

**PRAY CHRIST: PAUL'S MISSIONARY POWER**  
**ROMANS 15:30-33**

Early this year, we decided to replace most of the fencing in our backyard. It was rotting in several places and falling down in others. So we counted the panels and pickets and headed to the lumber yard to buy replacements. We were told that they only had one pallet of pickets and didn't know when they would get more. So we bought the pallet. Later we went back and found they had a few more, so we bought about another half pallet. Halfway through the project Raye Jeanne was concerned that we didn't have enough pickets. Since I always figure a project is 2x the time and 2x the money, I figured she was right. The store had more pickets by then so we loaded up again.

One Saturday morning with the project just about complete, we walked through the yard, counted our pickets, figured on a small percentage of "overage" to keep for repairs down the road, and loaded up 183 extra pickets and took them back to the store. That's how we plan and do projects. How about you?

As I think about missions and think about planning, I think about all the things we need to make missions work well. We need a policy. We need people. We need a clear gospel. We need training. We need \$\$\$\$. Anything else? Yes. We need prayer. Without prayer, missions will never succeed.

For three Sundays, we are thinking with Paul about missions. As Paul prepares to go to Spain — and as he prepares to come to Rome and ask for support to help him get to Spain — in vv. 17-21 he reveals the gospel he preaches; in vv. 22-29 he reveals his vision for missions; finally, in vv. 30-33 he reveals the power for his missions ventures: prayer. We might summarize his teaching this way:

**SUCCESSFUL MISSIONS VENTURES ARE EMPOWERED BY FAITHFUL PRAYING.**

By that statement, I (and Paul) don't mean that the praying itself changes anything; it is not the force of my prayers that changes anything. But I mean that if missions will succeed, then we will prayerfully depend on God to accomplish His purposes in missions — and we demonstrate that trust by praying dependently.

In these verses Paul models **five aspects of faithful praying** for missions:

1. The **NEED** for Missions Praying (v. 30a)
2. The **NATURE** of Missions Praying (v. 30b)
3. The **CONTENT** of Missions Praying (v. 31)
4. The **PURPOSE** of Missions Praying (v. 32)
5. The **COMFORT** of Missions Praying (v. 33)

## 1. The **NEED** for Missions Praying (v. 30a)

- The little words of Scripture are sometimes overlooked, but they are significant in understanding the meaning of passages — and sometimes powerfully significant. For example, in “Christ died for the ungodly...for our sins” (Rom. 5:8, 10), **for** might be overlooked but the whole of substitutionary atonement is in that small preposition.
- Similarly, when Paul says **now** in v. 30, he is making a conclusion and final appeal about missions. But he is also introducing a key idea — if missions is going to happen, it will only happen because of this...
- He also stresses the importance of what he is to say with the verb of admonition: **I urge you...**
  - ✓ The word is a common NT word that has a broad range of meaning from “encourage” to “urge” and even “call to action...” The imagery of compelling troops to get ready for battle is likely intended by Paul (given what he says about the nature of prayer at the end of the verse).
  - ✓ Prayer is necessary in *every* believer’s life. And Paul frequently demonstrated that commitment — e.g., Eph. 6:19-20 (that was also a missions prayer).
- We should also notice that this isn’t just Paul’s “good idea.” He makes this admonition on two bases:
  - ✓ **by our Lord Jesus**. Notice that he doesn’t just assert, “this is Jesus’ idea...” but he appeals to **our Lord Jesus** — it is the lordship (the authority and sovereignty) of Jesus that compels this. We pray because the Lord of Glory gave His life for **us** sinners (notice the word **our**; Rom. 5:8, 10; Gal. 2:20) — and He has compelled us to go to the nations (Mt. 28:18-20). The One who calls us to salvation also calls us to pray in dependence on Him for going to the nations.
  - ✓ **and by the love of the Spirit** is the second basis for praying — because of the love that the Holy Spirit produces in us (for others), we pray for other people in other nations to come to know Christ.
- When we pray, we don’t change God’s mind or His purposes or His plans. When we pray —
  - ✓ *We align our hearts with God’s heart*. Remember that God is a missionary God — He has always been about spreading the fame of His name to the world (Is. 66:19; Ps. 48:10; 66:4; 79:9; 86:9).
  - ✓ *We affirm our dependence on Him*. We say that we can do nothing without God; we say that we cannot change men’s hearts and that God must produce the change. Prayer affirms that reality. Like faith, prayer says, “I can’t...you must” and then petitions, “would you...for your sake...act?”
  - ✓ So missions praying is vital because it builds a missionary mindset in our hearts and makes us rely on God for the results (and also wait patiently for those results).
  - ✓ William Carey frequently noted his dependence on prayer:

