

How Paul Made His Missionary Travels Count

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[0:00] Take your Bibles, would you?

And open them to Romans chapter 15 and find verse 22. I'm going to read verses 22 through to the end of the chapter. That would be verse 32, or 22 rather, through 33.

Romans 15. All right. Here we go. For this reason, I also have been much hindered from coming to you.

But now, no longer having a place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come to you, 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. 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.

[1:17] It pleased them indeed, and they are their detours. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things.

Makes sense. Therefore, when I have performed this, and have sealed to them this fruit, I shall go by way of you to Spain. 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. Now, the Apostle Paul was a missionary, wasn't he? Yes, he was. Okay. He was perhaps the greatest missionary who ever lived. I think you could hardly even argue the point. Great missionary.

[2:40] And I would qualify that even a little further and say, characterize Paul as a pioneer missionary. Certainly not any kind of missions in those days was pioneer missions, but Paul was specifically called to pioneer missions, to boldly go where no man has gone before.

All right. Borrow that from something. I don't remember what. Pioneer missions was what God had appointed him to, had called him to specifically.

And really, Paul made that pretty clear in a few verses just before our text. In verse 20. Look at it. It says, And so I have made it my aim to do what?

To preach the gospel not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation. All right. So that's a clear statement of his call, specific call, to pioneer missions, not to build on another man's foundation.

And that's what he was called to. He also wrote in 2 Corinthians 10, 13, by the way, he said, We will not boast beyond measure, but within the limits of the sphere which God appointed us.

[4:01] Now, this is a reference to some other things, but specifically also to an area of ministry that he was specifically called to. He goes on to say, A sphere which especially includes you.

And he was speaking to the believers at Corinth. And so they, that church was planted as a result of Paul's pioneer missions.

And because Paul was a pioneer missionary, again, perhaps the greatest who ever lived, he traveled extensively. You'd have to agree with that.

If you've studied any of the missionary journeys, you can just look in the maps in the back of your Bible and see his missionary journeys, all the places where Paul traveled and, you know, pretty much encompassing the entire known world, inhabited world, civilized world of his day.

He traveled extensively. In fact, you might remember in 2 Corinthians 11 and verse 26, Paul is listing some of the things that he endured for the cause of the gospel, for the cause of Christ.

[5:10] And one of those things he mentioned was, in journeys often. Now, that doesn't sound like something that you'd have to endure for the gospel, but then you didn't travel back in Paul's day.

All right? And so this is just one of those things. In journeys often. One of the things he endured for the cause of Christ. Now, think about the places Paul had been. Think about the things Paul had seen.

The Greek, the very famous Greek temple of Artemis, or Diana, depending if you're calling it from the perspective of the Greeks or the perspective of the Romans, the temple of Diana, located in Ephesus, considered one of the seven wonders of the world.

Paul had seen it. Paul had seen it. Or the Colosseum in Rome. Or the Parthenon in Athens. You know, to name just a few things that Paul had seen in his missionary travels.

Now, these things are ruins today. But Paul saw them in all their glory. Can you imagine that? But, having said that, remember, that Paul did not travel to these places and to see these wonders to get another sticker on his, you know, his suitcase, you know.

[6:36] He didn't do that to rack up some more sky miles with American Airlines, Johnny. Maybe they call it something else. I don't know. Paul didn't go to all these places to fill his scrapbook with pictures and memorabilia, you know.

Taking menus from restaurants and towels from motels and things like that. Of course, you have never done that. Paul didn't go on all of these journeys for the gospel, all these missionary trips to get a t-shirt or some coffee mug to prove that he had been there.

Okay. This, by the way, I might just kind of insert this here. This is one of the negative reasons, I think, today for why short-term mission projects have become so popular among people in the church.

It has afforded them an opportunity to see the world, to go places they've never been before and to see things and such, to, in a sense, go on kind of a, the basis of a tourist.

I say that's one of the negatives. Now, Paul did not travel from place to place as a sightseer. He traveled from place to place as a soul winner.

