said. And, in fact, they begged the apostle and the others to allow them to give.

We have a Christian duty to help where we see a need in the church. And these people – who have great needs of their own – gave, and they gave with joy and out of "their deep poverty." That's an example for all of us. There are many examples of Godly Christian giving in the history of the church. And there are examples of very wealthy Christians supporting a ministry and giving.

The Countess of Huntingdon used her wealth and influence to support the great evangelist, George Whitefield, in the 18th century in England. In fact, she not only supported him, she built schools and churches, used her wealth in the service of Christ. On the continent about the same time, Count Von Zinzendorf gave shelter to spiritual refugees and exhausted his fortune in Christian service. So there are examples of men and women with great wealth who had used that in Christ's service. But, generally, it's not the wealthy; it's the non-wealthy.

It's even the poor that support the ministry, and it is a great ministry. It is a service that God has given us to offer to one another, and a service which is needed because it is the way that we meet the basic physical material needs of Christians. So that is one reason that this gift, this contribution was necessary. Another reason this service to Jerusalem was needed was theological. It was a symbol of believers' unity in Christ, and this collection was an important gesture to make that point.

There were some Jewish Christians who believed that all converts should be circumcised and observe the Jewish law. Paul has already spoken of some of those in the church at Rome, the weaker

brethren. Some of those were in Jerusalem. In fact, when Paul does make his journey to Jerusalem, Luke tells us in Acts chapter 21 that he met with the leaders of the church. They received them very happily.

He told them about his ministry among the gentiles, and they rejoiced greatly. They glorified God over it, Luke says. And then they told Paul about the great work that the Spirit had done there in Jerusalem in bringing to salvation numerous people. They spoke of the many thousands among the Jews who have believed. And, they add, all "are zealous for the Law."

Paul's hope was that the contribution would show those Jewish believers, who were weak in faith, who were still very much attached to the traditions and the law of Moses, that the gentile Christians were bound together with the Jewish believers in genuine love. So there was a theological reason for this contribution. And for theological reasons, the gentiles had an obligation to care for the Jewish believers out of genuine love. Paul writes in verse 27 that, "They are indebted to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual things, they are indebted to minister to them also in material things."

The basis for this obligation is given back in chapter 11, where Paul explains that Israel's failure became the occasion for gentile salvation. As he said, "By their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles." The gentiles are the "wild olive" branches, as Paul describes it, who have been grafted into Israel's olive tree. Because of Israel's unbelief, we have been made partakers of the promises that were given to Abraham and his people, the Jewish people. We are now being blessed by what Paul calls "the rich root of the olive tree."

We are in their blessings. And Paul says we are in their debt. We've been made partakers of their blessing; we've been made partakers of their future. Gentile salvation is in a Jewish Savior, one who was born of the seed of Abraham from the tribe of Judah in the line of David. The first evangelist to preach to the gentiles the gospel of salvation were Jewish missionaries. So the gentiles have a debt to the Jew.

John Stott wrote, "When we gentiles are thinking of the great blessings of salvation, we are hugely in debt to the Jews and always will be. That's what Paul is saying here. That's what he's reminding the Roman church of. And the gentile Christians of Macedonia and Achaia understood that. They understood that debt, and so they were pleased to be able to help in this way.

Now, you'll remember Naaman the leper. I think he gives us an example of this very thing, of this very gratitude that is seen in churches at Greece. Naaman was a gentile from Damascus and a very important man. He was the general of the Army of Syria, and he was a leper, but a man who was healed when Elisha told him to wash in the Jordan River. He was so grateful to the prophet because he had been healed, because he had been cleansed of his disease and, most importantly, brought to faith in the God of Israel, that he offered a great gift to the prophet, which Elisha refused.

But it was that same attitude that is seen here in these Greek Christians. They had been washed by the Blood of the Lamb, and they were eternally grateful to the nation from which those blessings had come. So Paul would take their collection to Jerusalem. That was his immediate task. Once that was accomplished and he had "put his seal," as he says, "on this fruit," meaning once he had safely delivered the gift, his plan was to go to Spain by way of Rome.

