

## A Few Thoughts for the Hunkered-Down

Wednesday, May 27, 2020

# ***Did Paul Make it to Spain? (Steve Didn't!)***

*I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to visit you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while. —Romans 15:24*

The other evening, I got a phone call from an old high school friend, retired and living in California. Steve calls from time to time just to catch up and it is always a pleasure to hear from him. I don't know, however, if Steve was so pleased to hear from me, as halfway through our conversation I posed a question. "Any plans for this summer?" It's a question which just popped out with little thought on my part, as it usually makes for interesting conversation around this time of year. But this is a different kind of year. He then explained quite a list of plans and journeys which had been arranged and recently cancelled. Realizing my rudeness, I then asked if there were any other sore subjects which I could bring up. Steve is a very gracious man, and for a friend like that I am grateful.

When I hear of travel plans being disturbed, I often think of Paul telling the Romans of his plans to take the Gospel of Christ to Spain. Paul was quite a planner, and his trip to Spain was most elaborate. When Paul expressed his desire to go to Spain he was probably in Corinth. He wrote to the Romans, longing to go directly to visit them, but already committed to first taking his relief offering to Jerusalem. His plan was to take the collection to Jerusalem and then sail to Spain with a major stop off in Rome. Rome was to be a base of operations and supply for this significant undertaking. The Letter to the Romans was written as a kind of introduction of himself to the believers in Rome. This was the plan.

Did Paul ever make it to Rome? No one knows with certainty, but we do know most definitely that his original plans were significantly derailed! Paul went to Jerusalem where he was arrested. He did make it to Rome but as a prisoner, and he stayed there for two years under house arrest. There he was able to preach the Good News freely. So ends the Book of Acts, and we do not know with any certainty whether his journey to Spain ever materialized. I tend to think that it did not, as there is no historic record of such a trip, but I would not be surprised if he did make it that far west. We just don't know.

Paul's Spanish plans have long been a fascination to me for a number of reasons. It just doesn't seem right that such a great saint, an apostle no less, should be so set on such a noble expedition and not have it actually happen. Or did it happen despite an

unexpected delay? We do know that whether Paul did the preaching or whether it was another, the Good News of Jesus did reach Spain without much more delay. Paul's planning has set me to pondering, and there are a few lessons which I have discerned:

1.) We Are to Make Plans & Pursue Visions: Paul's energy, foresight and optimism were exciting and contagious. He was no cautious, shrinking violet, and we should not be either. His life and ambition were meant to be an example to all of us. Oh, that I had one percent of the vim and vision that was Paul's!

2.) Leave those Plans & Visions in God's Hands: Here is where the Apostle is most impressive. It is easy to be aimless and passive as a defense against becoming disappointed in our plans. Many have had their hopes dashed, and as a result avoided hoping for much of anything thereafter. Others become so rigidly ambitious in their plans that they become unglued when dreams do not come true. I must confess that I choose my goals carefully as I find it very painful to have failed in an endeavor. Paul stands as a shining example of flexibility and continued trust in God. He knew how to dream and press on, and to keep on dreaming and pressing on even when "Plan A" came to naught. By Paul's faith and way of thinking, when Plan A failed, that meant that God was preparing a Plan A+!

3.) Keep a Godly Confidence Through it All: Herein lies our present assignment. This is a season of dashed plans for just about all of us. This is a season when faith is tested. Paul kept a confident faith, and now is a time to seek that same grace from God. And having said that, I must also be clear that Paul felt life's pains and joys very keenly. His letters exude a confident faith, and if you read them carefully you will see that they are also loaded with a range of deep and often painful emotions.

We don't know if Paul ever made it to Spain, and neither do we know just how our present plans will fare. What we do know is that God is in control, and if our kingdom plan does not materialize, then God must be working on a better one for us.

Blessings,

Pastor Jim

*Comfort, we ask you, most gracious God, all who are cast down and faint of heart amidst the sorrows and difficulties of the world: and grant that, by the quickening power of the Holy Spirit, they may be lifted up to you with hope and courage, and enabled to go upon their way rejoicing in your love; through Jesus Christ our Lord. —Richard Meuz Benson, 1824-1915*

*In times of despair, O God, rain showers of gentleness upon us, that we may be kindly one to another and also to ourselves. Renew in us the spirit of hope. Even in the depths of the darkness, may we hear the approach of the One who harrows hell and greets even Judas with a kiss. —Jim Cotter*