[8:02] There's a big difference between the two. He didn't go as a tourist. He went as a soul winner. I mentioned in 2 Corinthians 11, 26, you know, a moment ago, I mentioned when Paul listed some of the things that he endured for the cause of Christ and in journeys often was just one of them.

Listen to the rest of it. In perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren, in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.

He listed all those things too. See, so Paul did not travel from place to place as a sightseer. He traveled as a soul winner. He traveled as a church planter.

He traveled also, I think, for purposes of equipping the saints, for equipping leadership in these churches that were planted. He never left them leaderless.

And that was, of course, one of the reasons why he returned to some of those churches that he had planted and also wrote letters to them. All right now, so this is a very, I think, a very timely subject for us as a church.

[9:26] Because as your pastor, I believe our church, I believe every church, New Testament church, ought to be directly involved in taking the gospel to the world.

Not just the giving of our money, but actually going. I believe that. I fully expect some of you to go to Ukraine. I expect some of you to go to China.

And maybe some other places. I expect more of you to travel to Colorado. Are there exciting things to see there? Yeah.

There are. Are there exciting things to experience? Sure. Is there a thrill, a thrill of traveling to new places when you're part of a short-term mission trip?

Yes. Yes. But that's not why you must go. Not why we go. If God calls you to go, if God so blesses and provides so that you are able to go, making it possible for you to go, then make it count for God.

[10:41] That's so important. Make it count for His kingdom. Now this is all kind of introducing, an introduction to what Paul has written about here.

About his travels. He's a pioneer missionary. He traveled a number of places. How did he make that count for God? I think we can learn that from this passage.

Learn a number of things about it. So here's the first one. We see how Paul made his traveling count for God when we see his plans.

His plans for his missionary travels. Paul had it planned. He had it all mapped out. I'm sure he had even more details concerning his travels, his missionary endeavors.

More details than we have even recorded here in Scripture. Now we can go to the book of Acts and find more details about Paul's journeys. He didn't just kind of travel and go to these places off the cuff.

[11:45] He didn't just kind of on a whim get on his horse or donkey or put on his walking sandals and just head off to parts unknown.

It was all planned out. He had a plan for his missionary travels. And we, I think, see not only in the brief description that's given to us here, kind of the itinerary given here, but we can see it also when we study the book of Acts.

Now we're not going to do that tonight. You can do that some other time. But the book of Acts, a large part of it is taken up as an examination or as a detailing of Paul's missionary journeys.

It was all mapped out, all planned out. And that's the way it needs to be. Say you wanted to build a house and you hired a contractor, a carpenter, and you thought he was a good one.

And on the first day of work, he's supposed to get started, you travel out to the site to see how things are going and you get there and you're kind of surprised that the first delivery of lumber has arrived but you look and there's maybe a dozen two-by-fours and a box of nails.

[12:57] And that's all there is. And so you ask your carpenter, is that going to be enough for the house? And he says, and you're surprised to hear him say, well, we'll see. If we don't have enough, I'll just order some more.

And then immediately he goes over there and grabs a board and his hammer and some nails and he starts nailing a few two-by-fours together and lays them aside and he's just kind of nailing at random two-by-fours together and you say, well, where does all that go?

And he says, I don't really know yet. I'll figure it out. And you say, well, don't you have an architectural plan for my house?

And he says, no, not really. I don't usually mess with those things. I just kind of build as the Spirit leads me. Hey, would you pick up that board over there and help me?

You know, what kind of contractor would that be? You wouldn't want a contractor like that to build your house. That won't work with house building. And it won't work also with a missions strategy.

[14:02] Whether you're a church or a parachurch ministry, I guarantee you that VOM doesn't just go on a whim and send their people over there to help some pastor somewhere. Maybe they don't know where he is.

Maybe they have to look, but they'll find him somehow. There's a strategy involved in this. And there's a strategy certainly in the church for missions.

Now, we can learn a few things. I think see a few things here about Paul's strategy or his plans.