...if there is anything engages my heart in prayer to God it is that the Heathen may be converted... [Journal]

The most glorious works of grace that have ever taken place have been in answer to prayer...

If an holy solicitude had prevailed in all the assemblies of Christians on behalf of their Redeemer's kingdom, we might probably have seen before now not only an "open door" (2 Cor. 2:12) for the gospel, but "many running to and fro, and knowledge increased" (Dan. 12:4); or a diligent use of those means which Providence has put in our power accompanied with a greater than ordinary blessing from heaven.

Many can do nothing but pray, and prayer is perhaps the only thing in which Christians of all denominations can cordially and unreservedly unite... [An Enquiry...]

- ✓ So when we pray, we affirm our dependence on God to act to save sinners.
- ✓ When William Carey was asked in January of 1793 if he would travel with John Thomas to take the gospel and the Scriptures to India, he responded, "I will go down, but who will hold the ropes?" That question is an affirmation of his need for help from others to accomplish the missions plan.
- ✓ Part of our missions commitment is the recognition that not everyone will go on missions ventures; in fact, most will stay. But that doesn't mean we aren't involved. We are *all* involved in the mission venture — to use Carey's terminology, we are involved either by going or holding the ropes of the ones who have gone. *And holding the ropes starts by praying.* Praying is needful for missions.

## 2. The NATURE of Missions Praying (v. 30b)

- The end of verse 30 contains Paul's specific request — ***to strive together with me in your prayers...***
  - ✓ Notice first of all that Paul assumes that they are praying — ***in your prayers.*** He doesn't actually *ask* them to pray — he simply affirms that they *are* praying 1) to God (dependence) and 2) for him.
  - ✓ But notice also that Paul also assumes that the praying is hard work — and his request is that they would do the hard work of praying by ***striving together with [him].***
    - The word has the idea of joining with someone in a fight; it implies a strenuous effort.
    - Immediately we might think Paul means something like, "do the hard work of praying," because praying (and especially persistent praying) *is* hard work (as the disciples who were with Jesus on the Mount of Olives). That interpretation is certainly possible.
    - But Paul is probably talking about the solidarity that they have with him — "pray *with me...*" He is inviting them to join him in his battles for men's souls and the establishment of churches. "Be allies with me in my fight — pray for me as if you were in the difficulty I am in..."
  - ✓ We join w/ and partner w/ our missionaries when we persist in the hard work of prayer for them.
- Most of us won't go overseas in missions; but all of us can go overseas in prayer.
- The nature of missionary prayer is that we are persistently engaged in praying with our missionaries.

