

Paul's plan to visit Rome

The World Athletics Congress, the 2022 World Master Games, has been held in Australia. The unique feature of this championships is that participants can compete in different age groups. One 100-year-old senior woman competed in the 100-104 age group. And the senior won a gold medal in the shot-put event. Ladies and gentlemen, this is an amazing accomplishment. What was the reason for it? The answer is that she competed in the event all by herself only. This episode is very inspiring to us as well!

It is said that the Apostle Paul was converted around AD34 and devoted himself to evangelizing the Gentiles until AD67, when he was martyred. Since the book of Romans is said to have been written between AD 57 and 60, it is estimated that the Apostle Paul was approximately 60 to 65 years old at that time. Since the average life expectancy at that time is said to be around 40 years, the Apostle Paul was quite old. The average life expectancy in Japan today is 81.09 years for men and 87.14 years for women, according to the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare of Japan in 2024, so we can assume that the Apostle Paul was in 85-90-year-old.

At this age, planning for the future may not be something we do very often. However, the Apostle Paul writes about his plans to visit the congregation in Rome. It seems that there is no retirement for those who preach the gospel. I'm sure the Holy Spirit will give us the power to transcend human limitations. Now let's look at the verses 14-17 together.

Verse 14. I myself am convinced, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with knowledge and competent to instruct one another.

Verse 15. Yet I have written you quite boldly on some points to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me.

The entire book of Romans is full of information about being saved by faith, about what it means to be a child of God, about accepting the gospel without being bound by the law, and about the Jewish people and the reconciliation of Jewish and Gentile Christians. He boldly reiterated these points.

Verse 16. To be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles. He gave me the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

He says that the Apostle Paul himself is a servant of Jesus Christ for the Gentiles. He is a priest who preaches God's gospel for the salvation of the Gentiles and reconciles God and the Gentiles to each other. God's gospel for the salvation of the Gentiles and reconciliation between God and the Gentiles. As a result of the Apostle Paul's ministry, many Gentiles

believed in Jesus Christ and became holy. Gentiles were justified and became offerings pleasing to God.

Verse 17. Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God.

Paul takes pride in evangelizing the Gentiles. It may have been difficult for Christians at that time to be proud because of persecution, but Paul was truly proud of his work to preach the gospel. In Japan, we may not be persecuted when we preach the gospel, but we sometimes experience misunderstandings and other hardships. However, we should not be ashamed of the gospel and boldly share it with pride because it has the power to save souls. I pray that the Holy Spirit will give us this power. Paul worked by the power of the Holy Spirit to evangelize the Gentiles and had much fruit. Next is verses 18-19.

Verse 18. I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done.

Verse 19. By the power of signs and wonders, through the power of the Spirit of God. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ.

Whenever Paul evangelized, Christ was always at work. He says that there is nothing to his credit. He confesses that he owes everything to God. When we serve the Church, sometimes we think that we have come this far by our own efforts, but the Apostle Paul was different.

First, he preached the Word of God. Then, he did various deeds. He healed the sick and cast out demons. He knew that Gentile Christians were in trouble because of imposing Jewish customs, when he went to Jerusalem. So, he participated in meetings, and made arguments in Jerusalem. And also, he went on mission trips on foot and by ship to areas where people had not yet heard the gospel. He had completed his first and second mission trips, and was on his third mission trip at the time of writing the book of Romans. In those days, going on a trip was a life risk and it cost a lot of money. However, Paul devoted his entire life to evangelizing. Wherever the Apostle Paul went, there were many people who evangelized with faith, sincerity, many signs and miracles occurred by the power of God's Spirit.

This kind of gospel evangelism started in Jerusalem and spread to the state of Illyricum. Illyricum was the region of Pannonian and Dalmatian provinces at that time, extending as far as present-day Austria and Albania. There is no specific record of the gospel being preached in the Illyricum region in the Bible, but it is mentioned that it was preached in Macedonia when Paul was a missionary to the Illyricumans.

He would have tried to go as far as he could to preach the gospel in areas where it had not been preached. This attitude of the apostle Paul was faithful to the Great Commission of Jesus Christ. **Matthew 28:19-20: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to**

obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Paul did his best to see that the gospel was preached to the whole world. Please see verses 20-21.

Verse20. It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not to known, so that I would not be building on someone else’s foundation.

Verse 21. Rather, as it is written: “Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand.”

Paul did not preach the gospel where it had already been preached. That was his principle of his ministry because God’s people were already doing a good work for telling the gospel. Paul was preaching the gospel according to the prophecy of *Isaiah 52:15*. “So will be sprinkle many nations, and kings will shut their mouths because of him. For what they were not told, they will see, and what they have not heard, they will understand.” Paul's attitude shows that he would not have preached the gospel for the sake of his own honor at all. He worked for only the name of Jesus Christ alone, and that he wanted to be worshipped and proclaimed. This attitude reminds us of John the Baptist. *John 3:28-30* “John said, 'I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him. He must become greater; I must become less.'”

Paul tried many times to go to the church of Rome to preach the gospel in person, but he was not able to do so.

Verse22. This is why I have often been hindered from coming to you.

Verse23. But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to visit you,

And he specifically confides his plan to visit the Church of Rome.

Verse24. I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to see you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while.

Verse25. Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the Lord’s people there.

Right now, Paul is currently in Corinth writing the book of Romans. From Corinth, he goes first to Jerusalem. Then he says that Rome is a stopover to Spain on his mission trip. At that time in Roman times, Spain was considered to be the ends of the earth, so Paul was really planning to go to Spain in accordance with the missionary command of Jesus Christ to preach the gospel to the ends of the earth. When you consider that Columbus left Spain, for India and the Atlantic Ocean in 1492, we could realize how large and courageous the scale of the Apostle Paul's missionary journey was. And during the celestial movement theory was supported even until the 16th century, they thought that Spain would end and fall after Spain. Therefore, Paul's vision at that time was amazing very much.