First, they were very precise.

I mean, precise. I mean, deliberately. Precise. Look at verse 23. He says, But now no longer having a place in these parts, alright, that doesn't mean there's nobody yet to be saved there where he is.

No more churches to be planted. He's just meaning that his pioneer mission work is finished.

Alright? What God had sent him to do, to lay the foundation, the groundwork, that job has been done.

[15:04] Alright? So, God is releasing him to move to the next thing. And so he says, And having a great desire these many years to come to you, whenever I journey to Spain, I shall come to you.

Now, that's part of his plan. Alright? I'm through here. That's clear. And I have my plan set and that is to come and see you on my way to Spain.

And what is his plan for going to Rome first? I mean, he has a reason why he's going to go there first and he tells us in verse 24, I hope to see you on my journey, on my journey to Spain, ultimately, and to be helped on my way there by you.

Alright? So he is really asking them to support him. To support him and to support the advance of the gospel to really the furthest reaches of the civilized world.

To Spain. So, here's his plan. And it's a long-term plan. Rome, then Spain. But there's more to his plan. He says in verse 25, but now, or we could even say, but first, before I do that, I'm going, literally, I'm on my way.

[16 : 25] I'm about to hit the road. I'm going to Jerusalem. I'm going to do that first. This is part of the plan. And the reason for this, he explains in the following verses and we'll look at that a little bit later.

Now, just adding that to the plan, we may question the wisdom of his plan. But he certainly has a plan. I mean, think about this. Paul is writing from the region of Macedonia, probably from Corinth. And he's writing and he is wanting to go to Rome and to do that, all he has to do is get on board a ship and sail due west and he'll go to Rome.

But instead, his plan is to travel some 2,000 miles out of the way in the opposite direction to go to Jerusalem. Now, that seems a little odd, but that's his plan.

And he, as we see in the text, has a good reason for it. And more than that, God has a reason for all this that you can see unfolding in the book of Acts and all that's going to happen to Paul in his journey to Jerusalem and then ultimately to Rome.

[17 : 39] God is orchestrating all this, but God has also given Paul a wisdom to make a plan and this is his plan and it's a very long-term one, but it is his plan.

So it's very precise. Second, Paul's plans were problematic. Now, this is an important thing to note. I think it's one of the proofs of the inspiration of Scripture because man writing a detail about his plan would probably just leave some of these things out.

You know, he would want to portray it as a perfect thing and working out perfectly and there are never any hindrances, never any roadblocks, but our plans, Paul's plans and ours as well are by their very nature, the nature of this fallen world, they're problematic.

Problematic. That is, they do not always work out according to our desire and that was certainly the case with Paul.

In fact, he mentions that here in verse 22. He says, I also have been much hindered from coming to you. Meaning, his plan all along was to go to Rome and that had been his plan for a long time, but he'd been hindered from coming.

[19 : 00] His plan was problematic. So, I've been hindered from coming to you even though he said in verse 23 that I have a great desire these many years to come to you.

That's his desire. That's his plan. Now, the word hindered, by the way, comes from a certain Greek word that means to cut into. That's the literal meaning of it. Or, to expand it a little bit, it means, or it's used in this way to impede one's course by cutting off his way.

That's what Paul meant. Every time I wanted to go, got ready to go, and planned to go, something would hinder me. Something would cut off my way. Something would impede my course.

Every turn of his path to go to Rome had been cut off all through those years that he had a desire to go there. It was his plan and it was God's plan, a God-ordained plan as well, but it was problematic.

There were hindrances by the devil. He admits that in a number of places. Romans 1.13, 1

Thessalonians 2.18. Also hindered by the Holy Spirit in Acts chapter 16 verses 6 through 8.

[20 : 16] His plan was hindered by the Holy Spirit. Hindered by other people. Galatians 5.7 He makes a reference to that. Now, what does this tell us? It tells us that we should make the best plans that we can make and then expect them to get messed up.