He was confident that he would do that. He states in verse 29 that he was convinced that he would come to Rome "in the fullness of the blessing of Christ." That wasn't overconfidence on Paul's part. His confidence was not in himself and his ability to make his way to Jerusalem and then back to Rome. His confidence is in Christ.

He knew that the one he served was faithful. He could rely on Christ. He was doing a good work; he was following God's will, so whatever happened to him, he was sure that it would be a blessing. But Paul's confidence in Christ's blessing didn't keep him from praying for it. I think we have here a principle that we see all through the Word of God.

It's here by implication. But it's the principle of the harmony between the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. Paul's absolutely confident that he will arrive in Rome and arrive in the blessing of Christ. He doesn't doubt that. He's confident of it, but he doesn't say, "Therefore, I'll not even ask about it. I'm going to have it and so I'll not pray."

No, because he knew that this blessing was his. He prayed to receive it. He was seeking it through prayer. And, in fact, here he asks the Christians to pray for him, to remember him so that he would receive that. And we have that in verse 30. He asked for the prayers of the Christians in Rome.

But Paul knew what lay ahead. Paul knew that there were difficulties ahead of him, and prayer was necessary for overcoming them and accomplishing his purpose. In fact, the value that Paul placed on prayer is evident from the urgency of his request for prayer, which he reinforces by bringing into that request the three persons of the Trinity. And it's evident from the description that he gives of prayer. "I urge you, brethren – "

Right there we see Paul viewed prayer as essential, necessary. This man who believed in the absolute sovereignty of God knew that he was and others were responsible to pray. So he says, "I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me." Prayer is described as strident or struggling. Prayer is important, but it's not easy.

Now, in a sense it's natural because prayer is spiritual breathing. It's a natural response that we have. At the same time, earnest, diligent, faithful prayer is not easy. It's almost like an athletic contest. We struggle in prayer with ourselves against lethargy, against distractions.

But prayer itself calls for great effort. We get our words, "agony" and "agonized," from the word that Paul uses here, *sunagwniðzomai*. That's the Greek word. *Agwniðzomai*, agony,

agonizing. And that gives us a sense of what prayer calls for. It calls for persistent exertion.

Now, Paul had three concerns, and all involved his travel plans to Jerusalem and Rome. First he requested prayer for safety, "that I may be rescued from those who are disobedient in Judea." Paul knew that he had enemies in Jerusalem, and he knew how far they would go in opposing the gospel. He was there when they stoned Stephen. During his missionary travels, he had been driven out of synagogues and he'd been pursued from city to city by angry Jews.

So he knew that he might face dangers and plots in Jerusalem. All of that became even clearer to him as he began his journey. All along the way he was warned of danger. And he was told by the Holy Spirit that "bonds and afflictions" awaited him there. But in spite of the danger, Paul continued on in obedience to God's will.

He didn't court danger. He didn't put himself in peril. He was very cautious about what he did. He made his plans wisely. And one of the wisest things he did was pray and ask these Roman Christians to join him in prayer for protection and deliverance from his enemies.

The second request was that his mission to the church would be successful. Pray "that my service for Jerusalem may prove acceptable to the saints." His concern was that the gift would be rejected by the leaders of the church out of a fear of offending those weaker believers who were still zealous for the Jewish law and traditions and who were opposed to the apostle Paul. Paul had people within the church who did not understand his preaching and were opposed to him. And so he feared that the leaders of Jerusalem might not accept that gift out of deference for the weaker brother.

And if that happened, it would damage the relationship between gentiles and Jewish Christians and widen the gap in the church. And that's what Paul was concerned about. He wanted the gift to be received as a genuine token of love between Christians so that it would promote the unity that both groups have in Christ. So to that

end, he asked the Roman Christians to pray for success in his ministry there.

His third request was that he would come safely to Rome. Verse 32: "So that I may come to you in joy by the will of God and find refreshing rest in your company." He would need refreshment after that journey. It would be taxing in terms of his emotions, in terms of himself, spiritually, but also physically. It was a hard journey, and so he looked forward to arriving there and being refreshed by them. But his arrival in Rome was dependent on his safety in Jerusalem.