So why does Paul say he is going to Jerusalem first?

Verse26. For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among

the Lord's people in Jerusalem.

In Macedonia there was the church of Philippians, and in Achaia the church of Corinth. These two local churches collected donations for the poor in the congregation of the Jerusalem church. Paul said that they had a duty to the congregation of the Jerusalem church about giving money to the church of Jerusalem. They willingly agreed, but they were also obligated to do so. Since the Gentiles have partaken of their spiritual things, they are obligated to help them with the things of the flesh, their offerings.

Verse27. 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 I to the Jews to share with them their material blessings.

Verse28. So after I have completed this task and have made sure that they have received this contribution, I will go to Spain and visit you on the way.

Verse29. I know that when I come to you, I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ.

The Gentiles have benefited spiritually from the congregation in Jerusalem. Because they heard the gospel from the Jews. As a small repayment for this spiritual blessing, financial support is a matter of course and can even be called a duty. In those days, they did not have any system for sending money like these days, so Paul himself was the one who carried this important offering personally to Jerusalem. However, this choice was very dangerous for Paul.

Next, Paul shares his prayer challenge with the congregation in Rome.

Verese30. I urge you, brothers and sisters, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me.

Verse31. Pray that I may be kept safe from the unbelievers in Judea and that the contribution I take to Jerusalem may be favorable received by the Lord's people there,

The Apostle Paul was a great church leader, but he was humble enough to share his prayer challenges with his congregation. He would have wanted the congregation to understand and support with him in his spiritual battles with the various trials that occur in his ministry. Mission is not only for missionaries, pastors, and evangelists. It is supported by the prayers of each member of the congregation. Here Paul asks for two prayer requests. First, pray for protection from unbelievers in Jerusalem. Second, pray that Paul's service will be welcomed by the holy ones, the church's members in Jerusalem.

The "unbelievers" here refer, of course, to the Jews. And, very strangely, it also included Jews who had converted to Christianity and who were Torah-bound. God answered the prayers of the people of the Church of Rome as follows. If you look at [Acts 21](#), they had heard that the so-called "unbelievers," that is, the Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem and those who had converted from Judaism and became Christians but still respected the Law. And they

were plotting to capture and kill Paul. Therefore, Paul's disciples begged him not to go to Jerusalem. But Paul says this in **verse 13 of Acts 21**. "Then Paul answered, 'Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the Lord of Jesus.'" But why would he go this far to go to Jerusalem? It was too much of a risk just to give an offering to the congregation of the Jerusalem church. If you look at **Acts 21, starting from verse 17**, Paul met James, the brother of Jesus, who was the supreme leader of the Jewish church at that time. **v19~v20a** "Paul greeted them and reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. When they heard this, they praised God." Paul was welcomed by the congregation in Jerusalem. This shows that the second prayer request was answered.

And Paul gave his mission report because he wanted to assure the validity of the future evangelization of the gospel by saying to James, the supreme leader of the Jewish church, that God was pleased with the evangelization of the Gentiles. At that time, there were many thousands of Jews, not only Jews, but also Jews who had become Christians, who still respected the Law. They were opposed to Paul's teaching, so he had to risk his life to preach the truth that we are saved by faith, not by the law. At the time, Jerusalem was resistant to being saved by faith, and the idea of respecting the Jewish law was strong.

Just at this time, the Roman centurion saw Paul being assaulted by the crowd and arrested him anyway, although he did not know the truth. Well, that was a tough situation. Under the circumstances, everyone would have wished they had never gone to Jerusalem. But this was the fulfillment of the first prayer request, and Paul's safety was assured. After all, God answers the prayers of the church congregation on the site where the gospel is proclaimed. Finally, Paul asks for one more prayer request.

Verse 32. so that I may come to you with joy, by God's will, and in your company be refreshed.

Verse 33. The God of peace be with you all. Amen.

Paul hopes that by God's will he can go to Rome with joy and rest there. He also wants to be with all the believers in Rome. All of these prayers have been answered. Earlier, Paul was arrested by the Roman centurion out of danger, and as a result, he received protection from the danger of being killed by the Jews. Paul then appealed to the Roman emperor for illegally arresting him, a Roman citizen, and was transported to Rome for trial (Acts 25, 27).

By the way, Paul was confined to his house for two years from AD 61 to 63 after he was transported to Rome. During these two years, Paul would have interacted with the congregation of the Church of Rome. Just as he prayed, Paul was able to rest in his old age while preaching the gospel at home, not in prison. It is also said that the Apostle Paul was martyred in AD 67, but after his house arrest in Rome, he had many years to spare before he was re-imprisoned, so he may have gone to Spain to preach the gospel.

I am moved by this event in which the Apostle Paul's prayer requests were heard by God through the prayers of Paul himself and the congregation of his church. God does wonderful things to us when we pray for sharing the gospel. Hallelujah!

I have testified to you all before, but I have been praying to see you all at MJCF ever since I returned to Tokyo from Canada in 2014. I wanted to thank each and every one of you for your help in Canada. Thankfully, I was able to have a ZOOM service with you in this way in the midst of the Covid-19 disaster. This seemed like a miracle to me. My desire to see you all was no less than Paul's desire to see them all in the Church of Rome. I even had a dream that we had barbeque. I pray that dream will come true and it will be completely fulfilled. I am thankful that we Christians can live a joyful life in God's will like Paul and the congregation of the Church of Rome. Let's pray together.