I'm serious. I'm not joking about that. You say, well, that doesn't sound fair. It doesn't seem right. But it's just the truth of it. And especially when it relates to, you know, your plans for missions or our mission strategy.

You can just expect them to get messed up. Just because you make plans to serve the Lord does not guarantee that the devil will not oppose them. In fact, there's a guarantee he will.

And just because you've made your plan to serve the Lord, there's no guarantee that other people won't oppose you or gum up the works. Sometimes God's people do that.

They gum up the works. And even though the circumstances of life, even though you have made your plan, the circumstances of your life will often stand contrary to the plans that you have made.

[21 : 37] And I would add to this, there are times when it may even appear that the Lord is against you. Rerouting you or hindering you or, you know, changing, not changing the ultimate plan but

adding some of the turns in the plan.

Maybe even it seems he has stopped you completely. Though it may seem like that that's a dead end only for God at some point to get you back on that original plan.

That's just the way it works. And so here is, and I'm trying to teach this in the context of missions and our mission strategy and specifically short-term mission projects.

Here's rule number one for short-term mission projects. Be flexible. Here's rule number two. Be patient.

Be patient. Those are two qualities that I know we all are very strong on. flexibility and patience.

Now that leads to a third feature of Paul's plan.

[22:52] Third, Paul's plans were persevering. Persevering, and they must be. Someone has said that the measure of a man is what it takes to stop him.

Now, I've got that in relation to a man but that would apply to a woman as well. So, if we are sure best we can tell, we've prayed, we have planned, we believe we're in God's will, going in the direction He would have us go, and so if we're sure that we're following God, honoring God-ordained plans, then we must stick to them, regardless of the hindrances, regardless of the detours that may come, regardless of obstacles.

We must stick to them and then simply watch God work it all out. Now, He may not work it out in the way we would desire, but remember, the plan, the ultimate plan, is what we're looking at.

Just think about Paul for a minute. You know from Scripture that Paul eventually did make it to Rome. Okay? You know that?

But not as soon as he wanted. Three years later, he made it to Rome. And he didn't make it there in the way he wanted. He arrived there as a prisoner.

[24:21] A prisoner of the Roman Empire. Did his plans to make it to Rome, did that work out? Yes. Did God bless through it?

Tremendously. More than we could possibly even know. In fact, remember the book of Acts. Luke, writing the book of Acts, he just ended it open-ended.

Ended it open-ended. It was an open-ended ending. That's even more redundant. He literally said, and the gospel continued, unhinderedly.

He ends the book of Luke with an adjective. Unhinderedly. That means the gospel was nonstopped. Even though Paul was in prison, the gospel continued.

And Paul was used mightily of God while he was in prison in Rome. Leading many, many people to Christ. Even many of those within the household of Caesar. Now, did his plans to make it to Spain, did that work out?

[25:24] We don't know. We don't know. Because Luke ends with Paul in prison in Rome. We don't know if he ever made it to Spain.

It is possible that Luke was, excuse me, Paul was released from prison for a time and traveled to Spain, maybe even to regions of Gaul and Germany and Britain.

It is possible. And then later to be re-arrested and beheaded during Nero's persecution. It is possible. Do we know that?

We don't really. There is a statement by Clement of Rome who wrote in the first century, one of the early church fathers, and he wrote this concerning Paul.

He said, To the whole world Paul taught righteousness and reaching the limits of the West, he bore his witness before rulers.

[26:26] That's what Clement said. Now, that's first century. So, I think probably good authority to assume that Paul did make it to Spain and maybe even further if we take Clement of Rome literally here.

All right. So, Paul's plans for his missionary travels. That's what we're talking about. And now, second, we see how Paul made his traveling count for God when we see his purposes for his missionary travels.

They have to have the right purpose. Good plan. They have to have the right purpose for going. And we can glean a number of purposes here. First, evangelism.

That would be number one on the list. I think it was for Paul. Evangelism. That is, preaching, proclaiming the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The good news. The saving gospel of Jesus Christ. Evangelism. And we have to go back really to verse 20 to see this purpose of Paul's. He said, I made it my aim to preach the gospel not where

Christ was named.

