

## Plans of God Romans 15:22-24

One of the things that is fascinating is to look at the twists and turns of life. There is no way that you could have written your life where you would be where you are right now. Through all the up and downs, low points and highs, all the expected events and unedited turns and detours, we realize that there is someone else writing our stories. Our lives have changed and changed and changed. Some of those changes we celebrate and some of those we mourn and weep over. But it indicates that something that we too often forget - that there is sovereign God who is control of everything and everyone in my life. He is in control of the history and circumstances and relationships of my life. He is the one who decided beforehand my gifts, talent, intellect, personality, weaknesses before there was even me. What all of life should indicate is that there is someone else writing our stories. And even when I do not understand all that is going on, I realize that He can be trusted.

Now saying all of that, you might agree. But here is the incredible aspect of life: God wants us to plan under his sovereign hand what we should do and where we should go. He wants us to plan objectives and goals for our lives. And whether we realize it or not, we all make plans and have objectives. They might be short term such as what I want to accomplish today. We have a plan when we get out of bed. It might be simply just to get through the day but we have a reason for getting up in morning and crawling out of bed. We plan longer term objects such as where to go on vacation, or how we want our career to proceed, or when we want to retire with what kind of income we want to draw from. But all of us plan in life. It is one of the ways that we image forth God. We are made in his image and therefore like the planning and purposeful God we have plans and purposes for ourselves and those around us.

And we also realize that God has saved us. He has redeemed us and brought us into his family. He has placed us uniquely in the body of Christ with reason and purpose. And often we think that our Christian lives and ministries should just happen. God is the guide and we are to follow, and there is a sense where that is true, but one of the ways that he leads and guides is through the use of our minds, plans and intentionality. So we are to have objectives as a church and as individual Christians as we seek to live for the glory of Christ. We are to make plans. So that, as we rear our children we do so in a way where we have objectives and plans for our children that are not just secular in nature but are preeminently spiritual. We have regular and planned conversations. We do things and read the Bible and have them share. We do that in our marriages. We seek to help one another grow. We look and plan for opportunities to grow into the image of Christ and don't just hope that happens. And as a church we do not just hope that we can make and mature disciples for the glory of God but we plan for that in all that we do - in the missions that we invest in, the relationships that we cultivate and the things that we do in church.

As we consider our passage this morning we realize that Paul under the sovereign hand of God did everything with forethought and planning and intentionality. He didn't wander aimlessly as he sought to glorify God and carry out the task among the Gentiles but he had a plan. And I wonder as individual believers, do we have a plan for ministry? If God has placed you in the body of Christ to be active in the making and

maturing of disciples, how are you going to do that? Are you seeking to grow your faith so that you have something to give to others? Are you asking and planning how you can be a witness of Jesus Christ to those who are outside of Christ? Do you ever build relationships with the goal of presenting Christ? Are you active in building redemptive relationship in the church to help cultivate Jesus Christ in others? Or are you just hoping that it will somehow all take place? That you children will somehow follow Christ and have a love for him, or that you will grow to become a godly couple that reflects Jesus Christ's relationship with his church, or that you would be a blessing with others in the household of faith? God wants each of us to use our minds to plan how God can be most glorified in our lives. And I want us to see that this morning and really be challenged to have objectives both near and longer range, and then plan how they can come to fruition under the sovereign hand of God. I want us to see a couple things this morning: one is Paul's godly plans and then draw some applications for us in our lives and ministries.

1. We need to see Paul's godly plans. vv. 22-24

One of the things that is amazing about Paul is how busy and industrious he was. He was always thinking about the magnification of Jesus Christ. There was not the thought of somehow fading into the sunset and leaving the work for someone else. I have done my part. Now it is time for others. And it is amazing how we think about ministry. Those who are younger who have responsibilities at work and home think that older individuals who do not have the hectic schedules that they have should be active in ministry. And they should do the planning and heavy lifting. The problem is when you have that attitude of wanting to be served and not serving or even seeking to serve, it does not somehow vanish when you get older. You do not all of a sudden transition from one who demands to be served to a servant's heart. God wants all of us to be active.

And for those who are older, it is easy to excuse ourselves because we realize that we do not have the energy and zeal and even the intellectual capacities that we had when we were younger. And here is the amazing thing about this passage. Paul is not a young man here. He is probably in the twilight of his life and he is still planning and dreaming and has intentionality about how to make much of Christ, and how to take to the gospel to places that have never heard about Christ. And our capacities certainly change when we are older, but is there anything more worthy that our service to Christ with the capacities that we have left for Christ? We need to purpose and plan wherever we are in life to be used of our great God.

