

43. Learning to Minister to One Another by Prayer

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that the Holy Spirit verified the ministry of Paul as an apostle through signs and wonders. We also saw that Paul had a desire to take the Gospel to people who had never heard of the death and resurrection of Christ. We saw that we want to help our children develop a similar vision to take the Gospel to those who have not placed their faith in Christ. In our topic today, we want our children to understand another important ministry. We want to help them learn to minister to one another through prayer.

We saw in our last topic, that Paul wanted to take the Gospel to those who had never heard. As we come to Romans 15:24, we see that Paul had other places where he had a desire to take the Gospel. Romans 15:24 says, “Whenever I journey to Spain, I shall come to you. For I hope to see you on my journey, and to be helped on my way there by you, if first I may enjoy your *company* for a while.” Here, we see that Paul had a great desire to take the Gospel to the country of Spain. On the way to Spain, Paul hoped to stop in Rome and visit the Christians there because he wanted to be an encouragement to them. Second, he also wanted to give them an opportunity to share in the ministry to Spain. Third, he just wanted to enjoy their company for a period of time. That would give him the time to visit the many Christians that he already knew in that city.

However, before Paul could come to Rome, the churches of Macedonia and Achaia had given him another responsibility. Romans 15:25-28 says, “But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem. It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things. Therefore, when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit, I shall go by way of you to Spain.” Here, we see that the churches in Macedonia and Achaia had realized that they had an opportunity to minister to the Christians in Jerusalem and so they had enlisted the help of Paul to carry out that ministry.

At the time that Paul wrote this letter, we see that he was preparing to travel to Jerusalem to serve the saints that were in the city of Jerusalem. The churches from throughout Macedonia and Achaia had been collecting an offering to send to the poor saints in Jerusalem. Part of the reason for their poverty was due to the persecution of the Christians in Jerusalem by other Jews. Part of the reason for their poverty was due to the fact that they had used their resources to help care for the early Christians from other places while those new Christians grew in their spiritual lives. Acts 4:34-35 says, “Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid *them* at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.” As a result, the Christians in Macedonia and Achaia saw the need in Jerusalem as an opportunity to help those who had helped to make it possible for the Gospel to come to them.

Paul said that it was very appropriate for the Gentile Christians to help the Jewish Christians because the very reason that the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem were poor was due to the fact that

they had sold their possessions to make it possible for Christians from other places to grow and then take the Gospel back to their home areas. In fact, Paul had given instructions to the churches about the way to gather their gifts for the poor in Jerusalem. 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 says, “Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: On the first *day* of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.” Here, we see that Paul had explained to the Christians how to give systematically so that the money would be ready when he and the team with him came to take their gifts to Jerusalem.

In fact, Paul said that all Gentile Christians had a debt to the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem because of the way that they had sacrificed to help Christians from other areas in their spiritual growth after the Day of Pentecost. A few years later when persecution scattered the Jewish Christians that lived in Jerusalem, Acts 8:4 says, “Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.” Then, Acts 11:19-21 adds, “Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only. But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.” Here, we see that God used the Jewish Christians to begin to spread the Gospel to the Gentiles. Now the Gentile Christians wanted to share in the financial needs of the poor Christians in Jerusalem.

Paul said that once he had completed this ministry on behalf of the Gentile Christians to help them minister to the poor Jewish Christians, he wanted to visit the Christians in Rome on his way to Spain. However, Paul wanted the prayers of the Christians in Rome as he went to Jerusalem. Romans 15:29-33 says, “But I know that when I come to you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ. Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me, that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be refreshed together with you. Now the God of peace *be* with you all. Amen.” Paul looked forward to that visit with the Christians in Rome. However, we see that Paul felt a great need for prayer as he went to Jerusalem.

As a result, Paul begged the Christians in Rome to pray for him as he went to Jerusalem. Paul knew that there were many Jews that rejected the Gospel and wanted to see him killed. Here, we see that his request for prayer is based on his love for Christ and his love for the ministry of the Holy Spirit in his life. He asked the Christians in Rome to strive together with him in prayer to God. This is a request for the kind of prayer that the Christians demonstrated when they prayed for Peter. Acts 12:5 says, “Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church.” Paul wanted constant prayer for him until he had completed his ministry in Jerusalem because he realized that Satan would make every attempt to stop his ministry.

His first prayer request was that the Lord would deliver him from those in Judea who did not believe. Paul received many warnings about the dangers that faced him in Jerusalem. In Acts

20:22-23, Paul told the elders at Ephesus, “And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me.” In Caesarea, Paul received a final warning before he got to Jerusalem. Acts 21:10-13 says, “And as we stayed many days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. When he had come to us, he took Paul's belt, bound his *own* hands and feet, and said, ‘Thus says the Holy Spirit, “So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver *him* into the hands of the Gentiles.’” Now when we heard these things, both we and those from that place pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, ‘What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.’” Here, we see that Paul understood what he faced and knew he needed much prayer.

His second prayer request was that his service for Jerusalem would be acceptable to the saints. Here, we see that Paul recognized that the Jewish Christians had heard many false things about him and this caused him to be concerned that the Jewish Christians might not accept the gifts that he and the team brought to Jerusalem. Acts 21:20-21 says, “And when they heard *it*, they glorified the Lord. And they said to him, ‘You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law; but they have been informed about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise *their* children nor to walk according to the customs.’” Here, we see that many false rumors had been spread among the Jewish Christians about Paul.

His third prayer request was that he would be able to come to the Christians in Rome with joy. This prayer was answered but not in the way that Paul expected. Paul arrived in Rome by the will of God but only after he had spent two years in Caesarea as a prisoner. Then, on the way to Rome as a prisoner, he was shipwrecked. Once Paul arrived in Rome, he was imprisoned in a house with a soldier guarding him. However, he was able to minister freely. Acts 28:30-31 says, “Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.” God did answer all three of their prayers for Paul.

As we help our physical and spiritual children understand the importance of the prayers of the Christians for Paul, we also want to help them understand the importance of their own prayers for other Christians. Ephesians 6:18-19 says, “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints--and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel.” May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to pray for others.