So he asks for prayer. But he asked that everything happen according to the will of God, which is how all prayer is to be made. The purpose of prayer is not to bend God's will to fit our own but to conform our will to His. Prayer doesn't force God's hand. And we don't move God to give us the things we ask for by intensity of our request or something like that.

Prayer is the means that God has given us for accomplishing His will and receiving the blessings that He has for us. And so we are to pray that all things happen according to His will. That's how the Lord taught us to pray in Matthew 6:10. "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." We're always to pray according to God's will.

And the Lord taught us to pray persistently. You remember that parable in Luke chapter 18, the parable of the widow and the unjust judge. She was finally granted her request because she kept coming to him. She was persistent. That's how we are to pray to our heavenly Father who is not unjust. And He gladly gives all things that are asked for according to His will, and does so in the best way and does so at the best time.

So did God answer Paul's prayers? Was he rescued from his enemies? Was his ministry in Jerusalem successful? And did he arrive in Rome with joy? Yes, he did.

God answered all of those prayers a little differently from the way Paul had anticipated. Luke tells us that when he arrived in Jerusalem, the church received him "gladly." Luke doesn't mention

the gift, doesn't tell us whether or not they received that. But the circumstances of his reception, of them receiving him gladly, suggests that they certainly did and they appreciated the gift that he gave them. He was arrested by the Romans not long after that, put in prison.

But he was rescued by them from a Jewish mob in the temple, rescued from a Roman flogging, and later rescued from a plot to murder him. So the Lord answered that prayer. And he arrived in Rome safely and with joy. He came in chains. He came as a prisoner.

He came almost three years later than he had planned. Not the way he had envisioned, but he came in God's way and in God's time. It's true, as Burns said, "The best laid schemes of mice and men often go awry." At least they seem to. But for the Christian, they always go the way that God planned, and that is always the best way. Man proposes, God disposes, and we should be thankful that He does.

But prayer plays a part in our plans and in their success. It's not some mechanical exercise that we go through. "Praying," Stott said, "is not like using a coin-operated machine." It arises from the heart. It's framed in the mind.

It involves wisdom and effort. We seek God's will in prayer. We strive and we struggle to discern His will. We accept His will, and God, providentially, works out what we have prayed for. Prayer is God's appointed means for obtaining His blessings.

So if we lack those blessing in our experiences, then perhaps we should ask ourselves, "Am I praying diligently, earnestly? Am I seeking God's will daily?" Perhaps we're not doing that and that's why we lack the blessings that we should be experiencing. Well, Paul has requested prayer, and then he concludes with a prayer. It's a benediction for the Romans. "Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen."

God gives peace. God is the source of peace. Through the cross Christ has established peace with men. In fact, that's one of the great themes of this book. The peace that Paul writes of in the book of

Romans generally is that objective peace, the peace that God has established between Himself and sinners through His Son.

But through the Holy Spirit, He gives personal peace to His people, peace which transcends circumstances. That's what Paul is speaking of here. What a contrast that is to the world which has no peace, which is at war with God. And because it is at war with God, it is at war with itself and it is at war within itself. It is a place of constant turmoil, politically and personally, individually.

We know that by simply looking at the world around us. We know that by watching the news or reading the newspaper. The world is filled with turmoil, war and crises. You know that if you visit with people at work. You see the lack of peace within their lives.

We know that from experience, but we know that with confidence because that is exactly what the Bible teaches us. Isaiah said, "The wicked are like the tossing sea, for it cannot be quiet, and its waters toss up refuse and mud. 'There is no peace,' says my God, 'for the wicked.' " No peace.

I have a calendar at home that a friend gave me – one of our elders – with pictures of lighthouses off the Coast of France. The one for the month of June is impressive. It's a weather-beaten tower built on a tall stone foundation, standing in the midst of what looks like a powerful whirlpool in the sea, as huge waves swirl around it and against it. But the lighthouse stands unshaken. I was staring at it the other day, just fascinated by this picture, when the thought occurred to me, "That's the Christian in the world."