[27:39] All right. So, it was his aim to preach the gospel because he was called to a pioneer missionary vocation to preach it where Christ was not named.

Was not named. They didn't know him. Now, I would insert here, and I think it's very valid to make this point that in a real sense, our missionary strategy as a church must always include reaching to places where Christ is not named.

If we're going to obey and fulfill our obligation to the Great Commission, then we must go to the uttermost parts of the world.

And by definition, the uttermost parts of the world includes a number, a large number of places where the name of Christ does not exist. I think China would qualify there.

Even though the church is growing incredibly in China, there are still countless millions of Chinese people who do not even know him, never even heard of him, where Christ is not named.

[28:58] Our missionary strategy must include that. We have a church here in Bartlesville. You could argue that we have a church on every other block in this town.

All kind of different flavors and so forth, but there are churches everywhere you go. In America, 80 to 90% of the preachers coming out of seminaries stay right here in America.

Stay right here. Where we have a church in nearly every corner. I'm not suggesting that in America we don't have any more lost people. I'm not even suggesting that, like Paul said, well, you know, I don't have any more work here.

I must now go on. I'm not even suggesting that. There's plenty of churches that still need to be planted here and people who need to hear the gospel. I'm just making a point of the disproportion where there's gospel saturation here as opposed to many places in the world today where there is no gospel or very little gospel being preached.

And I would also add to that, and this I can add by experience, a large, larger than you might know and might think, a large number of preachers in other countries eventually, many of them eventually, come to the United States because it's easier to live here.

[30:20] I have confronted that in Ukraine. We've actually worked with some pastors. Pastors of some small churches there in Ukraine who their whole desire was to some way, somehow, get to America.

And what does that leave in Ukraine? A huge vacuum of men who are qualified to pastor and preach the gospel.

Alright, so, here's my point. We have to go where Christ is not named. That's a purpose. A purpose for missionary travels.

The second one would be fellowship. In fact, the rest of these purposes, Paul's purposes, don't have anything to do with evangelism in a direct sense. They have everything to do with connections with God's people, the saints.

And so, the second one is fellowship as a purpose for missionary travels. We see that in verse 24. I hope to see you on my journey, he said, he's speaking to the church at Rome, that I may enjoy your company for a while.

[31:35] Now, this was a two-way thing with Paul. Not only to enjoy their company, but for them to enjoy his company and to enjoy, to realize this very vital connection that Paul made for them.

These believers in Rome, a connection between them through Paul to Jerusalem, to other believers, Jews and Gentiles.

And this really is so key in missions, short-term mission project. This is so important for the purpose, an important purpose for the church here to be directly involved with a church there in another country.

Not so that we can somehow help them do everything. That might be part of it. And that comes in, of course, in other purposes.

But I mean just simply for them to know that Highland Park Baptist Church is vitally connected with a church in Ukraine or in China or wherever it may be.

[32:54] It is such an encouragement to the believers there that we serve the same Jesus and we have the same purpose, same gospel, same great commission.

And I'll tell you, I'll go even a step further and I was told this by a Ukrainian pastor. He said, even if all you do is come and the people, the unbelievers of this community know that you are here from America preaching the same gospel to know that it's the same Jesus, there is somehow a draw,

somehow in the unbeliever's heart there is some confirmation of the validity of this gospel, this fellowship.

So that's a purpose. Third, cooperation. Cooperation. This goes further than just the fellowship. It also includes ministry as well as evangelism.

But cooperation. Verse 24 says, I hope to see you on my journey and to be helped on my way there by you. Now, Paul's not just asking money for himself or other forms of support.

I think he's also asking for companionship as well. But he's not just asking for himself to make his work better or easier or to supply his needs.

[34 : 32] The whole point is that Paul wanted the church at Rome to have a connection with evangelizing the ends of the world. And so he's saying I want you to cooperate to be cooperatively.