So look at what Paul says here, "**This is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you.**" Paul's plan was to come to Rome at a much earlier time. He no doubt planned, but as we see in the text here, those plans were altered. And Paul gives the reason, and that is that he wanted to fully preach the gospel and to plant churches through the region from Jerusalem to Illyricum. He wants Jesus to be known to those who had never heard. And this is where we live in what is known as the providence of God. Even though we plan, God is the one who ultimately directs our steps and alters our course. And it is amazing to look back at even chance encounters or if we were not in a certain place at a certain time, how our lives would have been so different. I can remember after I finished university I wanted to go directly into the

ministry. And it seemed like the opportunities seemed to close for one reason or another. So we moved back to Nova Scotia. Shelia's uncle Bruce told us of a church plant in Dartmouth to get in contact with. I sat down and had lunch with him, and we ended up moving to Dartmouth which we never planned to do. It was through Bill Emberley that we met the church at Windsor and we have been here for 22 years. We make plans but it is God who orders our steps and redirects them as he sees fit. Just a slight alteration here or there would have changed our lives and we would have never knew any of you, and had the blessing of being involved in your lives. God hinders and redirects our steps. He alters our plans but we keep planning and keep trusting him. I kept planning for ministry. I planned by getting the education necessary.

And that is exactly what we see in the life of the apostle Paul. Look at verse 23, **“But now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions, and since I have longed for many years to come to you.”** Paul's plans have changed for a couple of reasons. You can see that in this verse with the word “since” being used twice. First, since there is no longer any room for his work that God had specifically called him to. The gospel had been well established in the area that he ministered in. New Testament churches had matured to take the gospel throughout that area. God had called him to a specific task to bring the gospel to places and people that had no gospel witness. And the second reason is Paul's longing to see these believers. This longing could have come through meeting and working with Pricilla and Aquila, and hearing about the church and their love for Christ. He has a real desire to meet and fellowship with these believers.

So look at what he says here in verse 24, **“I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while.”** Notice the word “hope” here. Paul is still planning but it is still under God's sovereign control. And he says he hopes to go to Spain. Paul says this for a few of reasons. One is that they would know that he is not coming to somehow take over the church. Paul knew this was a mature church that was ministering for the glory of Christ. He was not coming there to usurp the leadership. He also said this so that they would not be insulted when he did come. His intentions were not to stay. This was not his final destination. Although he wanted to impart a spiritual gift to them and minister to them, with keeping with the unique ministry that God had given him he was to moved on. And the third reasons he brings up Spain is that he would need their help in this gospel venture. He realizes his need and support of others. We are never in ministry or can accomplish what God has for us. We need our Lord, but we also need others to grow, but also need others to help others grow. None of are an island. We all have limitations. God has made us that way, and Paul needs these believers at Rome to accomplish his plans for going to Spain.

2. So how do we apply to this to our lives?

This passage has so many practical applications as we look at the life of the apostle Paul and his ministry.

One is that the task of making and maturing disciples is not done. And there are two ways that this is applicable to our lives. One is that God has given us this task, and we meet people every day that do not know Christ. There is much of the world and

much of our communities that are unevangelized. God has placed us in these places to be his witness. Here is Paul, and after all he has done, all the hardship that he has endured. Isn't it time just to rest and catch your breath. Paul would say no, because there are still places that have not heard of Jesus Christ. This is that amazing thing that back then Spain was known as the end of the world. Paul was willing to go to the end of the world to make known Jesus Christ. His task was not done. And our task is not done. There are still people who curse the name of Jesus rather than praise his name. They need to hear the gospel of Christ. When we look at the church people are still not fully formed into the image of Christ. They need to see Christ.

And the other aspect is not only is this task not complete, we realize that God is not done with us in this task. He still wants and plans to use us as his instruments in this fallen world as instruments that bring his grace both to the saved and unsaved. It is not time for you to say well I want to concentrate on other things, or it is time for me to rest and let others take over the mantle. Listen to what Paul says in Philippians 3:13, **“Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead.”** We are not fully formed but neither are others. God wants us to be active in his mission. The task is not done. God wants us to be active.