We are surrounded by turbulence. There is no peace in man, but there is in the church. There is in the Christian because we are built on the rock, grounded in Christ who cannot be shaken. As we think about that, as we understand who He is – and this is one reason it is so vitally important that you and I know who God is, know His attributes, know His character, know His dealings with us in all of their detail. And that is a lifelong study that will never end.

We'll spend eternity learning about that. It's so important that we understand who He is and who we are, by ourselves, in and of ourselves, and who we are in Him, so that when we pray we can pray with thanksgiving. Because as we pray with thanksgiving, God then blesses us with peace that passes understanding. It's important to have thankful hearts. We can't really have thankful hearts if we don't know who God is and what He's done, who we are and what He's done for us and what he's doing for us.

And God blesses us with peace as we do that. In that poem in which Robert Burns reminds us that our best schemes don't always go the way we've planned, he is addressing a mouse. As I said, the title of the poem is "To a Mouse." It's a mouse whose nest has been destroyed by a plough. And Burns is very sympathetic with the mouse.

He calls her his "fellow mortal." She worked hard to prepare a little house out in the field for winter. And then, suddenly, it's gone. And he likens the experience of the experience of the mouse to our own. We lay our schemes, we work hard to achieve them, but sometimes they don't work out.

"Still," he says to the mouse, "you are blest, compared with me! The present only touches thee. But oh! I backward cast my eye, on prospects dreary! And forward, though I cannot see, I guess and fear!" That's the natural man.

He knows that there is more for him than the present. Mice are here for but a moment. Only the present touches them. But mankind has a future and it's uncertain. He can only guess about it and fear.

Paul could never have said that. The future was not uncertain for him. He didn't guess about it. He wasn't fearful of it. He knew God's will was always for his good.

However, he might arrive in Rome, he knew it would be in the fullness of the blessing of Christ. That fact, that certainty gives peace, even when our plans go awry. And better still, Paul knew that his eternal destiny was just as fixed, just as certain as his past was. In

2 Timothy 4:18, he wrote: "The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom." Now, that was Paul's ultimate travel plan, to arrive safely in God's heavenly kingdom. He was certain that he would.

The reason is because the plans that God has made for His people are eternal and they are perfect. And so they can never go awry. He works all things according to the counsel of His will, and He works all of them for the good of His people. So the Christian has confidence in the present and assurance for the future. What a blessing that is.

Can you think of a better blessing than that, a greater blessing than to know that everything is certainly now for your good, and you are assured that you will be brought safely into His heavenly kingdom? No, there is no greater blessing than that. Do you have that blessing, or do you look to the future and guess and fear? There's no reason to guess about the future. It has been revealed.

But there is reason to fear. "It is appointed for me to die once, and after this comes judgment." There's a way of escape, and that is through Jesus Christ, God's Son, who became a man and died in the place of sinners so that all who believe in Him would be saved. So if you're here without Christ, know that you're a sinner. We all are. "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God."

But know that one came who was not a sinner, who lived a perfect life, was the spotless Lamb of God, offered Himself up in the place of sinners. If you'll turn to Him, if you'll look to Him, you believe in Jesus Christ, you'll be saved, forgiven of your sins and justified by the Lord God and made a child of God. God help you to do that, and help all of us who trusted in Him to rejoice in what we have, to be thankful, to be confident, to serve our Lord faithfully. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank you for your goodness and your grace. We come to a text such as this in which Paul is merely giving some personal statements to the Romans, telling them about his plans.

And yet, it's so full of truth. And we're reminded that you have a plan for us, and you're working it out in our lives. There are means to that end.

We're to be men and women who plan and live wisely and follow the direction of your Word. We are to enter into prayer and seek your will and seek your face and seek your blessing. We're to do all of these things. And yet, what a blessing it is to know that even when we, poor weak sinners, men and women who are but dust and ashes, fail, you never fail.

And we will all be brought safely – we who have put our faith in Christ – into that heavenly kingdom. We thank you for that. And we thank you for the work of your Son on our behalf. And it's in His name we pray. Amen.