I want you to be partners in the advance of the gospel around the world. I have such an encouragement to them and such a purpose for evangelism or for missionary travels, missionary journeys.

Number four very quickly, ministry. Ministry. And I don't mean ministry in the broad sense of the word like I'm a minister and Jonathan and Chris are ministers and I preach and each of the other two have their ministry areas and so forth.

I'm not talking about ministry in that sense. I'm talking about meeting people's needs. Ministry. Meeting people's needs in the name of Christ, of Jesus Christ.

Look at verse 25. But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. Minister to God's people.

[35 : 47] Let's read on further. Verse 26. For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem.

So he's describing his reason for going to Jerusalem. He's carrying with him funds, money.

Because the churches in Macedonia, Gentile churches primarily, almost exclusively, new believers, many of them, churches.

Because many of the churches there that have taken up this collection were new churches. Paul had planted them. And so, here's Paul taking the funds for the poor in Jerusalem.

Let's read on. It pleased them indeed and they are their debtors. They owed a debt. They felt they had a debt they needed to pay to the saints in Jerusalem, the Jews, Jewish believers primarily.

For if the Gentiles had been partakers of their spiritual things, salvation, their duty is also to minister to them in material things.

[37 : 06] It just seemed reasonable to them. You know, here's Paul, a Jew, who's come and he has shared the gospel with us, Gentiles, and the grace of God has been lavished upon us and we've been saved and so we've received a spiritual blessing.

It seems only right to us to do what we can to supply a spiritual, a physical blessing, a material blessing. It made good sense to them.

Therefore, when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit, I shall go by way to you to Spain, by way of you to Spain.

All right, so in reality, most of the Christians in our world today worship in abject poverty while we enjoy luxury.

Comfortable pews to sit in. I never will forget the first worship service I attended in that small village, Nikolaivka, Ukraine.

[38 : 17] In their little church, they didn't even have any chairs or pews or anything. We're getting ready for the worship service and I'm wondering, where are they going to sit on the floor or stand? And very shortly before the worship service started, some men brought in some bricks and some rough cut lumber.

I'm talking about where they've taken a tree log and ripped it four, five, or six times and made these long rough planks still have the bark on the edges of it.

Brought those in, set them on those bricks, those cinder blocks. They weren't cinders, some other kind of block. Made pews for these people to sit in. Now they did put some rugs and blankets and such over those things and they came in and sat on those things for a long time.

You think our worship service long. A long time. And many of them stood up around the outside of that little church.

And most of those people look at them, they're just farmers, poor, still reeling from the remnants of communism in Ukraine.

[39:29] And it's just incredible. Now think about it. And so the new believers, this is what was going on in Jerusalem. They were having, the poor in Jerusalem needed to be cared for.

And so these new believers in Macedonia and Achaia, they were poor. They were certainly poor. But they wanted to be a part of what God was doing in Jerusalem among the Jews.

What could they do? Give. They could give. Give what little they had. give. And so what about us? Some of you cannot go. Some of you cannot go to China, Ukraine, Mexico, Malawi, or wherever it may be.

Maybe even Colorado, you just can't make that journey. Some of you, most of you, are not going to preach. You could teach, you could do other things, but you can't do those other things, but you can give, right?

[40:35] You can give. And you're just thinking, you know, I can't do anything else. What can I do? To help those in another state or another country, help them and help those who need to go and want to go and support them and preach and evangelize and to train leaders and so forth, and I can help with my money and many of you do that, don't you?

You really do. Praise the Lord. All right, so his plans for his missionary travels, his purposes for his missionary travels, and there's one more. We see how Paul made his traveling count for God when we see his prayer, his prayer for his missionary travels, and not just his, but specifically the prayers of others.

Prayer, so vital in any work, for the Lord, but certainly vital for mission work. Verse 30 through to the end of the chapter, Paul is basically saying, will you pray for me?

That's really, sum it up that way. Will you pray for me? And I want you to look at it. First, he asks them or calls upon them for diligent prayer, to be diligent in it.