Another way that we can apply this text is to realize although we plan, it is ultimately God who is directing our steps in ministry. We have to be open to many possibilities and opportunities that God gives us in our lives. And there are a couple of thoughts. One is, and we have often heard this, if God closes one door he often opens another. There are some that think there is only one way or one ministry that they are called to. I can remember one person coming to me and they wanted to be involved in a certain ministry. The problem was that someone else was already involved in it. I suggested another ministry that needed help and would be so blessed if they were involved. But they were so locked in that they would not even consider it. God had closed the door on the ministry that they wanted to do. And this is where we have to be open. It is not about what we want to do, but ultimately about God, and if there is a need then we should seek to be active for the glory of God. In fact, if one door is shut we ought to turn to another door and go through it. Remember, it is about his glory. Maybe there are not even any formal ministry opportunities available. Read a book with someone that has been a blessing for you. Start to invite people over for a meal or go out for dinner. Do a prayer time with someone. Don't wait for people to ask you - get busy with whatever doors are opened.

Also, the second thing about this point is that God blesses when we plan. He might change the plan through his providence, but God blesses when we make concrete plans to glorify Him. It might be that we were not able to do what we wanted to do. But since we were planning and seeking to do ministry God will ultimately direct our feet and our course in another direction, but he will direct our path.

Another way that we apply this passage is to just keep going. Ministry in and of itself is not for the faint-hearted. Paul kept going. There were many times his plans because of obstacles and opposition that they were altered, but he kept going. He kept on seeking to make much of Christ. He kept that goal even of coming to Rome and meeting these believers and then going on to Spain before him. So often at the least opposition that we face we are willing right away to throw in the metaphorical towel

and conclude it was not his will. Maybe God is causing us to mature and be ready for that specific callings in our life. I can remember wanting a desiring to be in full time ministry when we were in Dartmouth. I wanted to preach weekly, and this was a good desire that God ultimately accomplished. And yet those years of waiting were so valuable. Learning ministry, being faithful in things I never thought I would do all for the Lord. Learning through many of trials and temptations of a secular occupation that I might understand and even apply the Word of God to the heart and life of others. We might not understand this detour or that detour but God's ways are so much greater and his wisdom so much greater than ours. But we need to keep going and keep serving and keep striving in those goals and plans that we make for the Lord. We do not even know if Paul made it to Spain. The commentators are mixed on whether he did or did not. But Paul never stopped planning to do great things for God.

And let me name one last application: ministry cannot be done in isolation. We need others, and we need their help. Most of us, if not all us, are not called to the specific ministry of Paul to preach Christ where he has never been heard. There are some that are called. And we praise God for them. But they are never sent out in isolation. They need support. And that support helps them. It might be prayer or financial aide or whatever. And we also realize the help of others is precious. Paul always had others with him. He always had a team of believers in all of his missionary enterprises. And that is what he is seeking from the Roman Church. The help could be financial or co-labourers, or just individuals to refresh and encourage, but Paul needed others to carry out the task that God had given him. We need others for the task that God has given us.

There are other applications that we could make of these verses, but maybe these application have no bearing in your life because you are simply not active in ministry. Ministry is something someone else does, but not something you do. God has saved us to be not passive but active. Ask about Junior church or help out in the sight and sound or maintenance in the church. Look around you at some that might need a friend or encouragement. Start to invite or witness to people in your neighbourhood or workplace. But seek to make opportunities. Look for them and plan them. And realize the glory of being involved in the eternal plans of God. Could there be anything greater for your life in the here and now. C.T. Studd wrote the poem "Only One Life." Let me read three of the stanzas as we close this morning:

**"Only one life, a few brief years, Each with its burdens, hopes, and fears;  
Each with its days I must fulfill, living for self or in His will;  
Only one life, 'twill soon be past, Only what's done for Christ will last.**

**When this bright world would tempt me sore, When Satan would a victory score;  
When self would seek to have its way, Then help me Lord with joy to say;  
Only one life, 'twill soon be past, Only what's done for Christ will last.**

**Give me Father, a purpose deep, In joy or sorrow Thy word to keep;  
Faithful and true what e'er the strife, Pleasing Thee in my daily life;  
Only one life, 'twill soon be past, Only what's done for Christ will last."**

**"I know that cricket would not last, and honour would not last, and nothing in this world would last, but it was worthwhile living for the world to come."**

**As I believe I am now nearing my departure from this world, I have but a few things to rejoice in; they are these:**

- 1. That God called me to China and I went in spite of utmost opposition from all my loved ones.**
- 2. That I joyfully acted as Christ told that rich young man to act.**
- 3. That I deliberately at the call of God, when alone on the Bibby liner in 1910, gave up my life for this work, which was to be henceforth not for the Sudan only, but for the whole unevangelized World.**

**My only joys therefore are that when God has given me a work to do, I have not refused it."**