

## 96-02-09b

Well, we had sort of an unpredictable break there due to our tape machine, but we're back now. And we just have a little bit left to cover this evening in Romans. And what I'd like to do is to substantiate the idea that we have established here in the first part of the first chapter with regard to the mission that Paul sees for himself here in this opportunity with the Romans and in writing this letter.

He, as we have seen, identifies himself as an apostle separated to the gospel of God. He is a servant of God. In Paul's mind, primarily, his mission is to bring about the obedience that is a part of faith or that springs from faith.

And to clarify this, we're going to look at a couple of places where Paul talks about his mission and talks about his goal as he ministers to believers. So, turn with me a few pages over to Ephesians. We know, of course, that this is really the Laodicean letter.

It no doubt made its way to Ephesus at some point, but it was originally written to the church at Laodicea. And in Ephesians 1.15-23, Paul gives the content of the prayer that he prays for these believers. This is the goal that he has.

This is what he hopes will take place. He says, I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers. And then he gives what his prayer is.

This is what he hopes for them. That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit characterized by wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of him. That word knowledge there is epinosis.

The eyes of your understanding having been enlightened so that you may know. And then he gives three things. This is what believers should know because the eyes of our heart have been opened.

The Holy Spirit ministers to us that you may know, first of all, what is the hope of his calling? And this is that calling that we saw in Romans 1. What is the expectation? What is the ultimate outcome that can be ours as a result of this calling? Secondly, what are the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints? Notice that both of these are forward looking or future looking. The hope of our calling is the ultimate sanctification that will be ours. The reward and the opportunity to reflect the glory of Jesus Christ in the eternal future.

And the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints is also something that will be revealed on that day. And what is the exceeding greatness of his power toward us who believe? Now keep in mind, Paul is writing another letter to another group of believers, but his goal is the same. He wants believers to understand the Christian life and the opportunity and the potential that we

have in this life because of the work of Christ.

The exceeding greatness of his power toward us who believe. According to the working of his mighty power which he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead. Once again we have that ultimate expression of God's power in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And these two verses of course are that section where all five Greek words for power are used. In Paul's mind, the raising of Christ from the dead is the greatest expression of God's power. The fullness of him who fills all in all.

So this is Paul's goal and this is Paul's prayer. And this is what motivates him to do, to fulfill his calling, to do the work of an apostle. You can flip over a page and see the rest of this prayer in Ephesians chapter 3 verses 4 through 10.

Paul picks up the thread of this thought and he says, For this reason, in chapter 3 verse 1, For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus, for you Gentiles, if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, and this reminds us of Romans 1.1, how that by revelation he made known to me the mystery, as I have briefly written already, by which when you read you may understand my knowledge and the mystery of Christ, which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to his holy apostles and prophets. And this is the content of the gospel. Once again, it isn't just salvation from the lake of fire, it isn't just redemption by the blood of Christ, but that the Gentiles, in verse 6, should be fellow heirs of the same body and partakers of his promise in Christ through the gospel.

Remember, heirship is something above and beyond salvation. Inheritance in the kingdom and inheritance in the eternal future is something that is a result of what happens after salvation. Of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of his power.

To me, who am less than the least of all saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God, who created all things through Jesus Christ, to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places. The things that God does in the church prove his point before the angels, both elect and fallen. This has been called the angelic conflict.

It's a part of God's larger purpose in human history. And what God does in us as believers through this message that Paul preaches accomplishes God's purpose before the angels according to the eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. So once again we see that Paul's mission, Paul's message, Paul's purpose is to give believers in Jesus Christ what they need to accomplish their purpose after salvation in the plan of God.

We see this also in verses 14 through 19 of this same chapter where Paul continues his prayer. He says, For this reason I bow my knee to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named. And this is what Paul prays in verse 16, that he would grant you, believers, according to the riches of his glory to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

This is something that is a potential for believers. It's not already an accomplished fact. That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

That you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height, to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. That is Paul's calling, to preach the gospel that will bring that about, to transmit the information about the plan of God, the character of God, the purpose of God, so that we can come to that knowledge. That's what he's trying to accomplish in his letter to the Laodiceans and that's what he's trying to accomplish in his letter to the Romans.

We find this in virtually all of Paul's writings. We'll just take a look at a couple more. In Philippians chapter 1, verse 6, Paul says, I am confident of this very thing, that he who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.

This good work is the object of Paul's ministry. He says, It is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart. Both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace.