### 3. The CONTENT of Missions Praying (v. 31)

- What should we pray for the missions ventures? Paul asks for two things for his own trip to Jerusalem:
- *First, he asks for protection from the unbelievers.*
  - ✓ When he asks for **rescue**, he uses a word he has used previously about God's deliverance of sinners (11:26; cf. also 7:24). In asking for rescue, he is affirming his dependence on God.
  - ✓ Why would he need deliverance?
    - He is headed for Jerusalem and is well-aware that numerous people there are opposed to him (e.g., Acts 20:23; 21:4, 13). He had been opposed since his conversion (Acts 9:28-30); nothing changed in the intervening years — even Jews outside Israel (Acts 20:3). (That had also been Paul's own attitude toward Christians before his conversion: Gal. 1:13; Phil. 3:6; 1 Tim. 1:13.)
    - He also expects it because they are **disobedient** — meaning that they are unbelieving. We know he means that because he uses "obedient" to mean "believing" (v. 18; 1:5; 16:26). For Paul, faith produces obedience and lack of faith is demonstrated in disobedient rebellion against God.
    - This disobedience against God will inevitably lead them to rebel against & oppose Paul's gospel.
  - ✓ This request is a reminder that the gospel that we love will invariably face opposition (and we shouldn't be surprised when it does), which is why we need to pray — only God can change them.
  - ✓ We assume they prayed; yet God didn't answer. The opposition that Paul faced in Jerusalem led to nearly five years of imprisonment; and while he was eventually released, he was later martyred.
    - However, it was also the opposition Paul faced that took him to Rome (it was his boat trip to Italy). For Paul (and often for us as well), suffering produced his (and God's) desired outcome. We do well to remember that and rest in it as we pray.
    - We should also remember that even martyrdom isn't defeat for Christ — God uses the death of His own to produce final salvation of His own (2 Tim. 4:18).
- *Paul's second request is that his work would be acceptable to the church.*
  - ✓ Remember that his **service** was taking financial gifts to the poor in Jerusalem (v. 26).
  - ✓ So you might wonder, "why wouldn't the Jews receive the gift as 'acceptable?'" It's "free money."
  - ✓ The Jerusalem church was still struggling with the relationship to the Law and that church was the strongest holdout for the circumcision of Gentile converts. There was still tension for Jewish converts in the Jerusalem church with Gentile believers in Christ.
  - ✓ So Paul is asking for prayer that these Jewish believers would accept a gift from the Gentiles.
  - ✓ While he is asking for the gift to be accepted, he essentially is also asking for the unity of the church body — that there would be harmony between different people ("factions") in the church (ch. 14).
  - ✓ While we don't have a complete report, it appears that they *did* accept the gift (Acts 21:17-20).
  - ✓ Even when we are venturing out to "do good," we shouldn't assume people (even in the church) will embrace it and accept it; our plans and our prayers should be for the preservation of gospel/unity.

#### 4. The PURPOSE of Missions Praying (v. 32)

- Why does Paul want the Roman church to pray for these things? ***So that I may come to you...***
  - ✓ He has already told them that he can only come to them when this ministry obligation is completed (cf. v. 24). So part of the prayer is that he can come to Rome — and then continue on to Spain.
  - ✓ He specifically wants to arrive in Rome from Jerusalem in two ways —
    - He wants to come ***in joy***. He wants the internal attitude of joy when he gets to Rome. If the prayer requests in v. 31 are answered, then he will be particularly joyful as he goes to Rome.
    - He wants to come to Rome ***by the will of God***. This is obviously not an internal attitude, but it is the means by which he will be enabled to make it to Rome. In other words, “pray these requests (v. 31), asking them to be accomplished and that God’s will be that I will get to Rome.”
      - ... We pray for God’s will, and we pray as a means of bringing about God’s will (which is the mystery of the union of God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility). Cf. **Is. 4:2b**.
      - ... The arrival in Rome will also serve as a means of ***rest*** by enjoying company with the Romans. He is not talking about a “vacation” but about the joy of fellowship and care (**1:12**).
- *Did Paul arrive in Rome with joy?*
  - ✓ We know that when he left Corinth to go to Jerusalem he was full of joy (**Rom. 16:19**).
  - ✓ We also know that he was severely delayed in getting to Rome — arrested and imprisoned in Jerusalem for over two years, shipwrecked on the way to Italy, and then imprisoned two more years in Rome. Was he still joyful?
  - ✓ Yes! It was while he was under arrest in Rome that he wrote his most joyful letter (to Philippi) — in that letter he mentions joy 16x (e.g., **Phil. 1:4**, 18; **2:2, 17**; 3:1).
  - ✓ And that is a reminder that we don’t need to have what we want the way we want it to be joyful. Our joy is not dependent on our circumstances, but on Christ, who is our hope (**Phil. 4:1, 4**).
  - ✓ He would later be arrested again, and ultimately martyred, and was still joyful (**2 Tim. 4:8, 18**).
- *Did he arrive in Rome according to the will of God?*
  - ✓ Yes. He did not arrive in Rome in the time-frame or manner he anticipated, but he arrived in Rome at the time and in the manner intended by God.
  - ✓ It was his imprisonment and what some might think was an “untimely” arrival in Rome that enabled the gospel to spread particularly in Rome (**Phil. 1:12-14**). Paul obviously believes that the spread of the gospel only happened because of his being imprisoned under God’s sovereign plan.
  - ✓ This verse is a reminder that we pray and then God sovereignly acts in ways that are the best for us and for His glory. Man proposes; God disposes. And what He disposes is always best (and joyful).
- *Will we accomplish everything we desire in missions? I don’t know; but we will accomplish God’s will.*

