

Romans Chapter 15 - John Karmelich

Title: What are we, chopped liver?

To appreciate this lesson, it'd be best if you had some familiarity with Romans so far. As far as my title I'll explain that in a bit and realize it fits well here! Paul the author of Romans spent the first half of the book explaining what it means to be a Christian. In Chapter 9 he started using the nation of Israel as an illustration that God will never break His word! That means we can trust His unconditional promise of our salvation! He turns to practical issues starting in Chapter 13. That was about how believers should deal with taxes and government. Then in 14, he gets into how we should interact with believers that we don't agree on debatable issues! Here in 15, he gives some final thoughts before he wraps up the letter. He discusses, why Rome? Realize when Paul wrote this letter to that church, and he's never been there! This letter went into great detail explaining how to live the Christian life. In the second half of chapter 15, as he focuses on the word "encouragement". Paul believes God has called him to preach to parts of the world that has never heard the gospel message. Paul explains here that when he wrote Romans it is his desire to go to the western edge of the Roman Empire (what we call Spain today). It required going through Rome. He wrote this letter ahead of that desire to go there as part of his next "road trip"!

I must admit, one part of this chapter always puzzled me. Paul said he wants to go to Rome on the way to Spain (translation of Greek words of that time). I admit if I was in part of the church in Rome, I'd be thinking, "What are we chopped liver?" (An old expression to describe something less important!) The point for Paul isn't that he had anything against the Roman church, but that God called him to preach in places that hadn't heard the Gospel message yet. He wrote this just after he finished his 3rd missionary journey and in effect, he was planning for his fourth one. This letter indicates that by that time word of Jesus had spread from (modern terms) Greece to what was Yugoslavia after the second world war. We don't know if Paul did visit all that territory. He just knew the word of the Gospel was around all those places. Now Paul wanted to go to the western edge of the Roman Empire to preach there. I believe he made it there (speculation). There's a several year time gap between when he got to Rome as a prisoner (then released) and when died. The point is Rome was on the way to Spain, and he not only wrote this letter to explain some of the finer points to be a believer but also to encourage them as believers. That's a key reason why he decided to write this letter before he traveled from Corinth, (Greece) to Jerusalem to explain why he was coming to Rome after his Jerusalem trip!

So, if Paul wanted to preach to places he's never been why go to Jerusalem first? Part of it was to give an offering for their church! In effect, this is Paul proving to that church he was doing what God called him to do, preach to non-Jewish people and help the "mother church"! Before he became a Christian he put Christians to death there. I suspect he wanted to show them he's changed! A good way to do that is to travel there, with converted non-Jewish people, bringing a gift! Yes, Paul was arrested in Jerusalem and had to stand trial. He didn't know that when he wrote this letter. I'm giving all this background as I am close to wrapping up the letter (one more chapter to go)! I want to show his motivation for going to Jerusalem and then Rome: To encourage the Roman church when he arrived! Acts Chapter 28, hints of Paul receiving a hero's welcome when he got to Rome! (When Luke wrote Acts, he used a Greek word to describe a hero's welcome!) Meanwhile, onto Romans Chapter 15 itself:

In effect, Chapter 15 picks up where Chapter 14 left off. As most of you realize there were no chapter breaks in the original text. Paul was discussing in the last chapter, how Christians should act around a fellow believer. In effect his key point is putting the interest of others before us! To share a thought, I suspect most of you know, the ideal life is to think in terms of Jesus, then others, then ourselves! Yes, I

realize we can't give to everyone who asks, or we'll be broke. The issue keys on helping other believers grow in their relationship with Jesus. If that means giving up privileges, so be it! Verse 3 even makes a point of saying in effect when people insult us because of our belief in Jesus he "absorbs the blows"! It does not mean life will be easy as a believer. It just means dealing with insults, let alone suffering will be a part of the Christian life. That is why it's so essential to understand our eternal rewards will be far greater than any suffering we must deal with in this lifetime!

In effect Verses 5 and 6 are a "benediction prayer"! In other words, Paul is asking God to strengthen us as we go through life making a difference for Him. That means the "Jesus, others, ourselves" will bring hardship to our lives, so asking for His strength and the Holy Spirit to work through us the power to go through all of that. Remember Paul even at this point, dealt with lots of pain and suffering just to bring the Gospel message to parts of the Romans world! And it was Paul's desire to keep going on!

From there, Paul decides to give a few Old Testament quotes to show that the Gentiles (anyone who is not Jewish) to show that they are part of the church. Remember the New Testament wasn't written yet, so Paul quotes a few places to show that Gentiles were always part of God's plan. I'm fascinated we get quotes from the Torah (first five bible books, the most holy section to Jewish people) specifically he is quoting from Deuteronomy (32:43). Then from the Psalms (15) and then "the prophets" (Isaiah 11,52). It is not in that order! I admit, when I meet religious Jewish people, I ask, will there be someone more than Jesus who the Gentile world will worship more than Him? Never got a good answer to that! He's giving all of these quotes to encourage the Roman church to worship "The Trinity"! It was always His plan since time began for believers all over the world to worship God that way and Paul wanted to give Old Testament examples to prove all of that!

By Verse 14, Paul is explaining why he wants to visit the church in Rome on his way to Spain. What is implied is the Roman church is not "chopped liver" in that they matter as much as any church does! Paul wants to explain to the church in Rome his plan after visiting Jerusalem. God got Paul there, but it was after literal trials in Jerusalem and yet more time in prison!

Which leads me to the idea of encouragement! A necessary part of any believer's life is to encourage a fellow believer. One never knows what others are going through! Remember, Paul explains for the last few chapters how we should act around nonbelievers and then how act around believers who don't hold views similar to others (debatable issues). My point is Paul was not only driven to make new believers, but he loved to encourage existing ones! We all need encouragement at times. Paul spent a lot of time in prisons, being whipped and even stoned for his belief. He needed encouragement, as we do at times! In effect he ends this section (chapter) with that reminder. He even asks for the church in Rome to pray for him as he knew how difficult the Christian life is! The last chapter (next lesson) deals with greeting people he knew in that church!

So, does this mean if I'm not suffering for Jesus right now I'm doing something wrong? Not necessarily true! I'm just saying Satan and demons "don't waste their bullets". There's a view in Christianity we're either part of the problem or part of the solution. Our churches require prayer for those on the front line so to speak who are making a difference and at the least require encouragement from time to time! I've met Christians who have a great gift of encouragement. Paul needed it and I'm positive that encouraged him to keep going through some pretty rough times. As I've stated in other lessons Paul had the biggest influence on Western Civilization second only to Jesus Himself! OK you may say, but I'm not Paul. I'd remind us that God isn't calling us to be Paul. He's calling us to be who He's called us to be. I recall as a young man I was worried I'd never make the impact on the world my father did. Then it hit me, God didn't call me to be like my father, but to influence who I influence through this ministry. My point is,

we are each called to make a difference in our way as believers and encourage others to continue to do what God called them to do! That's because none of us are "chopped liver" to God!

With that said, hope you like this study. I wrote a more detailed one some years back. If you want to read that, click on one of the links below. It is still a joy to study and teach this and again I'm grateful for you reading this. The rest of this email is links to questions you may have. If you're new here, you are always welcome to e-mail me. Thanks again for reading this!

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