

Travel Plans and a List of Friends
Romans 15:14-16:16
#70 in a Series on Paul's Letter to the Romans
Faith Community Church – June 24, 2007

Introduction

Please open your Bibles to Romans 15.

In 2 Timothy 3:16, Paul writes that “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.” This, and passages like it, lead us to the belief that the Bible is God’s word. The little word “is” is very important. We don’t mean that the Bible contains God’s word, but that it is – in total, what God wanted to communicate to us.

One author states that “Readers tend to lose concentration when they come to Romans 15:14.”¹ Let’s read the passage and find out why.

On the front of the bulletin I asked the question, “What do travel plans and a list of people have to do with us?” At first glance it may seem as if Paul has finished the important things, covering the great themes relating to our salvation and our Christian experience, and now we can put our minds into neutral as he goes through some personal reflections and says hello to people we don’t even know. But that would be a mistake.

Because “all Scripture is breathed out by God” – we often use the word “inspired,” which means that it originated with God – then this passage of personal reflections is God’s word too.

A Lesson to Learn from Travel Plans

Paul begins to wrap up this letter by explaining his reason for writing – He was appointed by God to be the Apostle to the Gentiles. He is not the only person who was set apart to minister to Gentiles, but clearly Paul’s work was what we today would call pioneer evangelism – he was, to use a phrase with which we might be familiar to “boldly go where no one has gone before.”

One might think that Paul is a bit of a braggart after reading these opening verses, but Paul is looking back with an appropriate degree of satisfaction on his ministry throughout the Roman world. Any questions about ego can be set aside when we see that he gives the credit to Christ alone for what has been accomplished. And what has been accomplished!!

- In approximately 47 AD Paul began his travels, making three major trips before this letter is written.

¹ Moo, Douglas: Encountering Romans (206)

- He establishes numerous churches, sees countless people turn from their sin and trust in Christ.
- He apparently writes extensively, and thirteen of his letters are preserved for us as part of the New Testament scriptures. From his pen have come these words:
 - Romans 8:28 – And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those are called according to his purpose.
 - 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a – Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.”
 - Ephesians 2:8-10 – For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.
- He’s encouraged us in Thessalonians to comfort each other in light of the return of Christ and his raising us from the dead. He’s instructed us to rejoice in the Lord always. He’s appealed to us to present ourselves to God as living sacrifices, and here in Romans he looks back at his ministry – though some of it still lies ahead – and has a profound satisfaction of a life well-spent. If you are doing what God wants you to be doing, you can have that same sense of satisfaction.

But Paul has never visited Rome – the head of the empire. He says that he has wanted to visit many times, but other things – good things – have hindered him from coming. But now, he has plans to go from Corinth (where this letter was written) to Jerusalem to give financial assistance to Jewish believers who are suffering there because of their faith in Christ. And upon completion of that trip, he will cross the entire empire again, stop for a period of refreshment in Rome, and head to Spain where the Gospel has not been preached.

And Paul will get to Rome, but not in the way he planned. In Acts 21 we find that he reaches Rome, but that he is arrested. He is transported from Jerusalem to Caesarea because of a threat on his life and spends many months in prison there before exercising his right as a Roman citizens and appealing his case to Caesar. And thus begins the journey to Rome. It is possible that he is freed briefly after spending two years in prison, but ultimately he is executed by the Emperor Nero, probably around 65 AD.

There are several points of application that we might make, but I think the most prominent one lies in his urging them to pray for his work. It should make us examine our own habits of prayer for those who are involved in missions and ministry.

Do you pray? Do you pray for any of our missionaries? Do you pray for Ron and for me? With all the experience and gifts that Paul had, he realized that the most important thing was that people pray for him.

Our world needs to be bigger than our jobs, our neighborhoods and our families. As Christians we need to be involved in work of God around the world. But I think we struggle with how to do that. Let me encourage you to start small. Choose one missionary or one country and pray for the needs that you read about. Do it two or three times a week. And communicate with those missionaries that you pray for. Encourage them to know that they are not alone.

- Pray for safety – more and more the world is becoming unsafe.
- Pray for wisdom – that they would know where to focus their efforts.
- Pray for effectiveness
- Pray for their families
- Pray for their personal lives, that they would be kept from sin.

Let me ask someone who knows a little about this to share with you what it means to know that people are praying for you. (Amy Smith)

A Lesson to Learn from A List of Friends

Paul often ends his letters by extending a greeting, but not to this extent. There are over thirty people, couples, families or house churches who are singled out for greeting, and what is remarkable is that they are all (exception of Phoebe, 16:1-2) in a city where Paul has never visited.

It is possible that Paul knew about some of these people, but it is clear that he also knew some of them – perhaps all of them – personally. How he had come to know them we are not told.

What I see here for us is that Paul is practicing what he preaches. His letters are filled with instructions about relationships.

- We have teaching here in Romans, and in 1 Corinthians, for example, that make us aware that as Christians we belong to each other.
- We have challenges throughout his letters to allow our lives to enrich the lives of others, and to allow others to enrich our lives as we follow Christ together.
- We have the example of a man who seems to always have a group of people around him, not just to influence them and train them, but to be helped.

Could you have a list of other Christian people who have been partners on your spiritual journey, and if so, whose names would appear.

I've spoken often about the problem – perhaps even the foolishness – of trying to follow Christ alone. That's not the way it's supposed to work. Yet a significant number of us

have no other Christian people in our lives to encourage us and help us grow. I'll say again what I've said several times over these last months: You can be a Christian without having significant relationships, but the evidence of Scripture is that you can't be a very strong one.

Let me encourage you to seek out and cultivate strong relationship with other Christian people for your spiritual good. Small groups are a great place to find them, but there are other ways as well.

Responding to God's Word

There is one other thing that we can learn from this, and I'd like to close our service on this note. One of the things that Paul does often is praise people who have served well. We see in this list the names of people who have helped in a variety of ways. As we close our service this morning, I'd like to follow his example.

This is the last Sunday that Peg Kulp will be working in the Beginner department in Sunday School. Peg's service in various areas of ministry has spanned nearly 60 years. She's been in the Beginner department Sunday after Sunday and has served well. We thought that it would be fitting for us to honor Peg and so we are doing that in two ways. First, Peg, these flowers are in your honor today. But as soon as the service is concluded, we'd like to ask you all to join us in the lower auditorium for a brief presentation and some refreshments in Peg's honor. Thank you, Peg, for your faithful service. It is because of people like you that the church Paul wrote to in Rome and the church God speaks to today here in Roslyn can exist and enjoy God's blessing for His glory.