## 5. The **COMFORT** of Missions Praying (v. 33)

- Paul has asked for persistent prayer from the Romans for him in this section; now he offers a prayer of benediction for the Roman church.
- His prayer is quite simple — *may the God of peace be with you all*.
  - ✓ Paul uses the phrase **God of peace** a few other times (16:20; 2 Cor. 13:11; Phil. 4:9; 1 Thess. 5:23).
  - ✓ The “God of peace” refers to the fact that God is inherently “peace” — it is His nature/attribute. But the God of peace is the One who also gives peace (which was Paul’s point at the beginning of the letter, 1:7).
  - ✓ That God is peace and is **with** them should be a comfort to the Romans. And Paul is also asking that **all** the believers in Rome would experience that comfort.
- That Paul affirms that God is a God of peace at the end of the letter had to be a real encouragement to the Roman readers, particularly given the emphasis on the wrath of God that opened the letter. This God who is wrathful against sin is also peaceable, gracious, and gentle with those who belong to Him. And He grants peace to those who are His so they can have harmony with Him (first) and with others (second). Cf. 1:7; 2:10; 3:17; 5:1; 8:6; 14:17, 19; 15:13, 33; 16:20 (the 10 uses of the word in Romans).
- This is the hope of the believer — that God is our peace (and we have peace with Him), no matter what transpires. Paul didn’t need to get to Rome or Spain in his desired manner to have peace. He had Christ.
  - ✓ The Romans didn’t need to have Paul, or missionary influence..., to have peace. They had Christ.
  - ✓ And you and I don’t have to have what we desire — even when the desires are godly (like missions venture) — in the time and manner that we want them, if we have Christ.
  - ✓ This is also a good place to remember that the peace and comfort that Paul desires for the Romans is only available if one is in Christ. You have to believe the message Paul is taking to Spain (and the nations) if you will have this comfort. And the message is **Christ** (vv. 17-21).
    - Christ died in our place, providing atonement/forgiveness of sin (3:24-25).
    - Christ’s work on the cross must be believed (appropriated by **faith**, 3:28; 4:5).
    - Christ’s Spirit must produce His fruit through the one who believes (8:13-14).
  - ✓ If we believe in this Christ, then we will have the peace that Paul prays we might have.

**CONCLUSION:** There is only one appropriate way to finish a sermon on prayer and missions — pray.

We pray for the missionaries you have given to serve with us:

- Andrea Perkins (AWANA)
- David and Kerry Gibson (PNG; Bible translation)
- Dennis and Linda Beck (Cru, Hungary/Ohio)
- Dean and Joan Chollar (Crossway Int., FL)
- Doni and Norma Salazar (Costa Rica)
- Jeff and Kristen Miller (TMAI, Germany)
- Rodrigo and Sheila Avila (church planting, Valparaiso, Chile)
- Shannon and Danielle Hurley (SOS Ministries, Uganda)
- P & K S. (Middle East)
- E & H Z (Middle East)

We pray three things for these missionaries:

1. We pray for their protection (both physical and spiritual) and their ability to minister
2. We pray for their unity and the fulfillment of their tasks. Give them unity with the people with whom they work and give them unity with us.
3. We pray for your peace to overwhelm them; whatever their problems, might they know the comfort and peace that Paul asked for the Romans to know and the Christians have always known through the ages.

We pray finally that you would make us persistent in praying and fight with our missionaries for the progress of the gospel in their countries. Would you keep us faithful to the task of holding the ropes of prayer for these beloved co-laborers.

**BENEDICTION:** **Romans 15:13**