In fact, even to wrestle with it. Literally. Look at verse 30. Now, I beg you, we might even say this is Paul's SOS, you know, kind of a desperate call for help.

[42:11] I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive. Now, pay attention to that word, strive together with me in prayer to God for me.

All right? And he's not being selfish. He has a great task ahead of him and he cannot do it. He has this well mapped out plan and he can't accomplish that apart from their prayers.

And so he's saying strive together with me. That word strive is the same word that Jesus, was used of Jesus when he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, Luke 22, 44.

And it pictures prayer as wrestling. In fact, the very word here, strive is from the Greek word agon, from which we get our word agonize.

Agonize. Probably visually we would look at a runner who is running, a long distance runner specifically who is getting close to the finish line and everything in him is going into this running to win the race and he's agonizing.

[43:34] I mean, he can't hardly breathe anymore and his muscles are aching and so forth. He's agonizing. And so this is what Paul is asking them to do, to be diligent in prayer.

Don't give up. Pray for me. Boy, I tell you, I could really use that all the time. I could really use that in my journey to China.

This is not going to be like Ukraine. This will be quite different and more dangerous, though not to life or limb most likely, but it's just not the same.

I could really use your prayers. agonize with me together in prayer. Second, Paul calls for detailed prayer. You've got to be very specific, very detailed.

And look at the details needed in their prayers, starting there with verse 31. That I may be, here's what he said to pray for it, that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe, the unbelievers, deliver me from the unbelievers, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to saints, that is the offering I'm bringing, they would accept it, and that I may come to you with joy by the will of God and may be refreshed together with you, that I would make it to Rome.

[44:54] Those three things. He said pray. Very detailed, very specific things. That I might be delivered from unbelievers in Jerusalem because they're my enemies and they would like nothing better than to see me in prison or even killed, and that the gift from the Gentiles of Macedonia will be accepted by the Jews.

There was no guarantee that that would happen. It was quite a schism, still quite a reluctance for Jews to embrace the Gentiles, Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians.

There were still a number who were opposed to that or weren't quite sure about that. And so there's not a given that he would come to Jerusalem with this gift from the Macedonian Gentiles.

It's not a given that they would accept it. So pray that they would accept the gift in the right way.

And that as a result that this very gift would be used by God, I mean this is the implication that God would use this gift to bring Jews and Gentiles together to make unity within the church.

And then the third thing of course was that he might make it to Rome. Now did God answer these prayers? We've already covered a little bit of this. Well the middle prayer, the second one, that they would accept the gift, we don't really know that for sure.

[46:11] But I think we can assume it, Acts 23, 11, I think seems to suggest that the gift was accepted. But what about prayer 1 and 3? Well, actually the answer is a qualified yes to both.

Now that sounds real good, but I mean a qualified yes. There's a qualified yes. That is, as to the first prayer, the answer was yes and no. First prayer, that I would be delivered from unbelievers, my enemies.

The answer is yes and no. Because Paul was arrested while he was there in Jerusalem. He was tried, he was imprisoned, but he was rescued three times from lynching, one time from flogging, and one time from a plot to have him murdered.

So God answered the prayer. So the answer is yes and no. As to the second prayer that he would make it to Rome, the answer of course is yes, but. Yes, but.

Paul did make it to Rome, as we've said, and you know, but as a prisoner. And he made it there three years later. And then I would end this with just reading the Scripture, verse 33, and I would call it Paul's delight.

[47:33] delight. He calls for delight in prayer. To delight in it. For them and for him. And they ought to delight in it because of what it produces.

What does it produce? What did it produce in Paul? He said, now the God of peace be with you all. Amen. That's how he closed this off.

Now the implication is that Paul, you see, he's on his way to Jerusalem and he does not know what will happen to him when he gets there. He doesn't even know what's going to happen to him on the way there.

For all he knows, he might be killed, he might be imprisoned, badly wounded, whatever. For all he knows. But he's able to rest in peace.

Rest in the arms of God. Because they're praying for him. Thank you.