

Romans (15:25-29)

2000 Mile Detour

Part 96 - February 25, 2007

REDIRECTED FROM ROME

A Christian author named J. Wallace Hamilton wrote:

Every person's life is a diary in which he or she means to write one story and is forced to write yet another.

Is that you? It's me. I've been rerouted and redirected; my life is *nothing* like what I had envisioned it to be. I didn't go to seminary ... I went to film school!

Q: How often does even a day go exactly as you've planned?!

You get up, make a list (mental or Post-it note), and then come the interruptions the intrusions, and the unexpected challenges. And time just flies by - even when you're *not* having fun!

When we left off, Paul was telling the believers in Rome that:

... I have been longing for many years to see you, [and] I plan to do so when I go to Spain. - *Romans 15:23b-24 NIV*

Paul had gone all the way from Jerusalem to Illyricum, and now he plans to go to Spain. Literally the ends of the earth!

However ... that's how today's passage beings: "Now, however ..."

And then Paul describes the task that's going to take him *all* the way back to Jerusalem! Right where he started. That's 1000 miles each way! That's a 2000 mile detour!

Today, we're talking about detours. Let's read:

Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there. For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings. So after I have completed this task and have made sure that they have received this fruit, I will go to Spain and visit you on the way. I know that when I come to you, I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ. - *Romans 15:25-29 NIV*

WHY DID HE GO?

“Macedonia” and “Achaia” were the northern and southern regions of Greece where Paul planted many of his churches.

Q: Why would he put Spain on hold, and travel 2000 miles out of his way - instead of just sending someone else?

He was even warned in Caesarea, by Agabus the prophet, that he’d be persecuted by the unbelieving Jews, and imprisoned by the unbelieving Gentiles (*Acts 21:8-11*).

[Luke says] When we heard this, we and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. - *Acts 21:7-12 NIV*

But he went. And he *was* persecuted, and he *was* imprisoned.

Q: Why did Paul feel so compelled to go?

1. He wanted to ensure the integrity of the offering.

So after I have completed this task and have made sure that they have received this fruit (*15:28*)



This is a sizable offering. He wouldn’t be traveling 2000 miles if it was twenty bucks! And this isn’t paper money. This is a big ol’ load of coins and precious metals. So, he wants: To ensure the integrity of the offering. But, he could’ve hired someone to protect it. There’s another, much more compelling reason for Paul to go.

2. To interpret the significance of the offering.

Throughout Romans, Paul has expressed a burden to unite Jewish and Gentile believers. And this offering can do just that! Paul’s converts in Macedonia and Achaia were mostly Gentile. The offering will be given strictly to the Jewish believers.

He could’ve motivated their generosity out of love and charity. But he chooses to use ethnically provocative language and logic:

“They” [Gentiles] were pleased to do it, and indeed “they” [the Gentiles] owe it to “them” [the Jewish Christians]. For if the “Gentiles” have shared in the “Jews” spiritual blessings, “they” [those Gentiles] owe it to the “Jews” to share with them their material blessings. (*15:27*)

When James, Peter, and John officially recognized and blessed Paul’s ministry to the Gentiles, Paul says they asked one thing:

They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jews. All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor ... - Galatians 2:9-10 NIV

Imagine Paul returning home with a parade of *Gentile* believers (from Macedonia and Achaia), shouldering a cargo of precious coins for their *Jewish* brothers and sisters in Christ. It's a crowing achievement and a confirmation of his work. But this isn't about Paul; it's about glorifying a gracious God. These are the very people Paul persecuted!

This is a demonstration - a pageant - of grace! Not only are the once-enemies of the Jews bringing them aid and relief - but their once-chief-persecutor will be leading the parade! Paul understood that he *himself* was part of the offering.

Q: Do you know how Paul finally got to Rome?

A: He was imprisoned for two years at Caesarea, sailed to Crete, blown off course, shipwrecked at Malta, and imprisoned in Rome.



That's some set of detours! And every step of the way, he led people to the Lord! And it's a very good lesson for us: Life is a series of detours. The Lord rarely takes us from point "A" to point "B" in a straight line. We all have our detours and our discouragements but we don't all react or respond to them as Paul did.

People, who are faithful, joyful, peaceful, and gracious, don't have *fewer* detours and disappointments than those who aren't.



But, they respond to them differently. Do you know why? Because they *perceive* them differently. We see things, not as they are, but as *we* are. If I have a "Why me?!" attitude, I'll be devoured by my detours. But if I take a "What now?" approach, I'll defeat the detours, and in the process, grow in my faith, joy, peace, and grace.

There's a key to this holy joy in life. And there's a great example of it, right here in this passage. When Paul repeats a word, I guarantee it's for emphasis.

For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. They were pleased to do it ... (15:26-27a)

They didn't give begrudgingly, they gave gladly. In fact, Paul was boasting about these people (2 Cor. 8-9) when he wrote that:

... God loves a cheerful giver. - 2 Corinthians 9:7 NIV

But that's only part of it. Look what it says right after that:

They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them



They gave out of an abundance of joy, *and* it was their obligation to do so. This is key to developing a right heart.

- We must take delight in our duty.

When it comes to attitude, there are four levels of Spiritual motivation and maturity:

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| 1. Survival | Do the bare minimum to stay “saved” . |
| 2. Duty | Do what’s right because God says to. |
| 3. Opportunity | Do what’s right because my contribution can make a difference. |
| 4. Delight | Do what’s right because I’m part of an offering, I’m leading a parade, and I’m bringing glory to my greatest treasure! |

Which stage are you at most of the time? There’s a spiritual principle for moving to “delight”: You have to *talk* to yourself, rather than *listen* to yourself.

Two natures beat within my breast, the one is foul, the other blessed. The one I love, the other I hate, the one I feed, will dominate. - *Anonymous*

The happiest aren’t those for whom life has been easiest. It’s those who’ve fed themselves a steady diet of truth and the truth has set them free, and freedom is delightful.

Q: So, did Paul ever get to Spain?

A man named Clement of Rome sat directly under Paul’s teaching, and Clement wrote that Paul reached “the extreme limits of the West” (*1 Clement 5:7*) which most-likely meant Spain. Truth is: we don’t really know ... and it doesn’t really matter.



God often gives us goals that are not intended to be reached, but are calculated to lead us to where He could get us, no other way.

[Which is why] We must hold onto our plans with open hands, and close them only to pray

And finally, Paul says:

I know that when I come to you, I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ (*15:29*)

There’s no question that the measure of blessing Paul was finally able to take to Rome, was significantly enriched and greatly enhanced by the detours he had to face along the way.