For God is my witness how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ, and this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment. Paul continues to preach this gospel so that people will come to knowledge and through that knowledge, their love will abound more and more. We know that the command that Jesus left us, By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, that you love one another.

Where does that love come from? Do we just decide to have it? Are we spurred on to have it by exhortation? Where does that love come from? We know that that love from Romans 5.5 is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. How does he do that? Paul tells us here, that your love abounds in knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense until the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. That's what Paul is trying to bring about.

That's the purpose of his ministry. We find the same thing in Colossians 1, verses 3-12, and in verses 24-29. I'll leave that for you to read, but that's where Paul talks about the worthy walk, the walk that is pleasing to God in every respect.

How do we obtain that walk? That's Paul's goal. Paul wants to bring about the obedience that is a part of faith, the obedience that springs from faith, the obedience that glorifies God among believers. That's why he writes these letters, and that's why he's writing this epistle to the Romans.

Now, as we continue in Romans 1, if I can get back to it, Paul says in verse 8, First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. This community of believers in Rome, even though they haven't been ministered to by an apostle, have received the Word of God through word of mouth, through believers speaking the truth to one another in love. There have been believers that have been schooled in the faith in Jerusalem and in Antioch and in other places, and there was a lot of trade and travel, commerce to and from Rome.

So believers that had the word of truth have brought it there. And just through word of mouth, this group of believers have responded, and their faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. Now, once again, when Paul says the whole world, we recognize that this is a figure of speech.

I doubt that the Aborigines in South America had heard of the faith of the Romans, but throughout the world in which these people moved, the Roman Empire, the area in which it could be known, it was known. For God is my witness, he says in verse 9, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers. And once again, we will not delve into this in detail, but in passing we might note that there is scriptural precedent for praying for believers that we've never met.

Praying for believers because we know about their circumstances, we know about the challenges that they face and the opportunities that they have, and because we have principles of the word of God in our soul, we can pray for believers without having met them, without knowing them. But you will also notice that Paul does have information about these believers. He has mutual acquaintances, mutual friends, as we will see next time, and he is well aware of their circumstances and their situation, and he can pray intelligently on their behalf.

He says, I make request, in verse 10, if by some means, now at last, I may find a way in the will of God to come to you. For I long to see you that I may impart to you some spiritual gift so that you may be established. That is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith, both of you and me.

And once again, we see running through this the thread of Paul's mission and Paul's ministry. And we cannot emphasize too strongly here at the outset that this letter and this ministry, the desire that Paul has to come to these people, is to strengthen them in the faith, to orient them to the plan of God and the purpose of God, to the possibilities that are ours as believers because of the work of Jesus Christ. That is the reason for the writing of this letter.

This letter is a stand-in until an apostle can be there personally to impart these truths and to edify and build up these believers. And this epistle will be the textbook that believers who are currently teaching in Rome will use until Paul and Peter and others can come and formally organize them as a church and train them up in the faith. So, if there's one thing that we bring away from our introduction, it is the context in which this letter is set.

Because everything in this letter applies to us because we are believers, we are Gentiles, we are seeking to have the obedience that is a part of faith, that springs from faith. That's our goal. And this letter is written to us just as much as it was written to those Roman believers.

We face the same issues, we face the same challenges, and this letter is going to equip us to achieve that obedience of the faith and to accomplish the purpose that God has for our lives. And as we travel through the different subjects and the different lines of reasoning and lines of argument that Paul presents here, keeping this context in our mind will help us understand it. It will help us realize why he is saying what he's saying, who it is he's talking to, and what it is he's talking about.

And, of course, that's very helpful when you're tackling a difficult book. And when we pick up our study next time, we will fulfill the promise I gave you earlier by going to the end of the book and seeing the inclusio, or the set of brackets, that Paul places around this very important information. We have seen the left-hand bracket, and next time we will see the right-hand bracket.

And you will find that without the center section, this would still make a very sensible letter. Paul virtually picks up the thread at the end of the book that he leaves off here in the middle of chapter 1. So that's where we will pick up next time. Father, we thank you for the privilege we have of studying your Word.

We thank you for the exciting prospect we have of being ministered to as so many generations of believers have by the Apostle Paul and the information that he desires to share with us. We pray that as we examine these truths, that God the Holy Spirit will make them real and understandable to us, and that it will accomplish the purpose that Paul wrote them down to accomplish, that God the Holy Spirit will be able to have His perfect work in us and make us complete with a view toward the day of Jesus Christ. We ask these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.