

Paul asks for prayer support

Paul was very concerned that his forthcoming visit to Jerusalem should go well. He asks the Christians at Rome to help him by their praying. ³⁰*Now I urge you, brothers and sisters, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me* ³¹*that I may be delivered from those who are disobedient in Judea and that my service for Jerusalem may prove acceptable to the saints,* ³²*so that I may come to you in joy by the will of God and find refreshing in your company.* ³³*May the God of peace be with you all. Amen.*

1. He believes in the power of their praying

1. Firstly, we note that he believes in the power of their praying. If you respect the Lord Jesus Christ, he says, do this not for me but for the Lord Jesus Christ. He pleads with them 'by the love of the Spirit'. Paul has never been to Rome. But he can take it for granted that they love him as God's servant, as he loves them as God's people. If this love-relationship is to be practical it will show itself in prayer.

2. He knows that prayer involves energy and workmanlike zeal

2. He knows that prayer involves energy and workmanlike zeal. 'Strive together with me in your prayers to God for me', he says. Prayer is difficult because it always faces spiritual opposition. Getting ourselves to the point of praying often involves the fiercest conflict.

3. Specific requests

3. What were the precise things they were to pray for? First, they are to pray for his safety, that he may be 'delivered from those who are disobedient in Judea'. Next they are to pray that his financial gift to Jerusalem may be well received, that his 'service for Jerusalem may prove acceptable to the saints'. It was very important to Paul that he should keep a good relationship between the gentile law-free Christians and the Christians in Jerusalem. He did not want there to be two Christian movements in the world, a Jewish one and a gentile one. It was vital for the future of the church for Paul to keep in a good relationship with the Christians in Jerusalem.

(i) His safety

(ii) The reception of his financial gift

(iii) That he would come to them in joy

There was a third item for which he wanted their prayers. He said he wanted them to pray that he would come to them in joy by the will of God. But did Paul get his prayers answered? One part of his prayer was answered! The Christians at Jerusalem received him warmly. Paul came to Jerusalem and – says Acts 21:17 – 'the brothers received us gladly!'

Answers

(i) A warm reception

Was Paul delivered from the disobedient? Yes, he was but in a rather unexpected way. Paul appealed to Caesar¹. Porcius Festus, the Roman governor, said, 'You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar you shall go'². Paul sailed as a prisoner, being taken to Rome in about September to October AD59. He arrived there in about February AD60. He had prayed and wanted them to pray, 'so that I may come to you in joy by the will of God and find refreshing in your company'³. He got his prayers answered, but in a surprising way. In Rome he must have been released for a short time. 1 Timothy and Titus belong to this period after he was released. He said to the Philippians, 'I want you to know, brothers

¹ Acts 25:11

² Acts 25:12

³ 15:32

• Often, when things are going wrong, they are going right!

(iii) God's peace – despite an uncertain future

• God was with him and his confidence was in God

• The kingdom of God is surprising!

and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually turned out to be for the advantage of the gospel'⁴. Often in our service of God when things are going wrong they are **actually** going right! Christians throughout the Roman empire heard about what was happening to Paul. The highest authorities in Rome got to listen to Paul's message. When things are going wrong, they are going right! Paul got his prayers answered

His last line in this paragraph is: 'May the God of peace be with you all. Amen'¹. Paul has had a lot to say about peace in this letter. The kingdom of God is peace. He had told them that being justified by faith we have peace with God. He had told them that their quarrelling over foods and holy days must fall aside because the kingdom of God is a matter of enjoying peace. Now as Paul faces an uncertain future he has peace in his own heart and he wants the Christian friends at Rome to enjoy God's peace as well. The kingdom of God is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit! He himself was confident in God, and his confidence was well placed.

Paul's peace came from God. At the heart of our story is Acts 23:11, 'The Lord stood by Paul, and said, "Be courageous, Paul, for as you have testified of me in Jerusalem, so you must bear witness also in Rome.'" Men might be shouting, 'Away with such a fellow'¹, but Paul would be at peace. He was praying for peace for the Christians at Rome; he would enjoy it himself. The kingdom of God is peace. Amidst terrible circumstance in Rome or in Jerusalem God would be with Paul and with the Christians at Rome.

He got his prayers answered. The kingdom of God is peace. He was delivered from the disobedient. His service for Jerusalem was accepted. But the kingdom of God is surprising! Jewish opposition to Paul's preaching to gentiles was the very thing that sent him to Rome, the capital of the gentile world. The power of the Roman empire gave Paul a personal escort from Jerusalem to Rome, watching over him every step of the way! The kingdom of God is joy. He came to them in joy by the will of God.

⁴ Philippians 1:12

¹ 15:33

¹ Acts 22:22



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